

All the responses to the questions we asked in the *CESBC Diverse Voices Webinar Series: Finding Our Way to Equitable Practices - Where to Begin?* session with Carolyn Camman

November 9, 2020

These are the answers participants gave to a series of questions that helped us explore the unspoken orthodox beliefs that inform how evaluation is practiced, by whom, and for what purposes.

The first two questions were asked in a survey distributed before the session. The third question was asked during the session after everyone had a chance to read through the initial responses.

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[How do you know when someone's an evaluator? What are three things that tell you when you \(or someone else\) are in an evaluator role and not another role?](#)

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Think about an evaluation you have been involved in. How did you know it was evaluation? What are three things that made it "evaluation" and not something else?

- 1. There were clear measurable evaluation questions; 2. We used evidence-based practices to measure the variables; 3. We formulated actionable recommendations based on the data to inform the program
- I was hoping to find out about; impact of program on participants; input on how to improve the program; insights on who participants were.
- Exploratory; Followed Evaluation Plan; Questions
- 1. the goal was to assess the impact of something on a particular target audience 2. the results were going to be used to make decisions about the program 3. the scope was larger than just a single item, it involved the whole program & its context
- 1. There was an overarching question to guide activities 2. There was a goal rooted in understanding what happened 3. I engaged with people in different ways to understand their experiences, perceptions, ideas, and visions for future
- We were seeking to understand the effect of the work we were doing. We were seeking to make a change and then understand the change. We wanted to learn from the work we were doing so that we could do it better/differently.
- 1. Wanted to see if a pilot innovation was effective and for who.
- We had questions prepared to ask attendees
- 1) Seeking participant input, 2) Use of surveys, 3) Surveys development informed by research questions
- 1. There was a request to assess whether the initiative was achieving the stated objectives. 2. There was a request to determine 'how well' the initiative was functioning against stated criteria using evidence and measures. 3. There was a clearly stated purpose of use for the findings related to future funding decisions.
- Because it was called an evaluation, there was some definition of what was being evaluated and why, there was an intention to learn.
- wanted to know it was working, how it was working and what needs to change if it is not working
- 1. We called it an evaluation; 2. We were gathering information that helped us make decisions about the work being done; 3. We identified a theory of change
- Had key questions it wanted to answer; practical in nature; was called an 'evaluation' :)

- Terms of Reference for evaluation, specific methodology, demand for expert
- Applied research, meant to provide evidence for decision-making, purpose was to measure outcomes
- Request for the program from Sponsor of program, Municipal Council expectations for impact of the program funded to be evaluated, and Service Provider requesting evaluation of the program from the funding source to report on process and impact
- Interest in collecting data to improve the program and be accountable.
- - We wanted to find out the level, extent, degree of participation in a program as it was being implemented in a Central American country.
- 1) it was called an evaluation 2) it involved formal facilitated meetings with stakeholders 3) there was an expectation of a public report with recommendations for action
- following the evaluation plan, measuring the activities with the logic model, and that overall the project was a pilot project
- It evaluated the impact of a government strategy, we collected data to measure changes related to the strategy, and we will provide recommendations for how the strategy could be improved
- It was called an evaluation. Someone called an 'evaluator' 'led' it. The purpose of the data collection activities was for learning
- Systematic collection of data for the purposes of program improvements and spread
- There were different perspectives about what should be evaluated. There were different motivations for wanting the evaluation. There were different values about what was considered "good" or "positive" results.
- Stakeholders interest in learning about what is working well and if they are successful; questions that they had about their initiative;
- Evaluating the implementation of a program; collecting and analyzing data; recommendations for program improvement
- Questions that we wanted to answer through data collection. Outcome measures. Recommendations to improve process.
- We were focused on gathering data to understand and refine the program, we were guided by evaluative thinking, and the work was led by an evaluator
- 1. Stakeholder wanted to know if the program is achieving its goals 2. Wanted to know strengths and areas for improvement 3. Wanted to know how its program stakeholders are impacted by the program

- It was examining whether the (1) outcomes of the program, (2) had been achieved, for (3) the beneficiaries of the program.
- I don't think it was evaluation! It was anchored in a goal to develop an evaluation framework, so it was all about evaluation, but it wasn't "doing" evaluation.
- 1. The primary purpose was to provide evidence of progress toward project goals-- in this way the purpose was to report on the merit and value of the program. 2. The audiences were both the internal team and the funder, so we reported on progress at interim time points for program improvement and at summative time points to inform the funder from year to year. 3. The goal was not necessarily to be able to build theory or generalize beyond the immediate program. Additionally, while we worked with a theory of change, we did not ground our work deeply in the literature and previous published work, but on the experiences of the Steering Committee and the needs of the participants. In this way, it was not a research project.
- 1) concrete actions arose from findings; 2) process oriented; 3) evaluation questions driven by program deliverers/stakeholders
- 1) It was called an evaluation (not a review, special study, research); 2) people with evaluation experience were part of the mandatory requirements, with bonus points given for credentialed evaluators, and 3) the methods that we used are common evaluation tools.
- It was targeted, purposeful data collection to set the parameters of a problem and test whether an intervention was addressing the problem at hand. There were overarching evaluation questions to be answered. The methodologies were applied (not general research) and focused on problem solving. Methods were mixed and context specific.
- It was designed to determine how *valuable* (but not in monetary terms) the program was. It was systematically designed. It was aiming to provide information for making decisions about the program.
- Assessed program implementation and outcomes, analyzed and reported on data collected, and developed recommendations based on findings.
- Because the PI said it was, because it was to contribute to program knowledge not the research general knowledge base, because it was about merit and significance
- We set up a methodology that added both quanti and quali methods and at the end there was a judgment of the intervention, about its effectiveness: robust methodology, judgment and external evaluator.
- I was trying to help a program learn what it was doing well and how it could serve its clients even better. 1) The focus was a specific program; 2) I was trying to figure out how it worked; 3) they wanted to learn how they could make it better.
- Questions about strength and weaknesses

- results asked participants and decision-makers whether the 'program' had value that made a difference to them and their aims
- The first time I took part in evaluation, was parent-teacher night when my parents were given feedback about me as a little person. The first part I was a part of and we discussed openly about my performance what I was good at-- then I presume they got into the nitty-gritty about me being a bit too chatty in class but also a good classmate. The first thing that made it an evaluation, is that it was a midway review with 3 different stakeholders. Parent, Teacher, me. 2nd, there was a 2 level process 1st was participatory and the second was more in-camera without me the kid. The last part of it being an evaluation was that there were presumably lessons learned, things to celebrate and to improve on that we worked on at home and in the classroom
- That we were assessing the performance, outcomes and experiences of a variety of stakeholders in relation to a new guideline in bc.
- We were looking to measure impact. We also wanted to see how well the program was implemented
- I was a consultant and the RFP stated it was an evaluation. It was an assessment of several factors that included the quality and efficiency of services and whether or not the identified outcomes were being met.

How do you know when someone's an evaluator? What are three things that tell you when you (or someone else) are in an evaluator role and not another role?

- This one is difficult as sometimes only part of their responsibilities are related to evaluation (e.g. program manager). But, I'd say, 1. At least 50% of their role requires evaluation-related tasks (whether planning an evaluation or implementing it); 2. They are using scientific methods to come up with the evaluation findings, rather than just implementing the evaluation findings/recommendations; 3. They are using data to assess the outcome of a program/project, rather than opinions (e.g. if they are just using some specific success stories to "evaluate" a project, that's not evaluation)
- they have training as an evaluator; the mindset of an evaluator; they are independent of program development (this might be more difficult, depending on where they work)
- Questions Asking; Approach; Evidence
- 1. they have the appropriate training, skills, mindset, approach (& hopefully CE designation)
2. they look at the big picture including context, unintended consequences, appropriateness of the intervention
3. they assess multiple aspects and impacts on various entities, not just limited to e.g. cost/benefit analysis
- 1) I will say that I'm an evaluator (but that doesn't mean other people aren't there to evaluate as well) 2) I discuss the parameters of everyone's roles (what are we all doing to work together, what expectations do we have, what needs to be done/ by whom)
- I am collecting data or working with others to collect data. I am leading or co-leading a process to make sense of data. My intention is that the data we are collecting and analyzing will make changes and improvements to the thing we are collecting data about.
- When people are looking to me for evidence to help them make a decision moving forward.
- they are holding some kind of recording device such as an ipad or clipboard, they make eye contact and introduce themselves, they make the expectations clear
- 1) They ask questions, 2) They use various measurement tools to obtain answers, 3) They know how to interpret the answers they receive
- *By this I will assume you mean a 'program evaluator' in a more common sense (but everyone can do/does 'evaluate things'). So, for some substantial portion of their work, 1. they would tend to be engaged in processes that work to support others in assessing the value, merit or worth of something bigger than a simple process, 2. They gather evidence and compare it against some criteria that explicitly defines that spectrum of good/bad or value, 3. they do this work, usually for others to improve things ...or sometimes just for accountability purposes :(4. Bonus-they knowingly or not tend to adhere or be guided by established and evolving principles and standards of evaluation practice such as Utilization, Accuracy, Feasibility, Propriety, Accountability, etc.

- Because they call themselves an evaluator, they take on the work in the evaluation scope, they facilitate the process.
- they have training or experience in evaluation methods, they are responsible or are committed to finding out if a program/org is working, they have dedicated time/resources for this work
- 1. If my role is mostly about asking questions, guiding discussions and collecting and talking about information, 2. If I don't have a direct role in making decisions about the work, 3. If I will move on from the project at some point (or into a different role)
- They define themselves as an evaluator; they look critically at the world; they have experience or education in this thing called evaluation
- CES member, CES credentialed evaluator, Knows evaluation methodology
- Ask questions, inquire about all stakeholders, think about outcomes and not only outputs
- Assigned the role. Identified in program/project documents as the evaluator. Expectations among allies for evaluation communicated
- The person uses research methods to collect data that will facilitate decision-making. Asking questions about how and or whether an "intervention" works.
- 1) They seek a better understanding of issues and are not afraid of (and even love!) being challenged on their own premises or hypotheses. 2) They listen to, acknowledge and report conflicting views in a balanced, fair way. 3) They are aware of and constantly check their own biases and assumptions.
- 1) They ask a lot of questions 2) Discuss program improvements 3) Value and seek out evidence to support decisions
- Credentialed evaluator, objective, knowledgeable about evaluation processes
- You conduct research based on outcomes which support making recommendations for change related to policy or programming
- They are coming with a curious mind. They are not part of delivering the services/program/x. Often, unfortunately, they are removed from the program and/or community being served
- They identify themselves as an evaluator
- They engage stakeholders (rather than doing everything themselves). They ask questions to understand context, motivations, and use of results. They ask how results should be interpreted (with a group of people, by the evaluator alone, etc.).
- asking questions; figuring out how to get answers to these questions; providing answers or new questions after collecting data

- Asking a lot of questions/researching; truly listening to the answers; truthfully reflecting that input into the recommendations
- Collecting data to improve a program or service summatively or formatively. Data collection from stakeholders
- Use evaluation theory and techniques to do work, identify as an evaluator, and goal of the work you do.
- 1. Providing assistance in helping stakeholders ask evaluative questions 2. Creating recommendations that is about what not the how 3. Abiding by the evaluation standards throughout evaluation process eg aware of potential political use of data
- (1) they partner on aspects (preferably all) of the evaluation, (2) they are interested in the application of the evaluation's findings/recommendations, (3) they occupy a co-learning role, as opposed to a lecturing role.
- Fascinating question! I don't think I think about people's roles and identities in such distinct ways. I think of evaluation as something you do, or use, not who you are. In terms of roles, for my context, there are rarely such distinct role identities with the teams I support, or even the reason I am brought on -- many people are playing different roles, and the type of work I support is about gathering and using information for growth. So differentiation is done by task -- e.g., ""we're exploring how this is working"" would identify that someone is there in an evaluation capacity.
- (This was a really tricky question!) 1. They consider who gets to ask questions, who gets to be involved, who gets to decide, who isn't at the table, what questions aren't being asked, who might be harmed in the program or the evaluation, etc. They interrogate the assumptions about who knows what and who should be involved, in order to make clear where inequitable and racist structures live in programs and in evaluation. 2. They have a learning mindset, they start by asking questions and listening- they act as a thought partner. 3. When people jump to talking about data collection instruments, they back up and ask more questions before making decisions about which tools will work best.
- 1) evaluators are facilitators 2) evaluators can collect, analyze and interpret data (with input from others) 3) evaluators don't decide themselves what is of value - they ask and include stakeholders to do so
- 1) When they talk about their work - what they do, e.g. I am an evaluator / I do work in evaluation; 2) if it says evaluator in their job title / email signature; and 3) if they have a professional specialization in evaluation, i.e., a diploma, certificate, degree, credential.
- Job title. Focus on research for decisions / problem solving, but shorter in time frame than action research. There are overlaps with a number of fields wherein someone with a different day job and different focus on most work efforts can act as an evaluator when thinking about, planning, collecting, analyzing, sharing data is about problem solving. Importantly, for me the better evaluations / evaluators proactively seek out and collaborate

with those for whom a given intervention is intended to benefit. If it is not working for them, than it is not working. This is true even if other 'side benefits' exist (eg delivery partners now collaborate)

- Trying to understand how a program is working and what the results of the program are for the purpose of informing decisions about the program.
- They are focused on assessing the program, they collect data from key stakeholders and participants regarding the program, they use the findings to develop recommendations for program improvement.
- They do evaluation, they think about improving programs not publishing, they think about merit, worth, and significance (values)
- When a professional has knowledge of evaluation methods, he has the ability to reflect and judge the results and has the expertise to prepare a return report for publication.
- a) They are are doing a study to help a specific program; b) they are more interested in how that program functions/the outcomes it achieves than on general patterns; c) they are concerned about what stakeholders think, including what they want to learn about the program.
- They ask questions about the program, my personal experience with it and explanations about things related to how the program works
- seeks to know what works and what doesn't/neutral, informed inquirer; seeks all perspectives/inclusive; listens deeply and validates/transparent.
- they have widely applicable skills; having gained implicit knowledge about the evaluation process that can be flexibly applied towards multiple approaches, methods, focus areas, and mindsets.
- evaluators are often in the position of power the teacher in this case ha the power to describe my behaviours in a strengths-based way to my parents, or not to. another way to tell it was evaluation, the teacher being outside our direct community (small family) yet still involved and participating in our community
- Leadership, direction, explains goals, there for clarification.
- I think anyone can be an evaluator. I know many who are accidental evaluators but wouldn't call themselves that. I would say anyone doing evaluation work and follows the principles of evaluation is an evaluator. Experience may vary but they are still doing the work
- When they call themselves an evaluator, when they have training. can be internal or external to the organization. When they are part of an evaluation unit.

What are our deeply-held beliefs about “the way evaluation is”?

Note: these are “orthodox beliefs” held by us or by others about evaluation, which are meant to be critically questioned to see if they are really true and serving our goals.

- Measurement is central.
- That it involves is a systematic process
- Evaluations are objective measurements
- Done by experts
- That it is "objective" and external to the program implementers
- Other people get to say what counts as evaluation.
- To be objective
- formalized and to be undertaken by educated experts
- Objective
- There are experts
- There does not seem to be a consistent definition of evaluation or evaluator
- It's something special that only certain very special people called evaluators can do.
- Only people with specific training can perform evaluation.
- Involves data
- Questions and systematic inquiry seem pretty important
- That standards are required to ensure quality
- It is 'top down'
- That it is participatory and involves all stakeholders - more of a state of mind than a person
- It's scientific and objective.
- Evaluation involves questions
- That an evaluation is only valid when quantitative data is collected.
- objective neutral rigorous
- some evaluators are identifiable by credentials and job titles

- To be useful
- something is an evaluation because it is called an "evaluation"
- Education / formal training also seems pretty important
- That there is an us+them narrative in evaluation. Someone DOES the evaluation on or with another group (stakeholder). And they are asking questions to be answered for someone's use, likely the 'US' group.
- clearly, we all love a job title
- There are certain questions that have to be answered for it to be considered an evaluation.
- That evaluators come by their "profession" through different paths
- Saying "this is an evaluation"/"I am an evaluator" is enough
- to answer overarching evaluation question(s)
- Involves a lot of discussion
- That an evaluation requires some level of formality with certain requirements, but the title of who can be an evaluator is less formal but still has certain requirements.
- 'because someone else said so'
- seeking meaning
- Evaluators are not a part of whatever is being evaluated
- Definitions are circular. Evaluation is what evaluator does or when the funder called it evaluation. An evaluator is someone whose work is more than 50% evaluations ...
- If evaluations are named as such, they must be evaluations. When we name something as such, others trust it to be true.
- Evaluators take on the role of leader and facilitator
- Systematic approach that involves eval questions, data collection and recommendations
- excludes lived experience and everyday events where evaluations about events, courses of action etc. are considered
- It is criticizing me (a worker) and how I do my job It's a way that companies find people to fire
- Evaluations use valid data to prove the value of an initiative, project or program
- It is in the service of rights and stakeholders

- Accepted methodologies
- Using evidence-based practices is the only way to conduct evaluations
- a project being called an 'evaluation' helps people know that that's what it is
- It normatively values 'what is' instead of 'what could be'
- research for decision making
- Driven by data
- to assess the effectiveness of the program/intervention
- that there is one "rigorous way" of doing the evaluation, deeply rooted in research. that can provide limitation for being innovative
- criteria is key
- Seems to commonly be considered a three-step process with a beginning, middle and end
- Impartial, neutral
- Formalized questions ought to be advanced beforehand
- measurement-centred & done by people with certain expertise
- That it comes from the outside. That it is bound by frontal lobes and can only be taught by humans. That "experts" know evaluation and the valuing, visibility, and respectability of said evaluator or evaluation is held by a collective in power.
- not limited to credential holders
- 'Evaluators' are evaluators or are conducting evaluation often because they say so, or have that title.
- references to stakeholders was fairly common, but in different ways
- Very theoretically based
- not limited to program-focused applications
- Systematic collection of data necessary.
- Asking questions with intention or purpose
- People who are in power and can either accept or reject something
- It's about looking for problems & how to fix them
- Evaluation requires knowledge of research methodology

- Evaluators are the leader/facilitator i.e., have power
- Rigorous. Systematic.
- Systematic data analyses necessary.
- data collection, objectives
- Evaluators must fundamentally be askers of questions
- A trust in titles: evaluation, evaluator
- applied, useful, seeking value
- Evaluation is focused on learning or answering questions.
- Evaluators believe they doing are systematic examination of a program
- Evaluators are objective and not usually part of the program being evaluated
- A way of validating a program to get more funding
- depends on who is paying for the evaluation
- implicit knowledge is gained in practice of evaluation, rather than exclusively explicit knowledge
- :(Logic Models are evaluation....not!
- that there isn't a clear "our" here. that this word means and holds different things to different people coming to it from different places.
- It is about judging the merit or worth of a program. But from whose "eyes"?
- evaluators involve stakeholders
- Collective responsibility
- Evaluation is more of a mindset
- I always thought evaluation was about helping