



Commission Investment Funds Meeting



AmeriCorps State and National Symposium 2016



Topics



- CNCS's philosophy and approach to evaluation capacity building
- The current state of the field in terms of evaluation capacity and evidence
- How to leverage existing CNCS resources and lessons learned from past technical assistance efforts
- How to leverage planned CNCS technical assistance efforts
- CNCS requirements and expectations for subgrantee performance measurement, evaluation and data quality
- Priority Area #3 goals and allowable activities

Introduction: Why Are We Here?



Priority Performance Area #3: Strengthen subgrantees' ability to conduct high quality performance measurement and evaluation in order to improve programs and build evidence

Outcome Frequencies



- Improved performance measures (19)
- Approved evaluation plan in place (10)
- Improved data collection plans (7)
- Improved logic model (4)
- Approved plan to improve position on evidence continuum (2)

Who Is Doing What?



- 36 Commissions in priority area
- 27 Commissions hiring consultants
- 13 Commissions hiring new staff

National Service 101: CNCS

- Created in 1993 through the signing of the National and Community Service Trust Act
- Nation's largest grant maker supporting service and volunteering
- Engages millions of Americans in service each year
- Sponsors and promotes a variety of special initiatives and days of service

What is AmeriCorps?



AmeriCorps State and National

- Awards grants to non-profits, faith & community-based organizations, public agencies, Indian tribes, and institutions of higher education.
- Provides opportunities for individuals – AmeriCorps members – to serve communities across the country.
- Since 1994, more than **900,000** men and women have provided service as AmeriCorps members.

ASN Grants



- Provide partial funding to support AmeriCorps projects/programs. Grant recipients must contribute cash or in-kind match funds
- Solely for program expenses and not for general organizational expenses
- Include an allotment of AmeriCorps member positions and funds that are directly tied to the number of members

Focus Areas



- Disaster Services
- Healthy Futures
- Economic Opportunity
- Education
- Environmental Stewardship
- Veterans and Military Families
- Organizational Capacity Building

State-Federal Partnership



State Service Commissions

- Promote service and volunteerism
- Set priorities for national and community service in the state (State Service Plan)
- Governor-appointed with statutory requirements for composition and operations

State Commissions



Partners in Grantmaking and Grants Management

- Conduct AmeriCorps grant competitions (competitive and formula)
- Responsible for training, technical assistance, oversight and monitoring of all single-state AmeriCorps programs
- Manage more than \$250 million in federal grants annually

Federal policy climate on evidence and evaluation

Presidential Administrations	Office of Management and Budget Guidance
President Clinton (1993 – 2001)	Government Performance and Results (GPRA) Act
President Bush (2001 – 2009)	Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)
President Obama (2009 – 2017)	GPRA Modernization Act OMB Memoranda <ul style="list-style-type: none">• M-13-17 Next Steps in the Evidence and Innovation Agenda Tiered Evidence/Innovation Funds U.S. Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking White House Deputies Committee on Evidence

CNCS' Philosophy and Approach to ECB

- Accountability is important, but focus on utilization of findings
- Evaluation for the purposes of program improvement: serve more people, better!
- Calibrating evaluation to a program's lifecycle facilitates use of findings
- CNCS: provide high quality training, technical assistance, and support to partners and grantees engaged in evaluation and evidence building

ECB and the Evidence Continuum



- [Evidence continuum video](#): available on Evaluation Resources page
- CNCS's grant portfolio represents programs at all stages of the continuum
- Investing in evaluation capacity helps move programs along the continuum
- Programs should know where they are on the continuum and know how/have a plan to build evidence over time

What is evaluation capacity building (ECB)?

Non-Profit Organizational Capacity

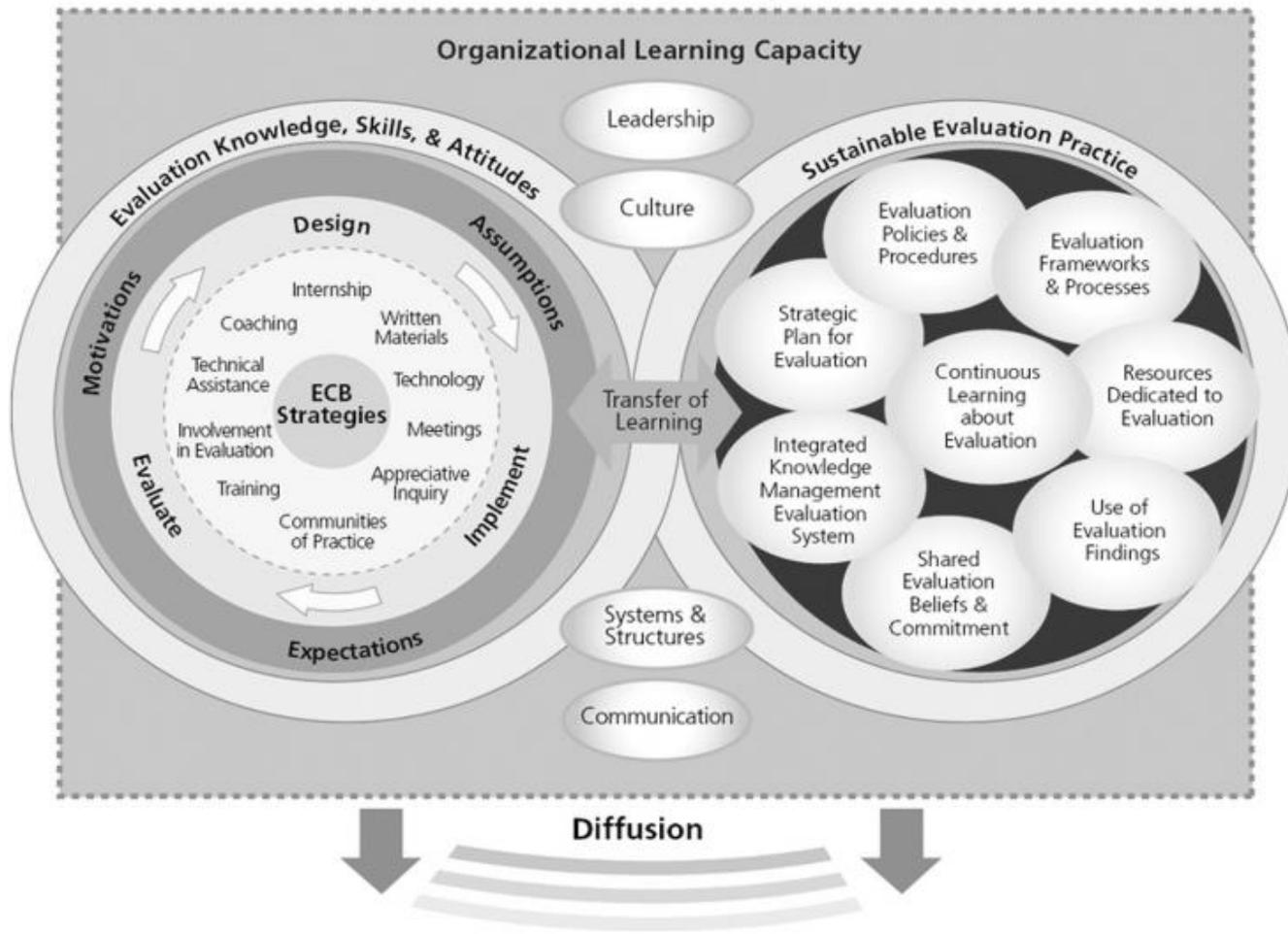


Source: www.worldlearning.org

- Evaluation capacity building (ECB): “an intentional process to increase individual motivation, knowledge, and skills, and to enhance a group or organization’s ability to conduct or use evaluation.” (Labin et. al., 2012)
- Can occur at the individual or institutional level
- Is an intentional, ongoing process
- Can be mapped to an organization’s lifecycle (Scheirer, 2012)

What is evaluation capacity building (ECB)?

A Multidisciplinary Model of Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB)



Source: Preskill, H., & Boyle, S. (2008). A multidisciplinary model of evaluation capacity building. *American Journal of Evaluation*.
AmeriCorps

Commission evaluation capacity

- Goal: increase commission's and subgrantees' ability to conduct and use data from high quality evaluations for decision making and improvement.
- Unique considerations:
 - Commission as an intermediary
 - Alignment of evaluation goals and requirements w/ CNCS HQ

Commission evaluation capacity



- CNCS' understanding of commissions' struggles:
 - Finding, connecting with qualified evaluators
 - Multi-focus intermediaries
 - Diverse portfolio of interventions
 - Limited personnel, staff evaluation capacity, and limited financial and ECB resources
- Opportunities: collaboration, proximity to field, unified voice within state, nimbleness

Case Study: ECB Fears



Commission and agency staff were asked, “What is your biggest concern about this project or evaluation in general?”

- How does this relate to my job/job duties?
- Will it help the organization?
- How long will it take?
- Who will participate?
- How effective is it really going to be?

Case Study: ECB Constraints

- Systemic inefficiencies and barriers within state government
 - Hiring/Re-hiring
 - Technology (part of larger state agency systems)
 - Difficult to react quickly to new opportunities or policy changes

Case Study: ECB Constraints

- Perception that CNCS expectations are unrealistic
- Insufficient funding to support training
- Lack of competition for grants reduces incentive for programs to build evidence

Need vs. Service-Delivery Orientation

“The difference there is that if you are coming to it from a need place... then you can see evaluation is really important and you want that to happen because you want to be able to fix that need. But if you already have this nonprofit running and you have all these programs within that nonprofit, then you are thinking more about boots-on-the-ground. You're thinking more about people who are going to help run these programs, and that becomes your focus. So then evaluation is burdensome...when all you really needed was people to come in and do this tutoring and to help...It's like there's a disconnect. And that's why I think evaluation ends up being negative, not positive.”

--Case Study Participant

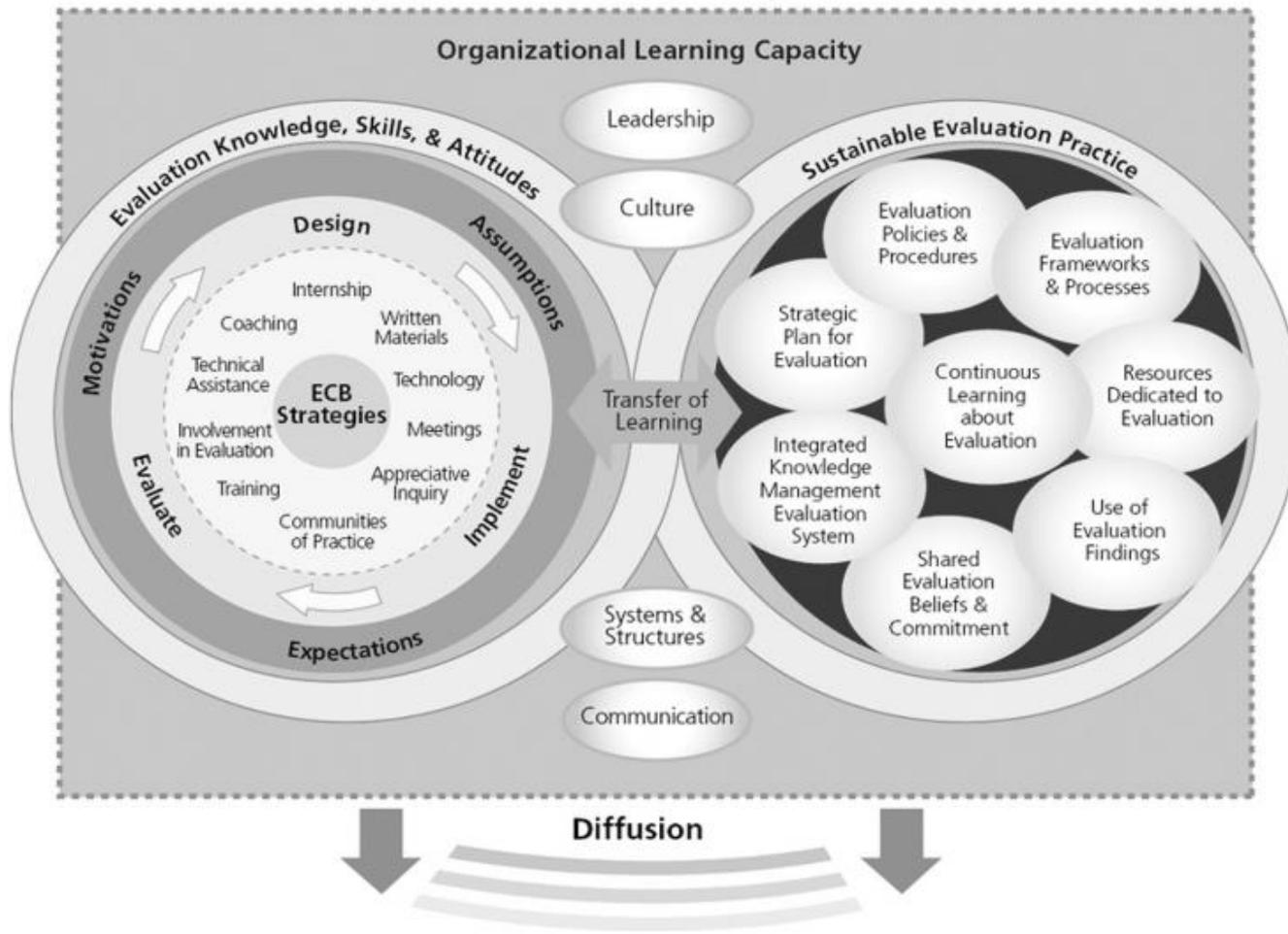
Commission Perspectives



Are the findings from the case study consistent with your experience in your state?

ECB strategies

A Multidisciplinary Model of Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB)



Source: Preskill, H., & Boyle, S. (2008). A multidisciplinary model of evaluation capacity building. *American Journal of Evaluation*.
AmeriCorps

CNCS ASN ECB to Date

Goal: To move the agency and its grantees towards using evaluation for program improvement so that ultimately, programs will be able to show evidence of effectiveness and serve more people efficiently and effectively.

Inputs

- Percentage of ORE budget
- Personnel:
 - ORE research staff
 - Evaluation contractor support
 - ASN program support, expertise
- Written materials:
 - Core Curriculum
 - Topical evaluation resources
- Technology:
 - Evaluation Resources webpage
 - Evidence Exchange
- Training:
 - Evaluation Institute at the ASN Grantee Symposium
 - Topical webinars and live trainings
- 1:1 coaching
- Technical assistance: ad hoc and formal
- Experiential learning:
 - Evaluation Bundling

Activities and Outputs

- Provide ad hoc technical assistance to staff and “small” grantees
 - *# of staff and/or small grantees soliciting assistance*
- Conduct 1:1 coaching and technical assistance for “large” grantees to improve evaluation plans
 - *# of grantees ending TA with well designed evaluation plan*
- Conduct experiential learning for select grantees (Evaluation Bundling)
 - *# of grantees successfully participating in project*
- Create and maintain repository of evidence and evaluation reports (Evidence Exchange)
 - *# of report downloads and unique site visits*
- Deliver trainings and Core Curriculum courses in person and via webinar
 - *# of grantees and staff attending or listening in*
- Produce and make evaluation training materials available on Evaluation Resources page
 - *# of grantees and staff accessing materials*

Outcomes

- Grantees plan and execute well designed program evaluations
- Staff feel confident monitoring evaluation progress, enforcing requirements
- Grantees use results from their evaluations for program improvement

External Factors: available budget; agency culture of evaluation; collaboration with program office, commissions

ECB: Technical Assistance



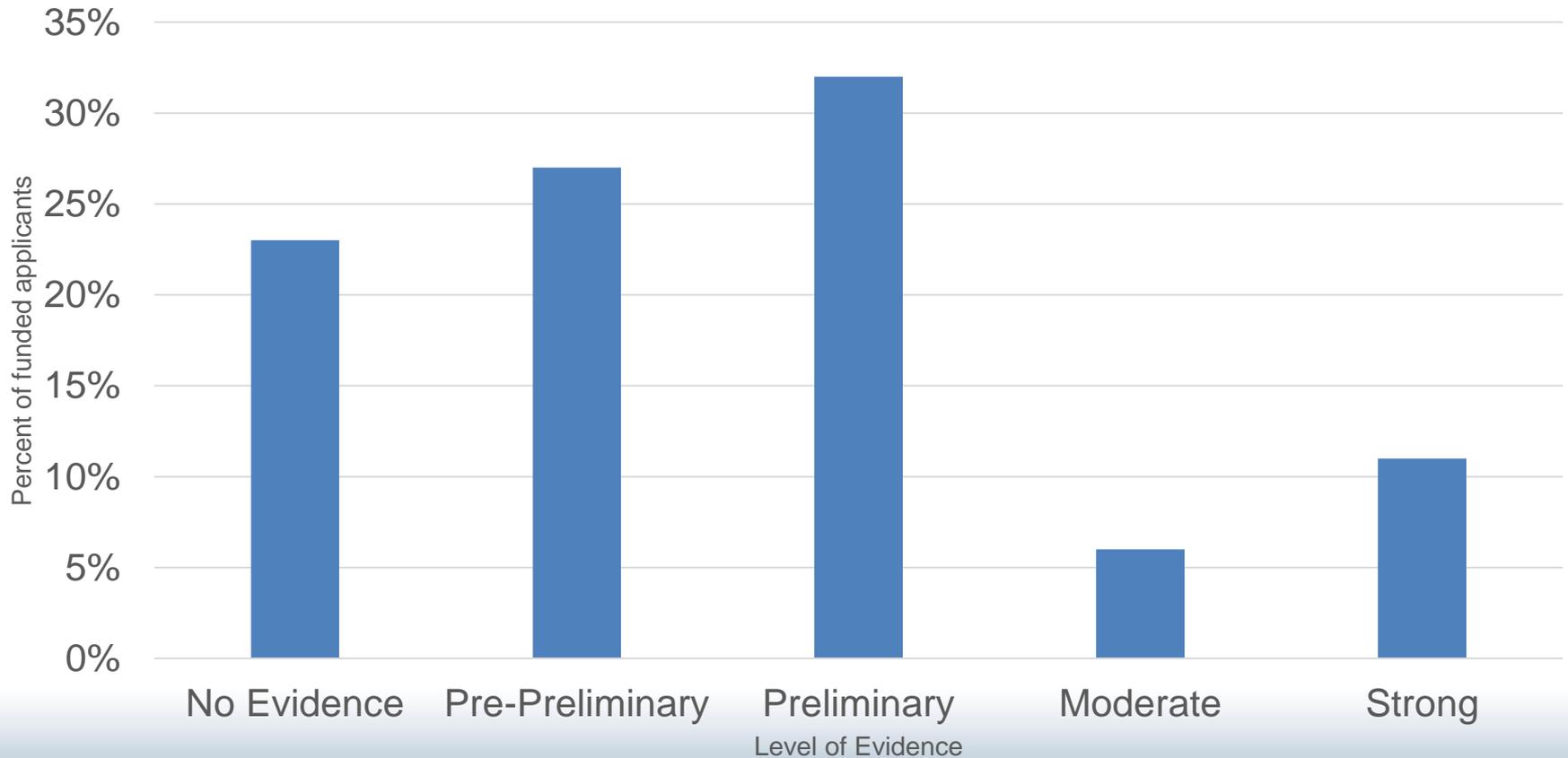
- 1:1 technical assistance with large grantee evaluation plans
- Feedback on small grantee evaluation plans
- Feedback to competitive applicants on evidence tier and quality of evaluations submitted
- Feedback on compliance with CNCS evaluation requirements

The State of the Field: Commission Perspective



The State of the Field: CNCS Perspective

Evidence Tiers 2016: Funded Applicants



Source: GARP evidence data from 2016 competitions

The State of the Field

	Evidence Actual 2015				
Evidence Claimed	No Evidence	Pre-Preliminary	Preliminary	Moderate	Strong
None Claimed	11%	11%	9%	1%	0%
No Evidence	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Pre-Preliminary	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Preliminary	0%	2%	3%	0%	0%
Moderate	5%	9%	17%	3%	0%
Strong	6%	5%	11%	2%	3%

	Evidence Actual 2016				
Evidence Claimed	No Evidence	Pre-Preliminary	Preliminary	Moderate	Strong
None Claimed	10%	7%	4%	1%	0%
No Evidence	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Pre-Preliminary	2%	7%	0%	0%	0%
Preliminary	4%	6%	13%	0%	0%
Moderate	3%	3%	6%	4%	1%
Strong	3%	4%	9%	1%	9%

Source: GARP evidence data from 2015 and 2016 competitions

The State of the Field



- Common TA issues
 - Writing complete, quality evaluation plans
 - Confusion between performance measurement and evaluation, and how the two can relate
 - Mismatch of research question to method
 - Inadequate budget
 - Setting proper scope of evaluation
 - Writing strong, clear research questions
 - Determining criteria for and finding and hiring a qualified evaluator
 - No plan to use evaluation data and findings ☹️

Source: 2014 and 2015 memos on small grantee evaluation plan themes; 2014 and 2015 T&TA reports from 1:1 TA to large grantees

The State of the Field



Findings from ASC survey:

- People have looked at the evaluation Resources page, and the majority who did found the resources useful
- Respondents report needing information on topics already available on the page, with some exceptions
- Accommodate a variety of learning styles!

Persistent issues:

- Multi-focus intermediaries
- Budgeting
- Finding an evaluator
- Technical issues unique to focus areas
- How best to serve more “advanced” programs or those very experienced with evaluation

The State of the Field



“There are nonprofits that are a higher level and then there are grassroots. If we go to (program name redacted) and tell them they have to do evaluation, they don't even have Bachelor's degrees, you know? So in some places it's also just that they don't have the knowledge to be able to do those things...CNCS continues to push us...towards these standards of proving everything, but it's standards that nobody on the ground (particularly programs) can physically do...There are just people who don't have that knowledge base...and I see it in workshops that we hold all the time with current Program Directors. People just don't know enough about what evaluation is. So that even when you tell them that they have to do it, they don't know where to go, they don't know who to talk to, they don't know where to start. And then it's really a burden, and it makes them feel stupid. You know? And you're not productive if you feel like you don't know enough about something...”

--Arkansas Case Study Participant

Perspectives on Technical Assistance



- Early insights from Colorado
- CNCS perspective



SERVE COLORADO
Governor's Commission on Community Service



Building Evaluation Capacity in Colorado



Why Build Evaluation Capacity?

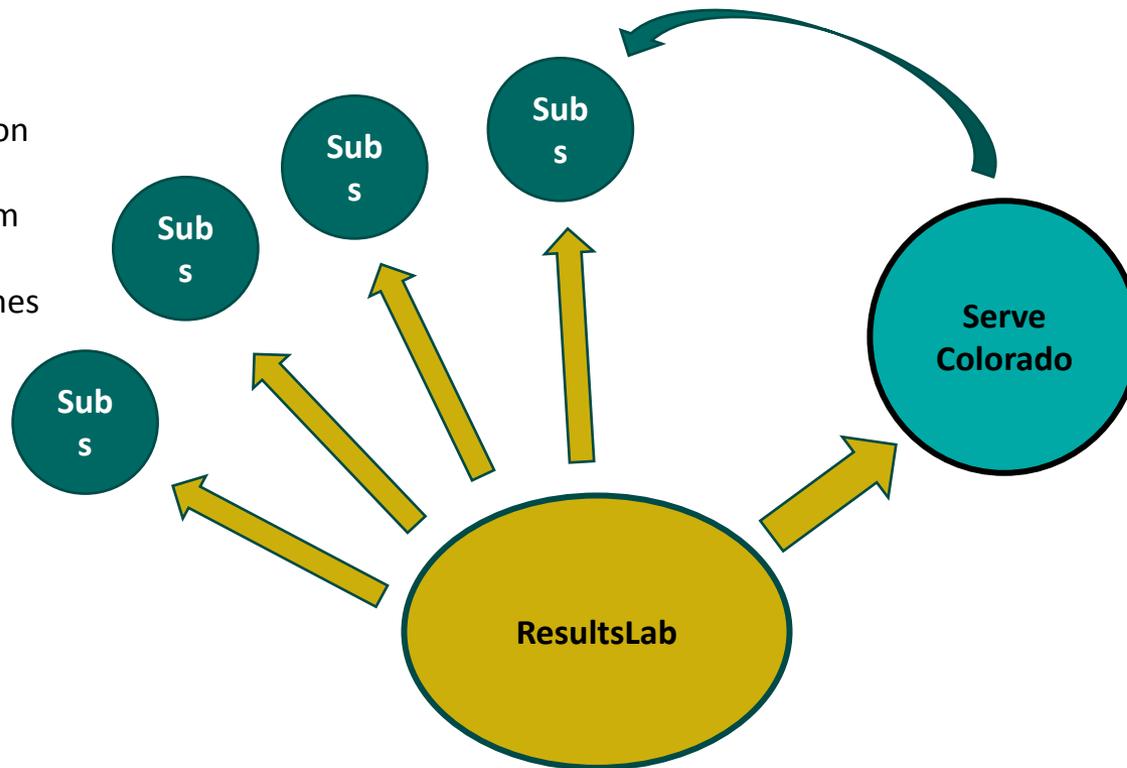




The Model

Subs

- Increase Evaluation Capacity
- Improved program quality
- Improved outcomes



Commission

- Increase Evaluation Capacity for the Commission
- Improved ability to provide EC training for subs
- Approach: Learn with coaching



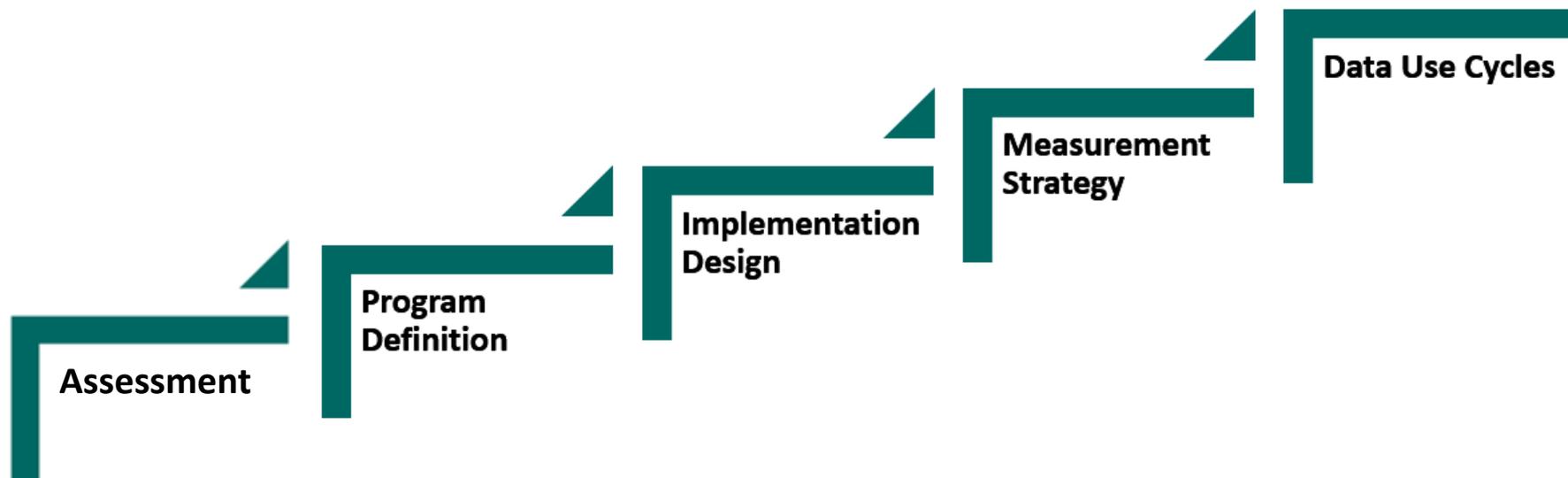
Evaluation Capacity

Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) is the process of improving an organization's ability to use evaluation to learn from its work and improve results.

- Innovation Network

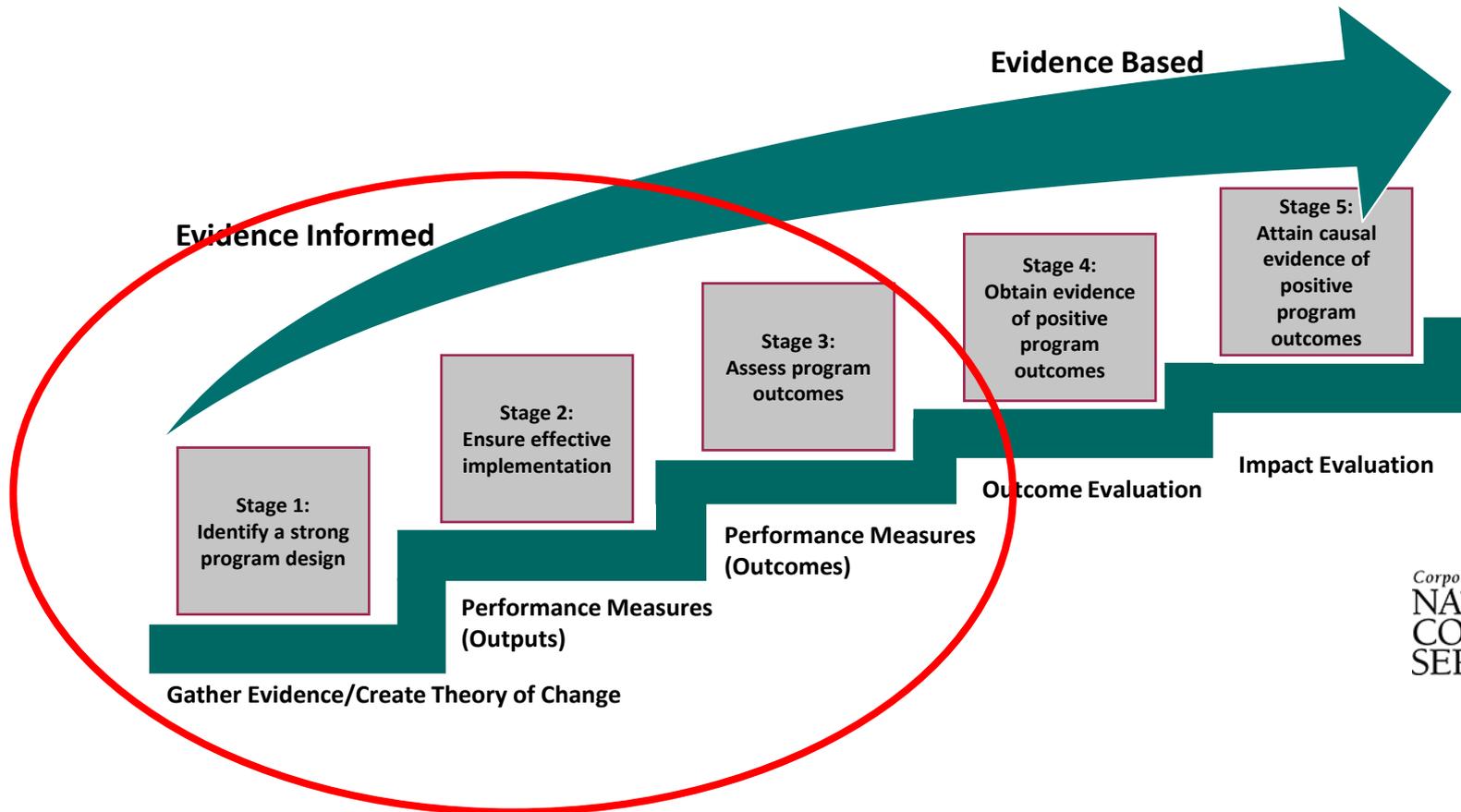


The Approach





Put Another Way . . .





Impact Evaluability Assessment

- Organizational Readiness
- Program Readiness
- Evaluation Readiness

Organizational Readiness (existing support for evaluation, capacity building [as needed], learning, use of data for decision making within the organization, especially at the leadership level, and existence of requisite infrastructure to support related activities.)	Indicate to what extent each statement is true.			
	Not at all true	Somewhat true	True	Not applicable
Leadership Commitment				
There is support for the evaluation and evaluation capacity building, as needed, at the leadership level (CEO and/or Board of Directors).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership demonstrates commitment to evaluation and evidence-based or data-driven decision making.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership supports staff positions/activities that focus on evaluation, learning, and improvement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organization and its Board of Directors demonstrate interest in learning about the effectiveness of the program by rigorously evaluating program effectiveness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Assessment Pros and Cons

Pros

- Allows for systematic assessment across grantees
- Addresses key areas of evaluation capacity
- Existing assessment tool – you don't have to create it

Cons

- Language of the questions may be too advanced for some
- Part 3: Evaluation Readiness is only applicable to organizations ready for a rigorous quasi-experimental or experimental studies
- Once subgrantees learn more about evaluation, they may rate themselves lower than their initial assessment



How is ECB Delivered?

Approaches

- **Reading** to understand evaluation
- **Training** to explain concepts more deeply
- **Facilitation** to maximize program expertise
- **Coaching** to embed learning
- **Learning Communities** to maximize shared learning from peers
- **Engaging in an evaluation** or performance management cycle for hands on learning

Right-sizing

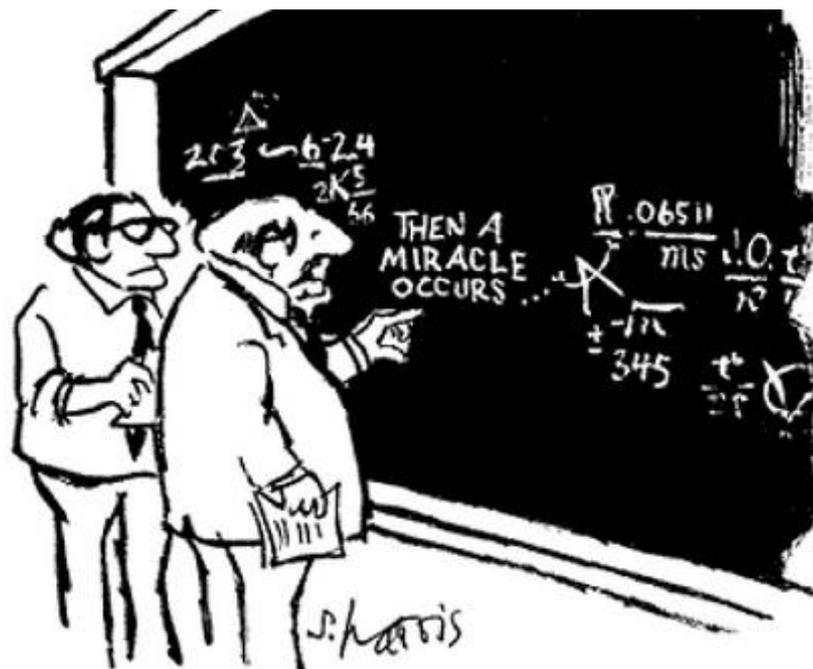
- **Group by** area of need or **developmental stage** along the evaluation capacity pathway
- **Group content delivery** where possible
- Provide **high intensity individualized coaching**

ResultsLab Theory of Change:
Individualized Coaching = Increase in evaluation capacity



Keys to Success

- **One size does not fit all** - Subgrantees' capacity varies – right-size your support
- **The Master Plan** - Subgrantees change over time - consider how you can continue to provide developmentally appropriate support year to year
- **Capacity Assessment** – This helps, and there are fundamentals to quality programming and evaluation capacity that all programs likely need
- **It is a long road** – Progress takes time and sometimes subgrantees drive backward after driving forward – be supportive of the developmental process
- **Trust** – Subgrantees must trust you in order to share their evaluation warts – consider how you will build that trust . . . and how you may inadvertently destroy it
- **Don't ask for data you don't need** – Measurement for learning should focus on what the program staff and leadership need to know – all else is secondary



"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

CNCS: What we have learned

- Commissions and subgrantees have come a long way in the last 3 years!
- Make resources:
 - More accessible, in different formats, and increase depth in some areas
 - More examples, tools, interactive resources and hands on activities!
- Upcoming T/TA from CNCS HQ:
 - 1:1 TA for evaluation plan improvement
 - Evaluation implementation support
 - Evaluation report review/feedback

Activity



- What is one thing you heard this morning that influenced your thinking about what you want to do in your state?
- What burning concerns/questions/issues do you have right now?

subgrantee Performance Measurement and Evaluation Requirements



- CNCS has requirements for performance measurement, data quality and evaluation
- Programs must understand these requirements and how to meet them

Requirements Messaging



- Using performance measurement and evaluation results to learn and improve
- Focus performance measures and research questions on what is important to the program
- Focus on what makes sense for the program given current and desired position on evidence continuum, not points in grant competition

National Performance Measures

- Reflect CNCS strategic plan and other programmatic priorities
- Allow for consistent terms, definitions and approaches to measurement
- Allow CNCS to roll up data from multiple programs
- PM Instructions (selection rules and “grids”) must be followed closely

Common PM Challenges



Common areas of improvement for performance measures include:

- Logical alignment between PM outputs and outcomes and the program's theory of change
- Relevance/significance of PM outcomes in relation to the program's theory of change
- Defining intervention dosage, constructs to be measured
- Data collection plan (including proposed instrument) that will yield valid and reliable data for outputs/outcomes
- Compliance with PM Instructions and other CNCS PM guidance

Data Quality Requirements



Subgrantee performance data must be:

- Valid
- Complete
- Consistent
- Accurate
- Verifiable

State Commissions are required to monitor subgrantee data quality and ensure that all data reported to CNCS meets these requirements

Evaluation Requirements



- AmeriCorps State Competitive and National Direct Programs (including Education Award Programs)
 - Over \$500,000
 - Under \$500,00
- State Commission Formula Programs

Evaluation Requirements



National Direct and State Competitive (\$500K+)

- Evaluation covers one year of program activity
- External evaluator
- Impact evaluation (QED or RCT)

Evaluation Requirements

National Direct and State Competitive (less than \$500K) or Education Award Programs

- Evaluation covers one year of program activity
- Internal or external evaluator
- Process evaluation, non-experimental outcome evaluation, QED, or RCT

Alternative Evaluation Approach (AEA)

Large grantees may request approval for an evaluation design that is not a QED or RCT on the basis of:

- Structure (insurmountable challenges to forming a comparison group)
- Member development
- Timing
- Replication of evidence-based program

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/resource/alternativeevaluationapproach.pdf>

Evaluation Requirements State Commissions

...you must establish and enforce evaluation requirements for your State Formula subgrantees, as you deem appropriate.

§ 2522.710

Evaluation Study Designs and CNCS Requirements

Evaluation Study Designs	Meet Requirements	
	Large Grantees	Small Grantees
Experimental Design Studies	Yes	Yes
Quasi-Experimental Design Studies*	Yes	Yes
Non-Experimental Design Studies	No	Yes

*Fulfills CNCS evaluation requirement for large grantees if a valid comparison group is identified and appropriate matching or equivalence techniques are used in the analysis.

What is Due When?

If you are competing for...	Submit evaluation plan	Submit evaluation report	If funded...
Your first three-year competitive grant (and you have had less than three years formula funding)			Begin the evaluation planning process.
Your first three-year competitive grant (and you have had three or more years of formula funding)			Begin the evaluation planning process.
Your second three-year competitive grant	✓		Complete evaluation during the three-year grant period.
Your third three-year competitive grant	✓	✓	Complete evaluation during the three-year grant period.
A competitive AmeriCorps grant beyond your third three-year grant	✓	✓	Complete evaluation during the three-year grant period.

Planning for Success



CNCS developed a course called “Laying the Groundwork Before Your First Evaluation” to help formula subgrantees and new competitive subgrantees understand how to prepare for evaluation in the first stages of program implementation.

Commission Investment Funds

- Support activities that develop new skills and knowledge to produce significant and demonstrable improvements in service delivery
- Priority Performance Area #3: Strengthen subgrantees' ability to conduct high quality performance measurement and evaluation in order to improve programs and build evidence

Allowable Activities



Training and/or technical assistance (1:1 or in groups) on the following:

- Developing or refining logic models
- Developing or improving data collection systems
- Developing and testing data collection instruments
- Conducting evaluability assessments
- Developing evaluation plans and conducting evaluations
- Conducting evidence review if results are used to provide TA that meets above requirements; Funds may not support any other part of grant review process

Allowable Activities



- All activities must be part of approved CIF grants – Changes require CNCS approval/amendment
- Training must make use of existing CNCS resources – Funds may not be used to develop new resources

CIF Performance Measures

- Consultants may develop instruments for measuring the CIF performance measures
- Commissions must ensure that instruments are valid and reliable and that they have taken appropriate steps to ensure data quality; Consultants can assist with this
- Applicant-determined outcomes were allowable but none were approved

PPA 3 – Goals – PM T/TA



Output: Number of subgrantee organizations receiving performance measurement training and/or technical assistance

Outcome: Number of subgrantee organizations that improved performance measures as a result of training and/or technical assistance

Suggested instrument: CNCS PM Checklist

PPA 3 – Goals – PM T/TA



Output: Number of subgrantee organizations receiving training and/or technical assistance on data collection practices:

Outcomes (Choose 1):

Number of subgrantee organizations that improved data collection plans

Number of subgrantee organizations that satisfactorily implemented approved data collection plan

PPA 3 – Goals – Evaluation T/TA

Output: Number of subgrantee organizations receiving evaluation training and/or technical assistance

Outcomes (Choose 1):

- Number of subgrantee organizations with approved plan to improve position on the evidence continuum
- Number of subgrantee organizations that improved their logic model
- Number of subgrantee organizations with an approved evaluation plan in place that will meet CNCS or Commission Formula requirements

Evidence Review and CIF



- Commissions conduct their own competitions for competitive and formula
- Varying levels of alignment with CNCS NOFO and process
- Consultant support for evidence review is an allowable CIF activity if results of review inform technical assistance after the competition

Evidence Review – CNCS



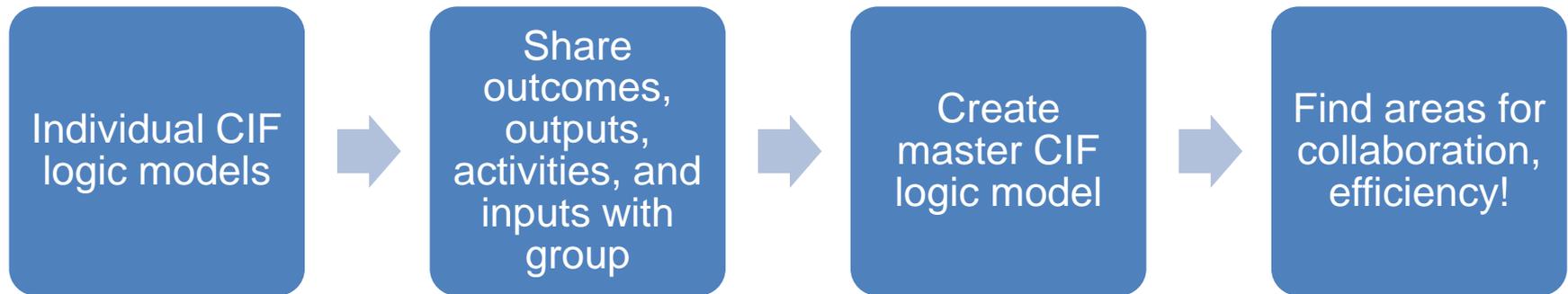
- Evidence tiers described in Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) – The stronger the evidence, the more points awarded
- Evidence tier is assessed separately from compliance with evaluation requirements (Compliance not scored)
- Understanding evidence tiers requires knowledge of basic evaluation concepts—Many programs do not self-assess tier accurately
- All applicants receive feedback that could be used for technical assistance
- Programs should focus on evidence continuum and learning needs rather than NOFO tier

Three Different Ideas



- Current and desired position on evidence continuum
- Compliance with CNCS requirements
- Maximizing evidence points available in grant competition

Implementation planning activity



Implementation Planning, Part I

- Work on the logic model for your state
- Get feedback from another state
 - Does the logic model make sense?
 - Are there gaps in the logic?
- Return to your logic model
 - Address feedback
 - Create post-it notes for each item – **Put your state on each post-it**
 - Put your post-its on the group logic model

Implementation Planning, Part 2

- What themes do you see emerging?
- Does seeing what other states are planning make you think about your plan differently?
- Does seeing what other states are doing help you identify any new opportunities or gaps in your plan?

Implementation Planning, Part 3

- What common plans do you have?
- How can you collaborate/support each other?

Wrap Up



- Circle burning questions/concerns that require follow up within your state
- Give CNCS a notecard with any questions/concerns you would like CNCS to address