

## AEA/CDC Summer Evaluation Institute

### Offering 36: Ensuring Evaluation Use

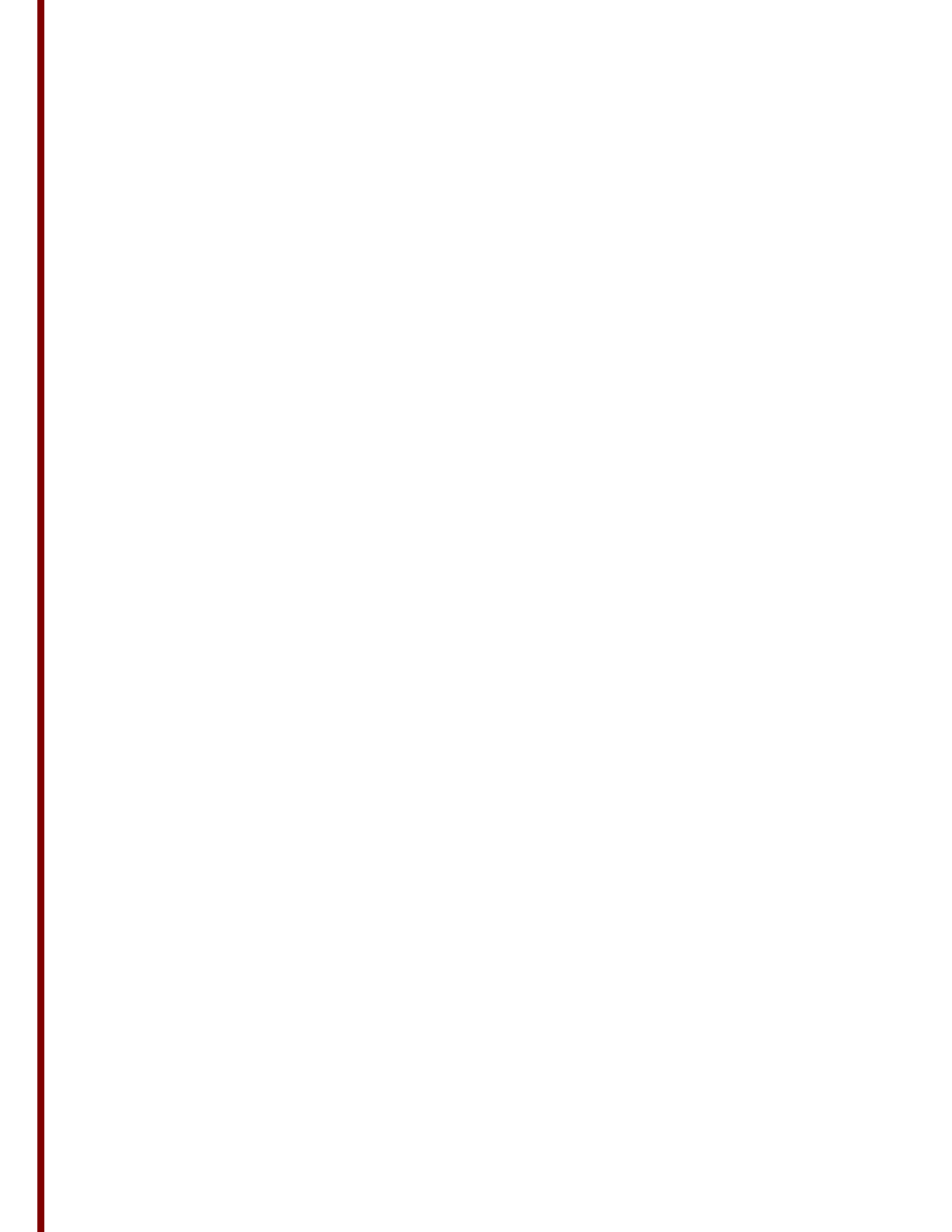
**Description:** Many evaluators and program staff are concerned with designing evaluations that are intended to inform more immediate decision-making and promote organizational change. A goal, then, is to offer the most useful information to answer the evaluation questions given the program context and the resources available to conduct the investigation. This session will focus on developing participants' understanding of, and methods for increasing, evaluation use. We will begin by providing a theoretical framework for understanding and promoting evaluation use. Employing interactive and small group exercises, we will examine strategies and techniques for increasing the use of both the evaluation process and findings. Upon completion of the session, you will: understand use as a primary purpose of evaluation, understand the difference between evaluation process and evaluation findings use, become familiar with a framework for promoting use, and identify strategies for promoting and increasing evaluation use.

**Audience:** Those who are new to evaluation, including stakeholders in the evaluation design process, who are working in any context.

**Christina A. Christie** is an Associate Professor, Director of the Masters of Arts Program in Psychology and Evaluation, and Associate Director of the Institute of Organizational and Program Evaluation Research at Claremont Graduate University. Her research, which has been supported by several funders including the Haynes Foundation, focuses on investigating the relationship between evaluation theory and practice and issues related to the development of descriptive theories of evaluation. She has also received funding from a variety of sources, including the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Hewlett-Carnegie Foundation to evaluate social, education, and health behavior programs targeting high-risk and underrepresented populations. Christie co-founded the Southern California Evaluation Association, a local affiliate of the American Evaluation Association, and is the former Chair of the Theories of Evaluation Division of the American Evaluation Association. In 2004, Christie received the American Evaluation Association's Marcia Guttentag Early Career Achievement Award.

**Offered (Two Rotations of the Same Content - Do not register for both):**

- Tuesday, June 24, 9:25 – 12:45 (20 minute break within)
- Wednesday, June 25, 9:25 – 12:45 (20 minute break within)



# ***Ensuring Evaluation Use***

AEA/CDC  
3 Hour Training Session  
June 2008

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Claremont Graduate University

## **Workshop Goals**

- ❑ Understand and consider the various ways evaluation can influence program activities
- ❑ Become familiar with a framework for increasing evaluation use
- ❑ Identify strategies for promoting and increasing evaluation utilization

## Overview of Evaluation

- Evaluation Theory
- Evaluation Practice
- Evaluation Methods
- Research on Evaluation

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## Evaluation vs. Research

- Study purpose
  - Research- to add knowledge to a field- conclusions
  - Evaluation- to make decisions- judgments
- Who sets the agenda
  - Research- the researcher
  - Evaluation- significant stakeholders
- Generalizations
  - Research- maximize for applicability to many settings
  - Evaluation- context specific
- Training
  - Research- in depth in a single discipline- methods accepted by the discipline
  - Evaluation- interdisciplinary- wide variety of methods

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## Theories in Evaluation

- Social Science Theory
- Program Theory
- Evaluation Theory

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## What are evaluation theories/models?

- *Prescriptive* theories for practice
- Intended to guide design and method choice

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## **Small Group Activity**

- Look around the room and describe and evaluate from the perspective on the piece of paper given to your group.

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## **Small Group Activity- Perspectives**

- Fire Department
- Interior Decorator
- Information Technology
- Teacher/Instructor

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## Why use an evaluation model?

- Provides a conceptual framework
- Helps organize procedures
- Allows for selective application

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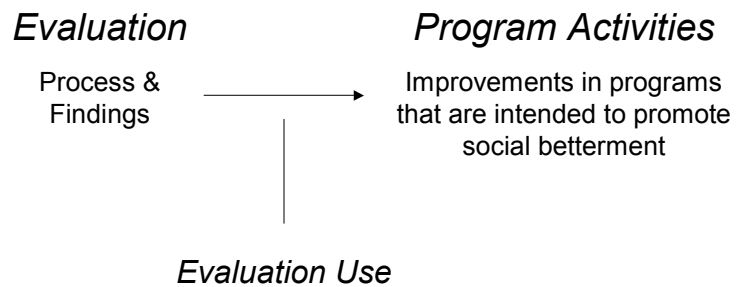
## What distinguishes models?

- What one believes to be the purpose of evaluation
- The techniques and strategies used to carry out the purpose

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## Evaluations with Impact (con't)



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## Use: A Motivator for Conducting Evaluation

Providing information for decision making and improving programs are two primary motivations for doing an evaluation

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## Use: What Do We Mean?

### *Instrumental*

- Evaluation findings lead to immediate and specific actions such as program continuation, expansion, revision or termination

### *Enlightenment/Conceptual*

- More general learning that takes place as a result of evaluation

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## Use: What Do We Mean?

### *Symbolic*

- Evaluation is used to justify a pre-existing position or simply to signify the purported rationality of an agency

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## Use: What Do We Mean?

- Process Use:
  - “Beyond” findings use
  - What “happens” to people & organizations as a result of participating in an evaluation
- Capacity Building:
  - The primary purpose of the evaluation - intentional

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## Process Use & Capacity Building

### Individual

- Changes in thinking & behaving as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process

### Organizational

- Changes procedures or culture

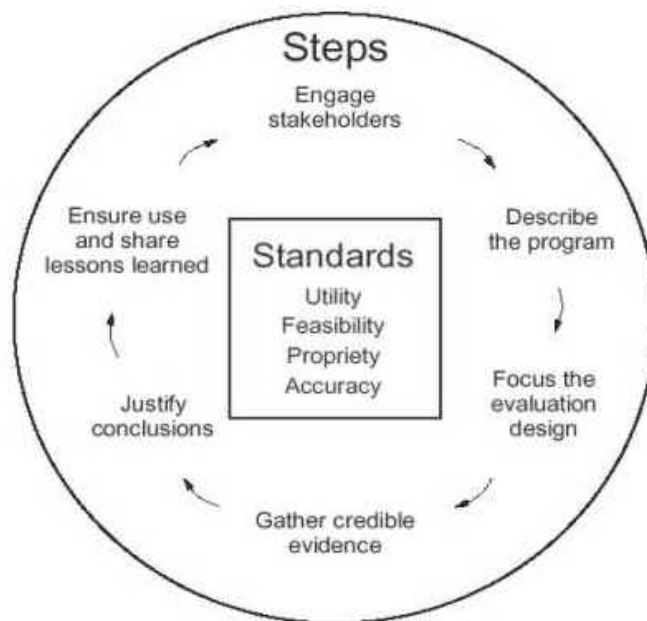
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## Small Group - Identifying Evaluation Uses

- From your own work/experience please discuss an example for each type of use
  - Instrumental
  - Enlightenment/Conceptual
  - Process or Capacity Building
  - Symbolic

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## CDC Evaluation Framework



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## **CDC Framework: 6 Steps**

1. **Engage stakeholders**
2. Describe the program
3. **Focus the evaluation design**
4. **Gather credible evidence**
5. **Justify conclusions**
6. **Ensure use and shared lessons**

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## **Program Evaluation Standards**

- Utility
- Feasibility
- Propriety
- Accuracy

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## 6 Steps of the Framework

- Serve as a starting point to develop an evaluation at any point in time
- Interdependent
- May be encountered in a non-linear sequence, however;
- There is a logic to the order

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## Step 1: Engage Stakeholders

- Definition: Fostering input, participation, and power-sharing among those persons who have an investment in the conduct of the evaluation and the findings; it is especially important to engage primary users of the evaluation.
- Role: Helps increase chances that the evaluation will be useful; can improve the evaluation's credibility, clarify roles and responsibilities, enhance cultural competence, help protect human subjects, and avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest.

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## Step 1: Activities

- Consulting insiders (e.g., leaders, staff, clients, and program funding sources) and outsiders (e.g., skeptics);
- Taking special effort to promote the inclusion of less powerful groups or individuals;
- Coordinating stakeholder input throughout the process of evaluation design, operation, and use; and
- Avoiding excessive stakeholder identification, which might prevent progress of the evaluation.

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## When to Consider Use?

2 Phases:

From the **START** of the evaluation  
**THROUGHOUT** the evaluation

... which will lead to use both *During* and at the *Conclusion* of the evaluation

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## Large Group- Evaluation Use in Your Context

Describe a time when information from an evaluation influenced you

- What was the circumstance?
- Who was involved?
- What made this information useful?
- How did it impact you?

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## Conditions Necessary for Use

The evaluation must be accepted as:

- 1- Accurate
- 2- Relevant

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## Research on Use

Factors identified that lead to use:  
Political Factors  
The “Personal Factor”  
Credible Evidence

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## The Personal Factor

“The presence of an identifiable individual or group who personally care about the evaluation and the findings its generates.”

(Patton, 1997 p. 44)

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## Impact of the Personal Factor

“Presence of the personal factor increases the likelihood of long term follow through, that is, the persistence of getting evaluation findings used.”

Patton, 1997 p. 47

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## Intended Use by Intended Users

- *People* use information (intended users)
- Users have specific *information needs* (intended uses)
- *Intended uses* focus the evaluation

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## Step 3: Focus the Evaluation Design

- The direction and process of the evaluation must be focused to assess issues of greatest concern to stakeholders while using time and resources as efficiently as possible. Not all design options are equally well-suited to meeting the information needs of stakeholders. After data collection begins, changing procedures might be difficult or impossible, even if better methods become obvious. A thorough plan anticipates intended uses and creates an evaluation strategy with the greatest chance of being useful, feasible, ethical, and accurate.

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## Step 3: Focus the Evaluation Design

Among the items to consider when focusing an evaluation are the following:

### **Purpose**

- *What is the intent or motive for conducting the evaluation (i.e., to gain insight, change practice, assess effects, or affect participants)?*

### **Users**

- *Who are the specific persons that will receive evaluation findings or benefit from being part of the evaluation?*

### **Uses**

- *How will each user apply the information or experiences generated from the evaluation?*

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## Step 3: Focus the Evaluation Design

### Questions

- *What questions should the evaluation answer? What boundaries will be established to create a viable focus for the evaluation? What unit of analysis is appropriate (e.g., a system of related programs, a single program, a project within a program, a subcomponent or process within a project)?*

### Methods

- *What procedures will provide the appropriate information to address stakeholders' questions (i.e., what research designs and data collection procedures best match the primary users, uses, and questions)? Is it possible to mix methods to overcome the limitations of any single approach?*

### Agreements

- *How will the evaluation plan be implemented within available resources? What roles and responsibilities have the stakeholders accepted? What safeguards are in place to ensure that standards are met, especially those for protecting human subjects?*

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## Step 3: Activities

- Meeting with stakeholders to clarify the real intent or purpose of the evaluation;
- Learning which persons are in a position to actually use the findings, then orienting the plan to meet their needs;
- Understanding how the evaluation results are to be used;
- Writing explicit evaluation questions to be answered;
- Describing practical methods for sampling, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, and judgment;
- Preparing a written protocol or agreement that summarizes the evaluation procedures, with clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders; and
- Revising parts or all of the evaluation plan when critical circumstances change.

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## The Psychology of UFE

- Intended users are more likely to use evaluations if they understand and feel ownership of the evaluation process and findings;
- Intended users are more likely to understand and feel ownership if they've been actively involved;
- By actively involving intended users, the evaluator is training users in use, preparing the groundwork for use, and reinforcing the intended utility of the evaluation every step along the way.

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## Who are Intended Users?

- People willing and able to use information
- Must have a formal position and authority in decision making
- Ideally, a group representing more than one constituency
  - Research shows Median # 6

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## Identifying Potential Intended Users: Stakeholder Audiences

- Primary Audiences
  - ✓ Major decision makers, funders
  - ✓ Program staff, supervisors, managers, external constituents
- Secondary Audiences
  - ✓ May have little or no daily contact with program but may have some level of responsibility for the program; may use results in some decision making situations (e.g., program participants or their supervisors or managers)
- Tertiary Audiences
  - ✓ More distanced from program's inner workings; may be interested in the results (e.g., future program participants, general public, special interest groups)

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## What are Intended Uses?

- Render judgments
- Facilitate improvements
- Generate knowledge

The evaluator assists the intended users in determining the intended uses of the evaluation

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## Some Questions for Intended Users about Intended Uses: Understanding the Use Context

- What decisions are the evaluation findings expected to influence?  
By whom? When must findings be presented to ensure use?
- What's the history and context of the decision making context?
- What other factors will affect decision making?
  - politics, personalities, promises
- How much influence might the evaluation have?
- To what extent has the outcome of the decision already determined?
- What data are necessary to support the decision?
- What needs to be done to achieve use?
  - Which stakeholders must have buy in?

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## Identifying Intended Users and Uses: Small Group Exercise

- Choose a program context that one or more of the group members are familiar
- Identify a list of potential intended users. For each:
  - Identify the role/position and relationship to the program.
  - What makes this person an “attractive” potential user?
  - What personal and professional qualities does this person have?
  - What will they bring to the evaluation?
  - What are the potential intended uses for this user?

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## Step 4: Gather Credible Evidence

- Persons involved in an evaluation should strive to collect information that will convey a well-rounded picture of the program and be seen as credible by the evaluation's primary users.
- Information should be perceived by stakeholders as believable and relevant for answering their questions. Such decisions depend on the evaluation questions being posed and the motives for asking them. Having credible evidence strengthens evaluation judgments and the recommendations that follow from them. Although all types of data have limitations, an evaluation's overall credibility can be improved by using multiple procedures for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data. When stakeholders are involved in defining and gathering data that they find credible, they will be more likely to accept the evaluation's conclusions and to act on its recommendations.

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## Step 4: Gather Credible Evidence (Continued)

The following aspects of evidence gathering typically affect perceptions of credibility:

### Indicators

- *How will general concepts regarding the program, its context, and its expected effects be translated into specific measures that can be interpreted? Will the chosen indicators provide systematic data that is valid and reliable for the intended uses?*

### Sources

- *What sources (i.e., persons, documents, observations) will be accessed to gather evidence?*
- *What will be done to integrate multiple sources, especially those that provide data in narrative form and those that are numeric?*

### Quality

- *Is the information trustworthy (i.e., reliable, valid, and informative for the intended uses)?*

### Quantity

- *What amount of information is sufficient? What level of confidence or precision is possible? Is there adequate power to detect effects? Is the respondent burden reasonable?*

### Logistics

- *What techniques, timing, and physical infrastructure will be used for gathering and handling evidence?*

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## Accuracy & Evidence

- Information that stakeholders perceive as trustworthy and relevant
- Experimental or descriptive
  - Quantitative or qualitative

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## What Constitutes Credible Evidence?

- How evaluation questions are posed
- Beliefs about truth, knowledge and knowing
- Sources of information
- Conditions of data collection, reliability of measurement, validity of interpretations, and quality control procedures
- These may vary from context to context, user to user

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## Step 5: Justify Conclusions

- Evaluation conclusions are justified when they are linked to the evidence gathered and judged against agreed-upon values or standards set by the stakeholders. Stakeholders must agree that conclusions are justified before they will use the evaluation results with confidence.

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## Step 5: Justify Conclusions

Justifying conclusions on the basis of evidence includes the following five elements:

### **Standards**

- *Which stakeholder values provide the basis for forming judgments? What type or level of performance must be reached for the program to be considered successful?*

### **Analysis and synthesis**

- *What procedures will be used to examine and summarize the evaluation's findings?*

### **Interpretation**

- *What do the findings mean (i.e., what is their practical significance)?*

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## Step 5: Justify Conclusions

### Judgment

- *What claims concerning the program's merit, worth, or significance are justified based on the available evidence and the selected standards?*

### Recommendations

- *What actions should be considered resulting from the evaluation?*  
*[Note: Making recommendations is distinct from forming judgments and presumes a thorough understanding of the context in which programmatic decisions will be made.]*

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## Step 5: Activities

- Using appropriate methods of analysis and synthesis to summarize findings;
- Interpreting the significance of results for deciding what the findings mean;
- Making judgments according to clearly stated values that classify a result (e.g., as positive or negative and high or low);
- Considering alternative ways to compare results (e.g., compared with program objectives, a comparison group, national norms, past performance, or needs);

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## Step 5: Activities (Continued)

- Generating alternative explanations for findings and indicating why these explanations should be discounted;
- Recommending actions or decisions that are consistent with the conclusions;
- Limiting conclusions to situations, time periods, persons, contexts, and purposes for which the findings are applicable.

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## Mock Data Application Scenarios

Fabricating possible results

- Checks to be sure important q's are being answered
- Tests standards and beliefs about credible evidence
- Identify Standards of Desirability -- Level at which program is considered:
  - Effective
  - Adequate
  - Inadequate
- Realistic expectations of results
- Increases commitment to use

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## Points to Note

- Strive for Balance
- Be Clear About Definitions
- Make Comparisons Carefully & Appropriately
- Don't surprise stakeholders with negative findings

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## Step 6: Ensure Use & Share Lessons Learned

- Assuming that lessons learned in the course of an evaluation will automatically translate into informed decision-making and appropriate action would be naive. Deliberate effort is needed to ensure that the evaluation processes and findings are used and disseminated appropriately. Preparing for use involves strategic thinking and continued vigilance, both of which begin in the earliest stages of stakeholder engagement and continue throughout the evaluation process.

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## Step 6: Ensure Use & Share Lessons Learned

The following five elements are critical for ensuring use:

### Design

- *Is the evaluation organized from the start to achieve intended uses by primary users?*

### Preparation

- *Have steps been taken to rehearse eventual use of the evaluation findings? How have stakeholders been prepared to translate new knowledge into appropriate action?*

### Feedback

- *What communication will occur among parties to the evaluation? Is there an atmosphere of trust among stakeholders?*

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## Step 6: Ensure Use & Share Lessons Learned

### Follow-up

- *How will the technical and emotional needs of users be supported? What will prevent lessons learned from becoming lost or ignored in the process of making complex or politically sensitive decisions? What safeguards are in place for preventing misuse of the evaluation?*

### Dissemination

- *How will the procedures or the lessons learned from the evaluation be communicated to relevant audiences in a timely, unbiased, and consistent fashion? How will reports be tailored for different audiences?*

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## Step 6: Activities

- Designing the evaluation to achieve intended use by intended users;
- Preparing stakeholders for eventual use by rehearsing throughout the project how different kinds of conclusions would affect program operations;
- Providing continuous feedback to stakeholders regarding interim findings, provisional interpretations, and decisions to be made that might affect likelihood of use;
- Scheduling follow-up meetings with intended users to facilitate the transfer of evaluation conclusions into appropriate actions or decisions; and
- Disseminating both the procedures used and the lessons learned from the evaluation to stakeholders, using tailored communications strategies that meet their particular needs.

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## Why an Evaluation Communication Plan? (Preskill & Torres)

- Helps plan for communications throughout an evaluation
- Increases likelihood that information will meet users' needs
- Increases likelihood of evaluation use
- Informs the evaluation budget

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## Elements of the Communication Plan

- Identify intended audience
- Format and style of the communication
- Frequency and timing
- Deadlines

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## Sample Communication Plan

Audiences	Communicating & Reporting Need	Format	When Needed
	Specifics about upcoming evaluation activities		
	Progress report on the evaluation activities		
	Interim findings		
	Final findings		

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From: Torres, Preskill & Piontek, 1996

## Communication Format: Stakeholder/Audience Characteristics

- Accessibility
- Reading ability
- Familiarity with the program
- Role in decision making
- Familiarity with research and evaluation methods
- Experience using evaluation findings

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## Communication Formats

### Informal

- Short communications: memos, faxes, email
- Personal discussions
- Working sessions

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## Communication Formats

### Formal

- Verbal Presentations
- Videotape Presentations
- Conferences
- Public Meetings
- Written reports
- Executive Summaries
- Chart Essays
- Web
- Poster Sessions

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## Formats and Strategies by Degree of Interaction with Audience

### Least Interactive

Short Written Communications  
 Memos and Email  
 Postcards  
 Written Reports  
 Executive Summaries  
 Newsletters, Bulletins, Briefs, Brochures  
 News Media Communications  
 Web-Site Postings



### Most Interactive

Working Sessions  
 Synchronous Electronic Communications  
 •Chat rooms  
 •Teleconferences  
 •Videoconferences  
 •Web conferences  
 Personal Discussions

Verbal Presentations  
 •PowerPoint and Transparencies  
 •Flip charts  
 Video Presentations  
 Posters  
 Photography  
 Cartoons  
 Poetry  
 Drama

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## Small Group Activity

Complete a communication plan for a program with which a group member(s) is involved

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## Use Deadly Sins

- Evaluators make themselves the decision maker
- Identifying vague, passive audiences
- Focusing on *decisions* instead of *decision-makers*
- Waiting for findings to identify users & uses
- Standing above the fray of people and politics

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## In Sum: What Do We Know?

- There are factors necessary for obtaining use
  - Buy-in
  - Credible evidence
- Evaluation operates in a political context
- Potential decision makers do not operate with a clean slate & have a working knowledge
- A decision is not the only evidence of evaluation impact (process use/capacity building)

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## Helpful Websites & More Training

<http://www.cdc.gov/eval/>

<http://www.eval.org>

<http://www.cgu.edu>

CGU Professional Development Workshop Series

***Date & Location:*** August 22-26, Claremont, CA

AEA Annual Conference

***Date & Location:*** November 5-9, Denver, CO

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