Evaluation Checklists Project Charter

This charter includes critical information to guide decision making about the expansion and improvement of the Evaluation Checklists Project.

Mission, Vision, and Values

The Checklists Project's mission is to advance excellence in evaluation by providing high-quality checklists to guide practice.

Our vision is for all evaluators to have the information they need to provide exceptional evaluation service and advance the public good.

These values guide the project's work:

Diversity: We are dedicated to supporting the work of evaluators of all skill levels and backgrounds, working in an array of contexts, serving a wide variety of communities.

Excellence: We strive to meet standards of the highest quality to help evaluators provide exceptional service to their clients and stakeholders.

Professional community: We actively seek out and use input from across the evaluation community to improve our work.

Practicality: We are committed to developing and disseminating resources that evaluators can use right away to enhance their practice.

Definition of Evaluation Checklist

An evaluation checklist distills and clarifies relevant elements of practitioner experience, theory, principles, and research to support evaluators in their work.

Criteria for Evaluation Checklists

Checklists accepted for inclusion in the Evaluation Checklists Project collection should meet the following criteria:*

Appropriateness of Evaluation Content

- ☐ The checklist addresses one or more specific evaluation tasks (e.g., a discrete task or an activity that cuts across multiple tasks).
- ☐ The checklist clarifies or simplifies complex content to guide performance of evaluation tasks.
- ☐ Content is based on credible sources, including the author's experience.

* These criteria were derived in part from Bichelmeyer (2003), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015), Degani and Weiner (2016), Scriven (2007), Stufflebeam (2000), and Willmore (2006).

- ◻ Content is consistent with the *Program Evaluation Standards* (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011) and the American Evaluation Association's *Guiding Principles for Evaluators* (2013) and *Statement on Cultural Competence in Evaluation* (2011).
- ◻ Content does not overtly favor one evaluation approach over others, unless the checklist is intended to support application of a particular evaluation approach.

Clarity of Purpose

- ◻ A succinct title clearly identifies what the checklist is about.
- ◻ A brief introduction orients the user to the checklist's purpose, including the following:
    - The circumstances in which it should be used
    - How it should be used (including caveats about how it should not be used, if needed)
    - Intended users

Completeness and Relevance

- ◻ All essential aspects of the evaluation task(s) are addressed.
- ◻ All content is pertinent to what users need to do to complete the task(s).

Organization

- ◻ Content is presented in a logical order, whether conceptually or sequentially.
- ◻ Content is organized in sections labeled with concise, descriptive headings.
- ◻ Complex steps or components are broken down into multiple smaller parts.

Clarity of Writing

- ◻ Content is focused on what users should do, rather than questions for them to ponder.
- ◻ Everyday language is used, rather than jargon or highly technical terms.
- ◻ Verbs are direct and action-oriented.
- ◻ Terms are precise.
- ◻ Terms are used consistently.
- ◻ Definitions are provided where terms are used but might not be obviously known.
- ◻ Sentences are concise.

References and Sources

- ◻ Sources used to develop the checklist's content are cited.
- ◻ Additional resources are listed for users who wish to learn more about the topic.
- ◻ A preferred citation for the checklist is included (at the end or beginning of the checklist).
- ◻ The author's contact information is included.

Procedures for Evaluation Checklist Authors and Editors

In the steps described below,

- *Author* refers to the individual(s) who creates an original checklist.
- *Editor* refers to the member of the Evaluation Checklists Project staff assigned as the point-of-contact for the checklist's author (tasks associated with Editor may be performed by more than one member of the Evaluation Checklists Project staff).

Authors should review the steps described below before they begin the checklist development process. In addition to these steps, authors should be aware of two important points:

- It is typical for a checklist to undergo several revisions before it meets all criteria listed on pages 1-2 of this charter. Authors are encouraged to recognize this is a normal part of the checklist development process, keeping in mind that their checklist may be the only one in the world on its given topic. The Evaluation Checklists Project is committed to working with authors to produce checklists that are of exceptionally high quality and utility.
- Either Author or Editor may discontinue the checklist development process at any time if there are irreconcilable differences in opinions about the checklist's content or quality.

Steps

1. Author submits an idea for an evaluation checklist (either by completing the online form or emailing a member of the Evaluation Checklists Project staff).
2. Editor responds to Author to confirm the proposed checklist's topic is appropriate (or ask for more information) and explain process (as outlined here).
3. Author submits first draft of checklist to Editor.
4. Editor, with input from other Evaluation Checklists Project staff, provides initial feedback and suggestions for improving the checklist.
5. Author revises checklist based on feedback and sends revised draft to Editor (this step may need to be repeated at the discretion of either Editor or Author).
6. Editor sends checklist to at least three expert reviewers for a double-blind review.
7. Reviewers send feedback to Editor.
8. Editor summarizes reviewers' feedback and offers guidance to Author about how to address the reviewers' input.
9. Author revises checklist based on reviewer feedback and sends revised draft to Editor (this step may need to be repeated at the discretion of either Editor or Author). Editor may perform minor editing and formatting to the document prior to field-testing.
10. When both Author and Editor agree the checklist is ready for field-testing, Editor posts the checklist in the field testing section of the Checklist Project's website, creates an online form to collect field test feedback, and announce the checklist's availability for field-testing via

appropriate channels. Author may disseminate through their networks as well. (Note: At this stage, the checklist's authorship will be known to field testers—it is the Evaluation Checklists project's experience that more people are likely to engage in field-testing when they know whom they are helping with their time).

11. The checklist will remain in field testing for a designated period—typically between two and four weeks (it may depend on how long it takes to get a sufficient number of responses). When the field-test period ends, Editor will compile the results and send to Author with guidance on how to revise based on field-testers' input.
12. Author revises checklist based on field-test results and sends revised draft to Editor (this step may need to be repeated at the discretion of either Editor or Author).
13. When both Author and Editor agree the checklist has been sufficiently revised, Editor sends the checklist to a professional editor for copy editing (paid for by the Evaluation Checklist Project).
14. Editor sends Author the copyedited version of the checklist.
15. Author reviews the edits and accepts, declines, or modifies them as appropriate and sends the checklist back to Editor for finalization.
16. Editor formats the checklist and posts it on the Checklist Project website.
17. Editor announces the availability of the finalized checklist via appropriate channels. Author may disseminate through their networks as well.

Evaluation Task Areas

This list of evaluation tasks areas is intended to guide the Checklists Project in curating the collection, with the aim of building a collection of checklists that provides coverage of evaluation tasks and cross-cutting activities that is as comprehensive as possible. However, not all important evaluation tasks and activities are appropriate checklists topics.

The list of common evaluation tasks below is divided into nine domains of evaluation activity. This list is not intended to be exhaustive for all evaluation contexts, and some tasks may not be relevant for a given evaluation. However, they collectively represent a core set of tasks typical in many evaluation contexts. ***Although presented as discrete tasks in linear order, many will intersect and inform each other and will occur concurrently or iteratively. This list is not intended to be a checklist for conducting an evaluation.***

1. Managing the Evaluation

Plan and manage use of resources involved in conducting an evaluation, including people, time, and money.

a. Assemble a competent evaluation team and determine each member's role.
b. Prepare an evaluation plan that includes details about the evaluation design, as well as timelines, tasks, and deliverables.

c. Develop an evaluation budget.

d. Prepare document(s) to define the evaluator's scope of work and conditions for compensation (e.g., contract, memorandum, or statement of work).

e. Establish and follow protocols to ensure all interactions with people involved in the evaluation are respectful and meaningful.

f. Develop and adhere to a data management plan to ensure data are secured and kept for an appropriate period of time.

g. Document key decisions throughout the evaluation.

2. Engaging Stakeholders

Identify stakeholders who should be informed about and involved in the evaluation and engage them accordingly in the evaluation.

a. Identify stakeholders who should be involved in planning, conducting, or using the evaluation.

b. Determine the appropriate level of and means for stakeholder involvement throughout the evaluation process and related to specific tasks, with recognition that not all stakeholders must be involved equally at all times.

c. Determine if key stakeholders value certain types of evidence or evaluation approaches over others so their preferences can be reflected in the evaluation design.

d. Determine appropriate mode and frequency of communication about the evaluation with various stakeholders.

3. Situating the Evaluation in Context

Identify the key characteristics of the program being evaluated and tailor the evaluation activities to the conditions in which the program operates.

a. Identify the purpose and intended uses of the evaluation.

b. Identify the specific information needs of the evaluation's intended users.

c. Identify key program factors, including activities, expected effects, resources, and participant needs.

d. Identify the program's theory of change.

e. Identify potential unintended positive or negative consequences of the program.

f. Identify key contextual factors that are likely to influence the program, its outcomes, or the evaluation, such as sociopolitical and economic conditions.

4. Applying Specific Evaluation Approaches

Draw on established evaluation approaches, theories, and models to guide the evaluation process.

a. With understanding of the underlying values and distinct features of major evaluation approaches, determine which one(s) are appropriate for the context.

b. Apply established principles and guidelines associated with the selected approach(es) in designing and conducting the evaluation, as appropriate for the context.

5. Designing the Evaluation

Determine what aspects of the program the evaluation will focus on and make decisions about how to structure the inquiry to serve intended purposes.

a. Determine the specific evaluation questions, objectives, and/or criteria.

b. Identify potential negative consequences of the evaluation and establish appropriate safeguards for human welfare.

c. Identify what will be measured to address the evaluation questions, objectives, and/or criteria.

d. Determine what methods and data sources will be used and ensure they are appropriate for the evaluation's context.

e. Determine if comparison or control groups are appropriate and feasible.

f. Determine what, if any, sampling techniques should be used to obtain data of sufficient quantity and quality. If appropriate, identify sampling frame and develop sampling protocol.

g. Determine how conclusions and judgments about the programs will be derived, including procedures and sources of values that will inform interpretation.

6. Collecting and Analyzing Data

Obtain and describe data to generate credible findings.

a. Establish and follow protocols for ensuring security of collected data.
b. Develop and test data collection instruments and protocols (or identify and obtain existing instruments appropriate for context).
c. Collect data in a contextually responsive and technically sound manner.
d. Assess the trustworthiness or validity of the collected data.
e. Prepare data for analysis.
f. Analyze data in a contextually responsive and technically sound manner.
g. Establish a process of checks and balances to ensure analysis is trustworthy, such as member checking, triangulation, etc.

7. Interpreting Evidence

Combine findings from data sources and use agreed-upon procedures and values to reach conclusions and judgments about the program.

a. Identify appropriate points of comparison or values for interpreting evidence, such as historical data, program goals, organizational priorities, and stakeholder expectations.
b. Integrate and interpret results in a systematic manner that supports conclusions in relation to evaluation questions, objectives, and/or criteria.
c. Seek out and explain possible alternative explanations for observed results.
d. Identify actions to recommend, based on evidence, if appropriate.

8. Reporting Results and Promoting Use

Describe and communicate the evaluation's processes and results in a way that encourages understanding and use of results by stakeholders.

a. Determine the appropriate means for communicating the evaluation results, such as meetings, memos, presentations, infographics, technical reports, or journal articles.
b. Determine what content to include in each reporting medium, based on the intended audience.
c. Prepare evaluation report(s) with attention to visual elements and formatting to support understanding of evaluation results.
d. Disseminate reports and other media into the appropriate hands.
e. Follow up with stakeholders to support understanding and use of results.

9. Evaluating the Evaluation (Metaevaluation)

Assess the quality of the evaluation.

a. Reflect on the evaluation process and deliverables to identify opportunities for improvement.
b. Formally evaluate the evaluation.

References

American Evaluation Association. (2013). *American Evaluation Association guiding principles for evaluators.* Available from http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=51

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Willmore, J. (2006). *Job aid basics.* Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development.

Yarbrough, D. B., Shulha, L. M., Hopson, R. K., & Caruthers, F. A. (2011). *The program evaluation standards: A guide for evaluators and evaluation users* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.