

A Checklist for Building Organizational Evaluation Capacity¹

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The purpose of this checklist is to provide a set of guidelines for organizational evaluation capacity building (ECB), i.e., for incorporating evaluation routinely into the life of an organization. The checklist, which was developed from case study data and an extensive literature review, can be a resource for a wide range of stakeholders in organizations seeking to increase their long-term capacity to conduct and use program evaluations in everyday activities.

Organizational Context: Be aware of the internal and external organizational context, power hierarchies, administrative culture, and decision-making processes.

1. Cultivate a positive, ECB-friendly *internal organizational context*.

- Make sure that key leaders of the organization support and share responsibility for ECB.
- Locate existing and enlist new evaluation champion(s) in the organization.
- Determine and work to increase the organization's interest in and demand for evaluation information.
- Determine if and to what extent the internal environment is supportive of change.
- Provide opportunities for sufficient input in decision making, ensuring that people in the organization are able to use data to make decisions.
- Organize opportunities for socializing around evaluation activities during the workday (for example, working on a survey collaboratively or discussing evaluation findings at brown bag lunches).

2. Understand and take advantage of the *external environment* and its influence on the organization.

- Identify external mandates/accountability requirements and expectations, and integrate them into the ECB efforts.
- Determine if and to what extent the external environment is supportive of change (for example, accreditation agencies encourage innovation, professional communities promote evaluation activities, external stakeholders provide support for evaluation).

¹ The Institutionalizing Evaluation Checklist (Stufflebeam, 2002) is a complementary resource for people seeking to build evaluation capacity. While sharing similar content, the capacity-building checklist was developed with explicit attention to the ECB literature and practice.

ECB Structures: Purposefully create structures—mechanisms within the organization—that enable the development of evaluation capacity.

3. Develop and implement a *purposeful long-term ECB plan for the organization.*

- Establish a capable ECB oversight group (composed of members of the staff, board of directors, and community) to initiate, evaluate, and advance evaluation processes continually in the organization.
- Generate an appropriate conception of evaluation for organizational policies and procedures.
- Create a strategy for conducting and using evaluations in the organization that applies existing evaluation frameworks, guidelines, and professional standards.
- Integrate evaluation processes purposefully into organizational policies and procedures.
- Make sure that a detailed written ECB plan exists, is distributed throughout the organization, and is used to assess progress.
- Evaluate the capacity building activities routinely to insure that capacity is increasing and the evaluation function is growing.

4. Build and reinforce *infrastructure to support specific components of the evaluation process and communication systems.*

- Create organizational structures that will facilitate evaluation activities (for example, framing evaluation questions; generating needed studies; conducting needs assessments; designing evaluations; and collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data).
- Assign responsibility for facilitating the ongoing development and evaluation of evaluation processes.
- Build individuals' readiness and skills to implement evaluation activities.
- Develop and use an internal reporting/monitoring/tracking system.
- Develop an effective communication and reporting capability to explain evaluation processes and disseminate findings, both positive and negative, to stakeholder groups.

5. Introduce and maintain *purposeful socialization into the organization's evaluation process.*

- Establish clear expectations for people's evaluation roles and provide sufficient time during the work day for evaluation activities.
- Offer tangible incentives for participation in the evaluation process.
- Provide or make available formal training, professional development, and coaching in evaluation.

- Promote and facilitate people’s learning evaluation by involving them in meaningful ways in evaluation planning and implementation (“learning by doing”).
- Model a willingness to be evaluated by insuring that evaluations and the ECB process itself are routinely and visibly evaluated.

6. Build and expand *peer learning structures*.

- Emphasize and implement purposeful trust building (both interpersonal and organizational) and interdependent roles in the evaluation process.
- Incorporate a feedback mechanism in the decision-making process and an effective communication system so that people will learn from evaluation activities.
- Create ongoing learning activities through which people interact around evaluation processes and results.
- Provide ample opportunities for both individual and group reflection (for example, data-based discussions of successes, challenges, and failures in the organization).

Resources: Make evaluation resources available and use them.

7. Provide and continuously expand *access to evaluation resources*.

- Use evaluation personnel effectively (for example, have internal professionals model high quality practice, teach evaluation processes by engaging staff in evaluation activities, have external consultants present findings to staff).
- Provide easy access to relevant research bases that contain “best practice” content for evaluation in general and for evaluation in specific program content and to examples of high quality evaluation descriptions and reports.
- Ensure the availability of sufficient information on how to access existing evaluation resources (for example, websites, professional organizations, evaluation consultants).

8. Secure *sources of support for program evaluation in the organization*.

- Assure long-term fiscal support from the board or administration—explicit, dedicated funding for program evaluation activities.
- Provide basic resources (copying, equipment for data collection and analysis, computers and software, etc.).
- Allow adequate time and opportunities to collaborate on evaluation activities, including, when possible, being physically together in an environment free from interruptions.
- If needed, develop revenue-generating strategies to support program evaluation (for example, selling copies of data collection instruments or serving as evaluation consultants to other organizations for pay).

Useful Resources/References

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