

# Becoming the Bridge

## Leveraging AEA Evaluator Competencies to Support Innovation

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AMERICAN EVALUATION ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE NOVEMBER 16, 2019

SESSION NUMBER 1263 (THINK TANK)



# Agenda

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- Introductions
- Session Goals
- Case Example
- Human Centered Design Approach
- Evaluation Framework
- Optimism Priming Activity
- Small Group Discussion
- Discussant comments – Dr. Laurie Stevahn

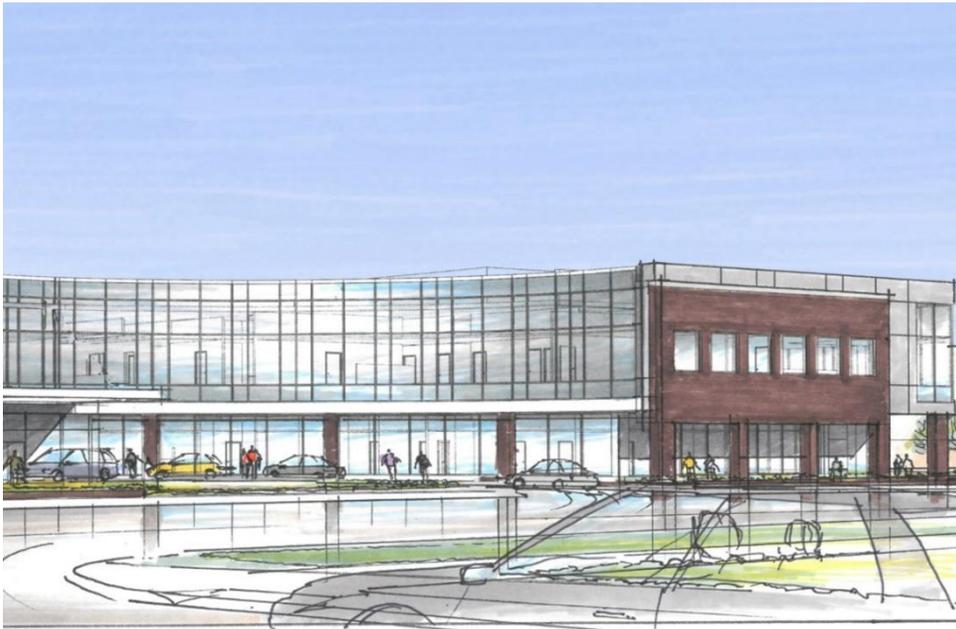
# Introductions

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Julie Nielsen, PhD- Director of Program Evaluation, NorthPoint Health & Wellness

Ashley Johnson, MPP- Senior Program Evaluator, NorthPoint Health & Wellness

Laurie Stevahn, PhD- Professor of Education, Seattle University



NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center is a multi-specialty medical, dental and mental health center and human service agency located in North Minneapolis. Serving approximately 30,000 individuals annually, it is the only remaining “pilot city” opened 50 years ago under the Johnson administration’s *War on Poverty*.

# Goals of the Session

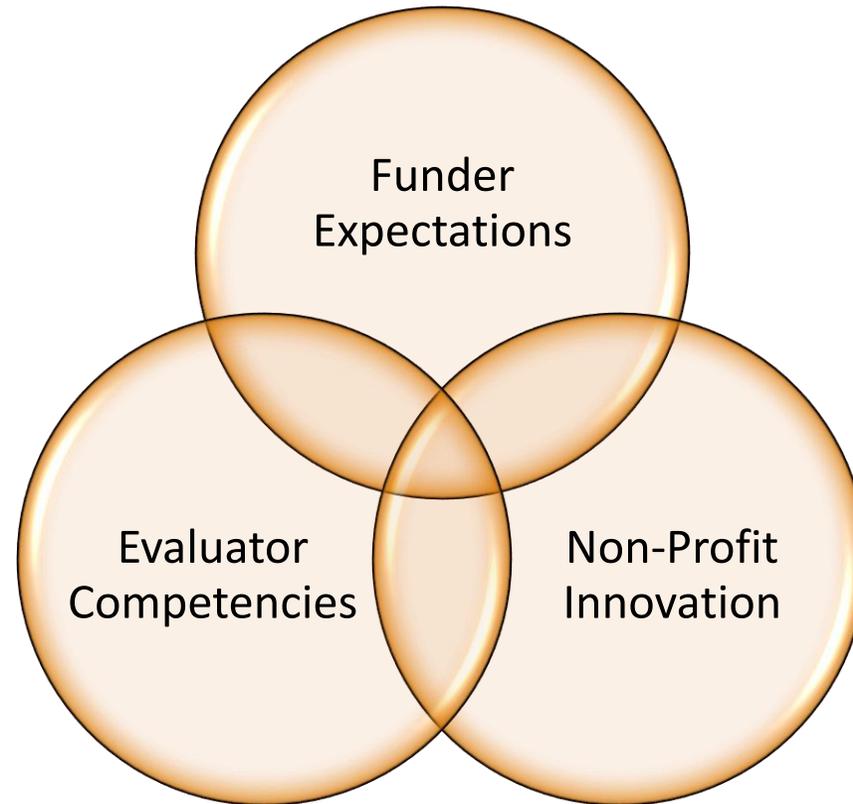
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*At the end of the session participants will:*

1. Deepen their awareness of opportunities program evaluators have to appropriately expand their professional skills boundaries in the context of innovation (bridging staff knowledge and funder expectations)
2. Increase awareness of the value of establishing an optimistic mindset among team members, and a process for doing so
3. Be able to identify and engage the AEA Evaluator Competencies to address evaluation challenges

# Leveraging Evaluator Competencies to Support Innovation

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Lip Service

PART OF MY JOB IS TO ACT LIKE I'M INTERESTED IN WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT!



Give up

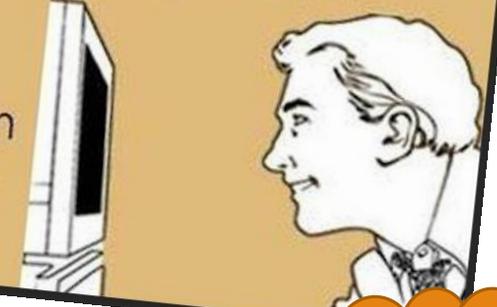
YOU TRIED YOUR BEST AND YOU FAILED MISERABLY



THE LESSON IS, NEVER TRY

Procrastinate

I'm very busy doing things I don't need to do in order to avoid doing anything I'm actually supposed to be doing.



Denial

I SAY A DAY WITHOUT DENIAL IS A DAY YOU'VE GOT TO FACE.



FROM NOW ON, I'M NOT GOING TO THINK ABOUT ANYTHING THAT'S UNPLEASANT.



ISN'T THAT A PRETTY SELF-DECEIVING WAY TO GO THROUGH LIFE?



I'M NOT GOING TO THINK ABOUT THAT.



Blame the evaluator



SCAPEGOAT

A Good Scapegoat Is Nearly As Welcome As A Solution To The Problem

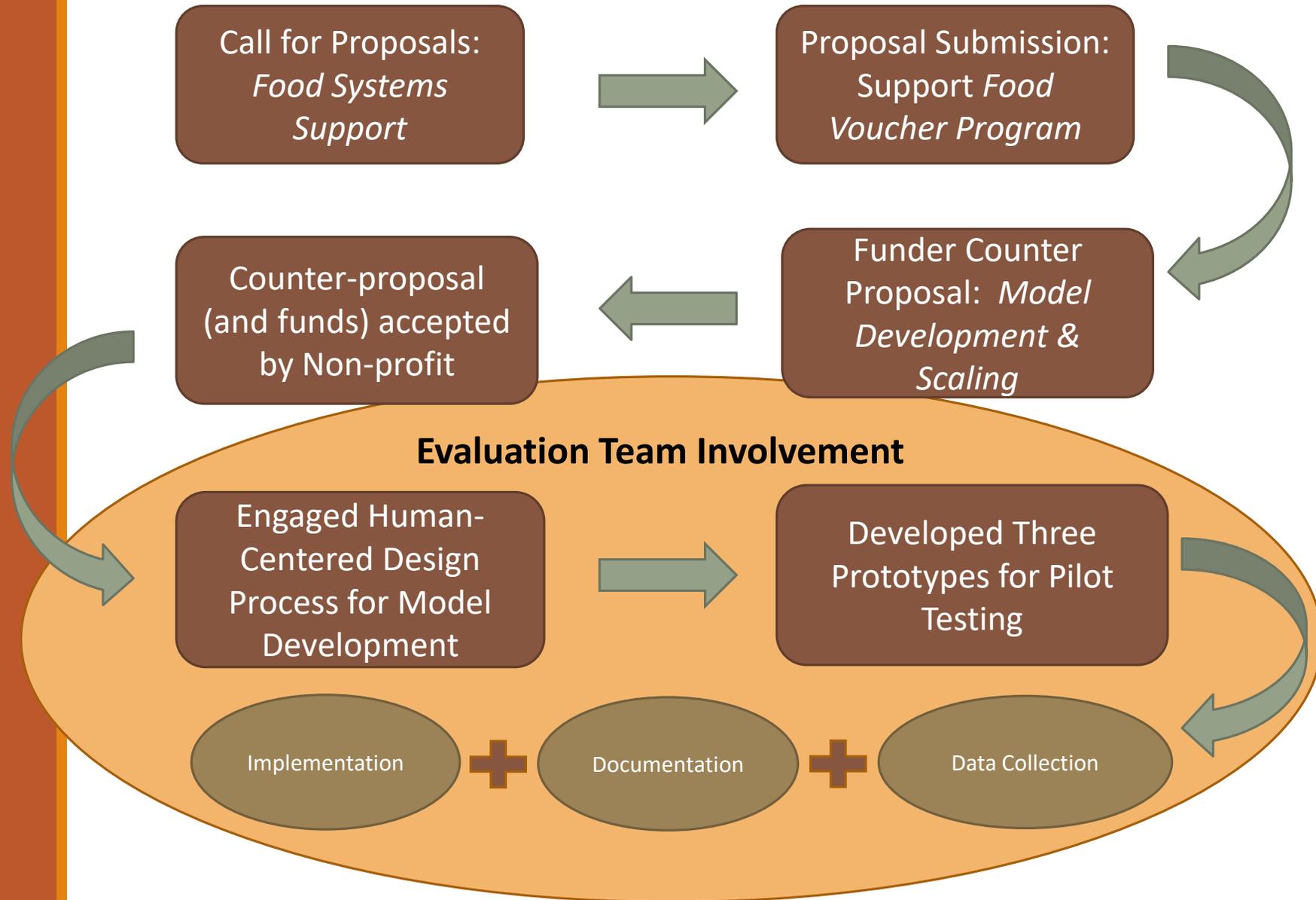


## *Claim:*

Program evaluators are uniquely situated to bridge funder expectations and program staff

uncertainties in the context of innovation

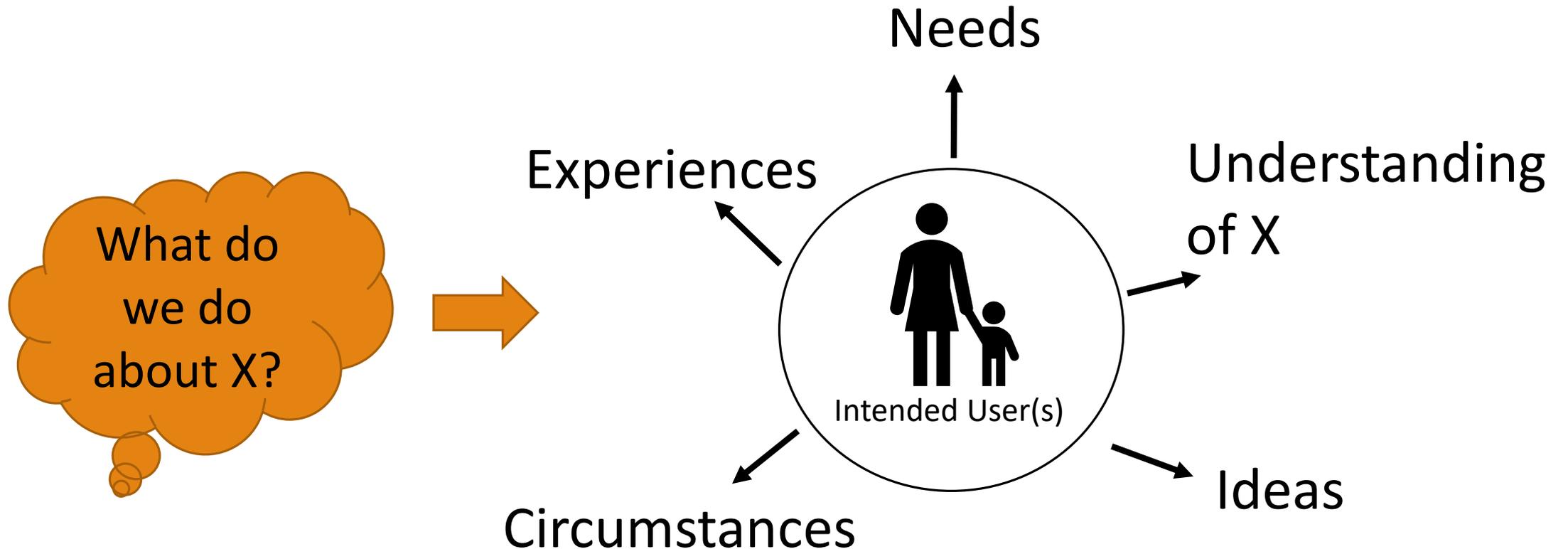
# Case Example



# What is Human Centered Design?

# Creative problem solving placing people at the center

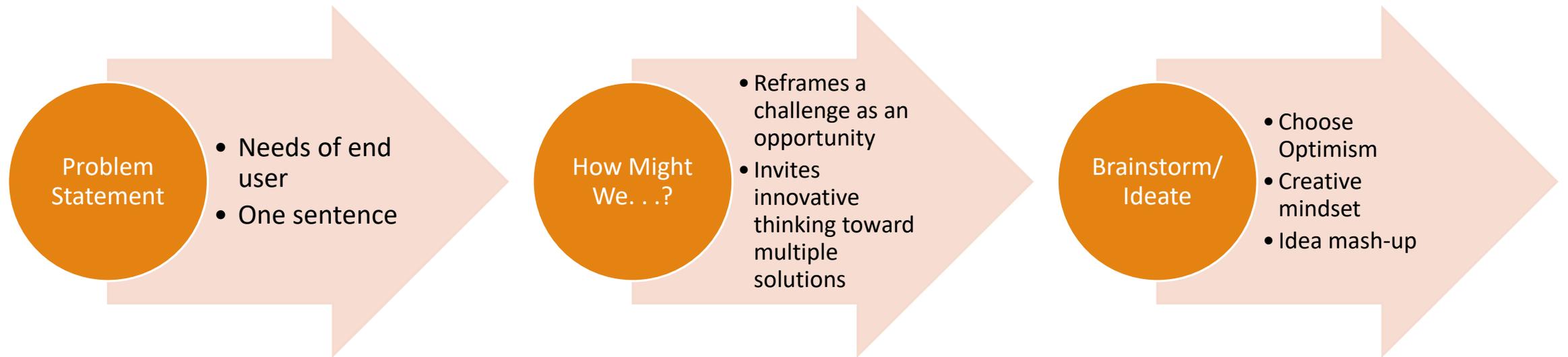
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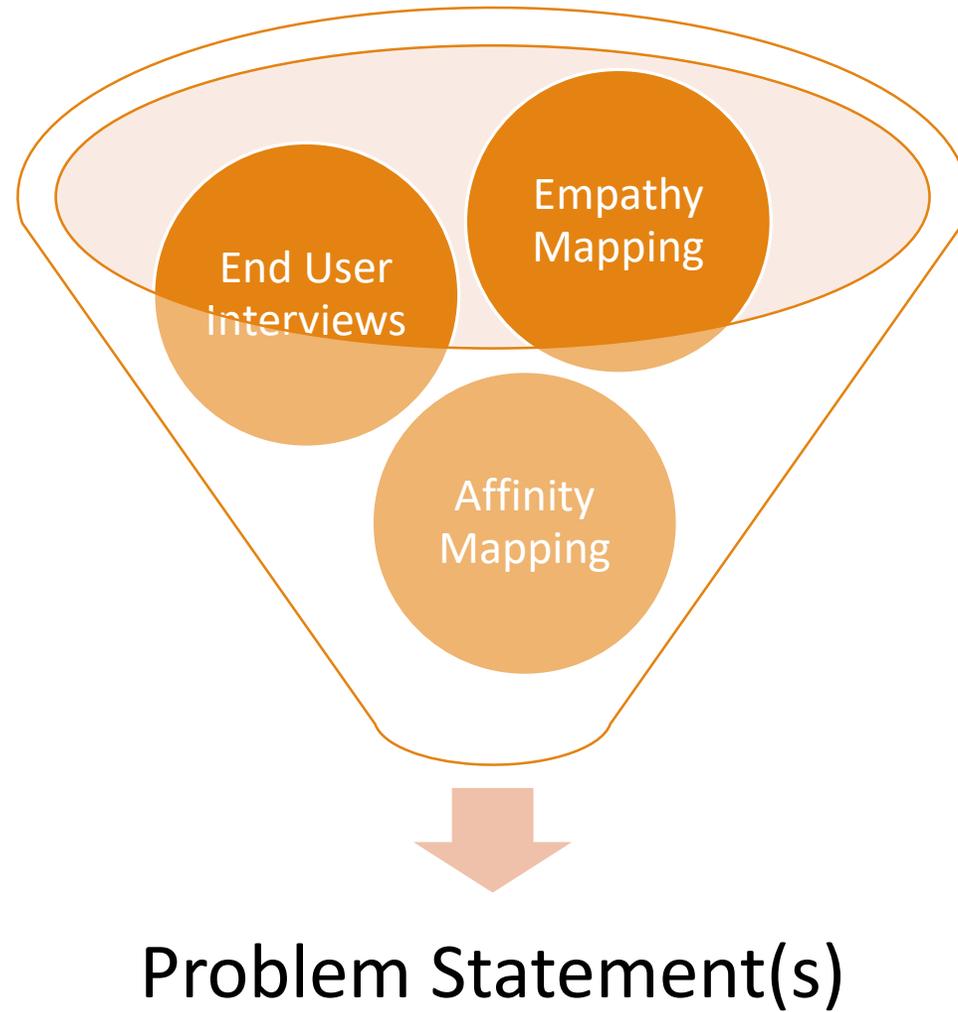
# Empathy



# Experiment



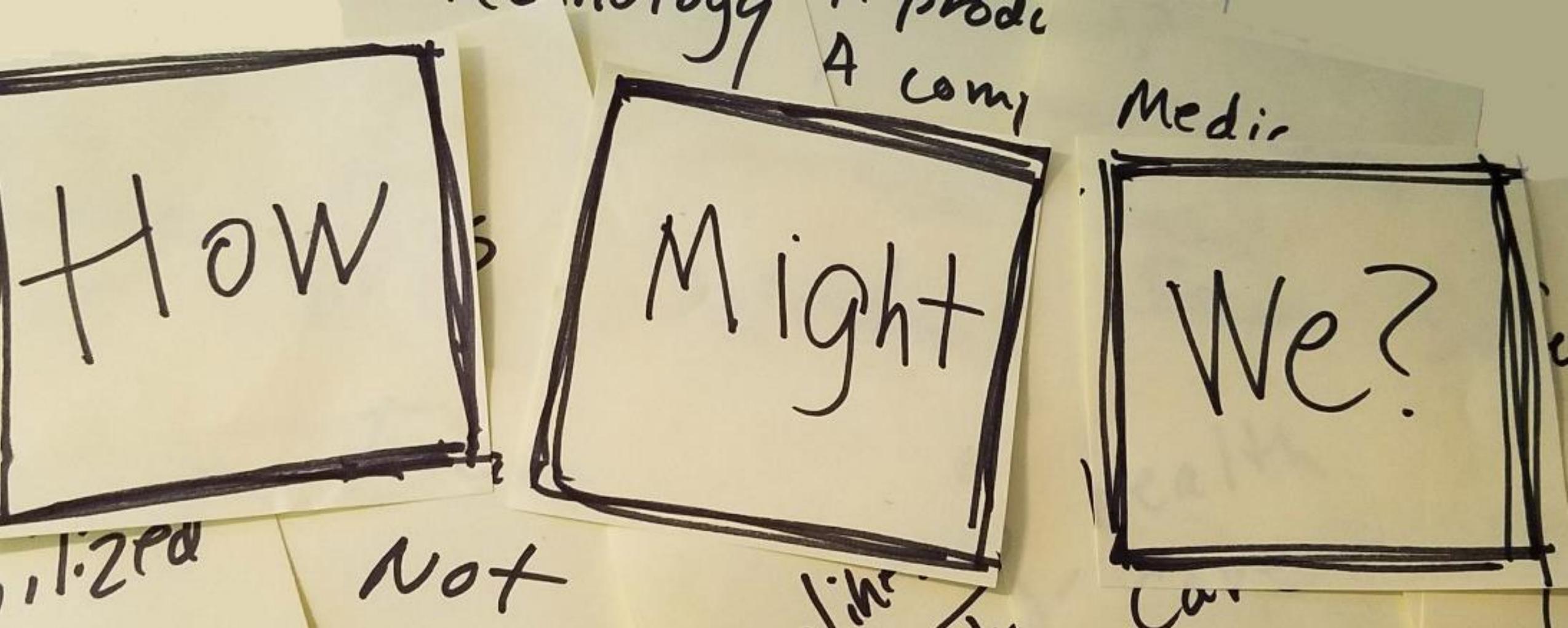
# Empathy



# Problem Statements

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1. NorthPoint clients need to know about other resources available that will help offset the cost in order to purchase more fruit and vegetables
2. **NorthPoint clients/North Minneapolis residents need more access to year-round high quality produce that is close to their homes because the produce available is low quality and high quality produce is only available in the summer**
3. NorthPoint clients need access to more food of their liking in order to be a healthy community
4. Northside residents need to have a consistent and affordable means of getting to/from the grocery store in order to live a healthy life
5. NorthPoint patients and clients need easier and varied ways to get foods that will support good health because the knee-jerk/default support of offering bus tokens doesn't work for them
6. NorthPoint patients and clients need easier and varied ways to get foods that will support good health because there are few mobile markets and limited options for food that supports good health at the corner stores
7. NorthPoint patients and clients need easier and varied ways to get foods that will support good health and surprisingly, we did not really hear anything from our end users about secure delivery to participants' homes
8. NorthPoint clients need to have enhanced transportation options/services in order to eat healthier
9. **NorthPoint clients need consistent/reliable (but varied) options for obtaining healthy foods because they have different needs (and preferences) for getting food and getting food in their homes.**
10. **NorthPoint clients need resources and connection to existing food access and education opportunities. Surprisingly, they want to eat healthier but don't have consistent support in knowing what's available in North Minneapolis.**

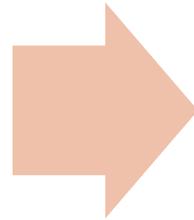


Optimism: How Might We + Rapid Prototyping

Problem → Opportunity → Prototype → Experiment

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HOW MIGHT WE create a product or service that increases access to high quality, affordable foods of choice for North Minneapolis Residents?



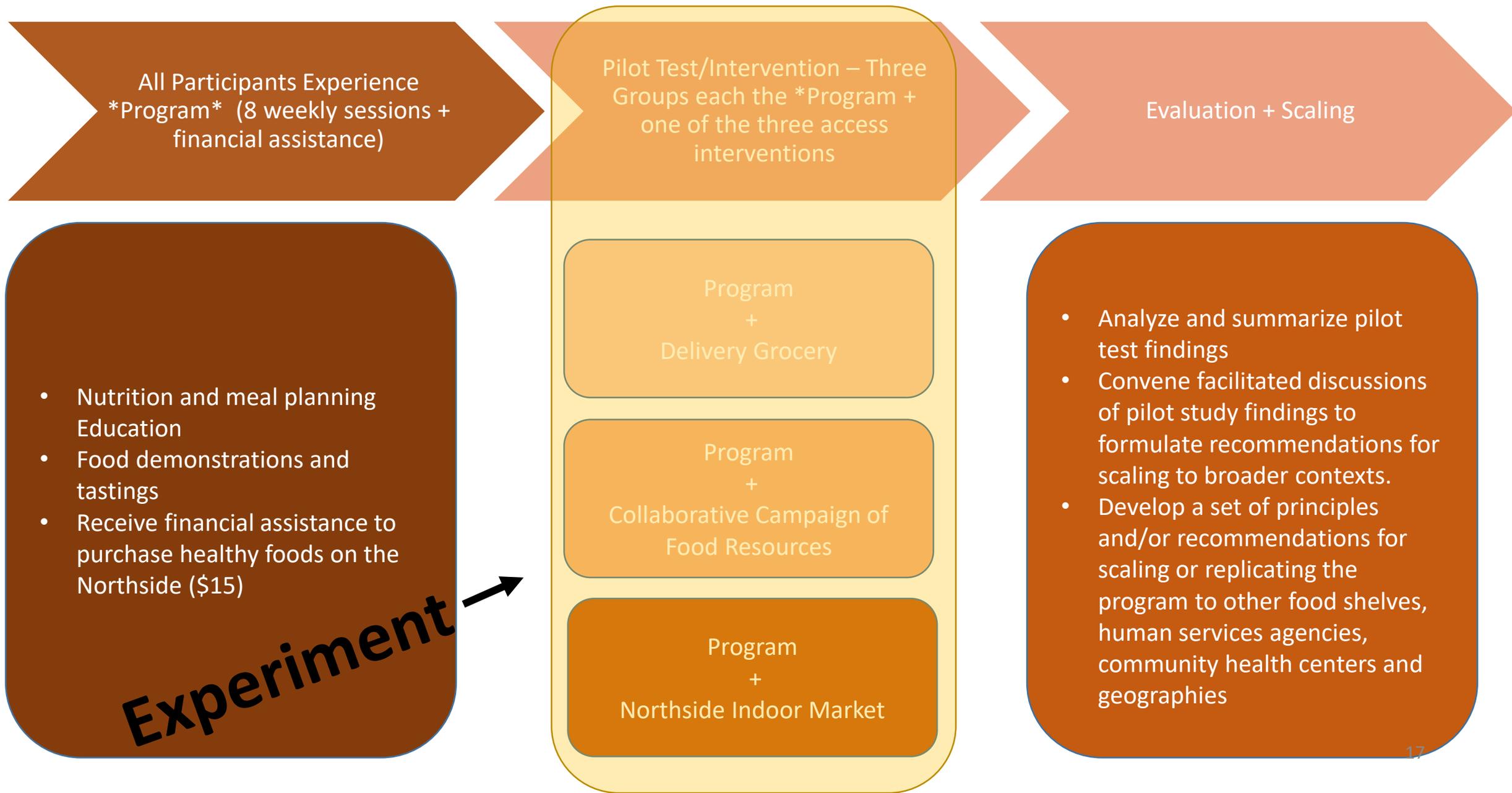
Delivery and Access Network



## Prototype modified for program pilot

Participant paper order \$15 groceries at group+shopper+ choice of delivery to group or home

# Fruit, Veggies, and More- NorthPoint Project



# Evaluation Questions

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1. To what extent and in what ways does each of the three prototypes improve participants' **ability to access and consume healthy food**? How do the three prototypes compare to each other?
2. To what extent and in what ways does the food incentive **improve food affordability**?
3. To what extent are the prototypes **sustainable for [Non-Profit] in the given food environment**? Holding incentives costs steady, how did implementation costs compare?

# Optimism

*noun.* Hopefulness and confidence about the future or the successful outcome of something

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- Failure is okay
- Embrace fear
- Suspend judgment
- Be creative



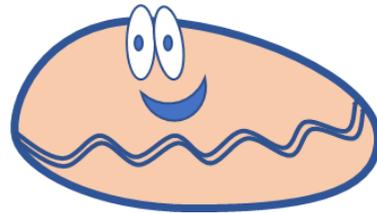
IMPOSSIBLE

# Optimism-Priming Activity

## Clams are Great Because. . .

The group stands in a circle and someone steps in the center and begins to list all the reasons clams are great until someone tags them out and takes over. The list could include factual things like “Clams are great because they burrow into the sand with a muscular foot” or “Clams are great because they taste so good in a white wine” or ridiculous things like “Clams are great because they hung out with me after my boyfriend broke up with me” or “Clams are great because they totally reorganized my shed.”

Whatever your actual opinion about clams, this warm up gets your brain moving. Whatever comes out of your mouth becomes possible in the world of this warmup, and we accept and support it. It also is a way to practice support through action: you don’t want to leave people in the center alone for too long talking about clams. You need to step up and take a turn.



## What’s in the Box?

Standing in a circle, one person starts and asks the person to their [left/right]. “Hey! What’s in the box?” The second person answers, indicating anything they want – it might be something awesome, something icky, something unbelievable, something useful, something useless. . . certainly, something imaginative. “It’s a (name it).” The first person responds with, “Great, I can use that for [something]”

Example  
Hey John, What’s in the box?

It’s a pickled brain!

“Great, I can use that to help me pass my test tomorrow!”

The person who asked, “what’s in the box” now turns to the person on his or her other side and that person asks, “hey, what’s in the box?” and the person makes up something else.



*(Source unknown for priming activities)*

# Small Group Discussions

- Introduce yourselves
- Briefly review competency handout
- Read the scene out loud
- Answer and discuss the scene questions in small groups
- Report question two responses

## 1.0

### DOMAIN **PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE**

focuses on what makes evaluators distinct as practicing professionals

Professional practice is grounded in AEA's foundational documents, including the Program Evaluation Standards, the AEA Guiding Principles, and the AEA Statement on Cultural Competence.

## 2.0

### DOMAIN **METHODOLOGY**

focuses on technical aspects of evidence-based, systematic inquiry for valued purposes

Methodology includes quantitative, qualitative, and mixed designs for learning, understanding, decision making, and judging.

# The AEA Evaluator Competencies

## 3.0

### DOMAIN **CONTEXT**

focuses on understanding the unique circumstances, multiple perspectives, and changing settings of evaluations and their users/stakeholders

Context involves site/location/environment, participants/stakeholders, organization/structure, culture/diversity, history/traditions, values/beliefs, politics/economics, power/privilege, and other characteristics.

## 4.0

### DOMAIN **PLANNING & MANAGEMENT**

focuses on determining and monitoring work plans, timelines, resources, and other components needed to complete and deliver an evaluation study

Planning and management include networking, developing proposals, contracting, determining work assignments, monitoring progress, and fostering use.

## 5.0

### DOMAIN **INTERPERSONAL**

focuses on human relations and social interactions that ground evaluator effectiveness for professional practice throughout the evaluation

Interpersonal skills include cultural competence, communication, facilitation, and conflict resolution.

# Discussion Scenes

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## SCENE 1

*The program staff and project coordinator struggle to fully pilot test the innovative components, seemingly hesitant to the “fail fast” aspect of the project as problems arise with implementing the planned prototyped interventions.*

## SCENE 2

*During implementation of the first prototype and continuing throughout the project, it becomes clear that the pilots are not being implemented to plan nor is program documentation occurring. At this point, the evaluation team is not even sure what innovations are being delivered by staff and therefore, what they are evaluating. Data collection as well, suffers.*

# Contact

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**THANK YOU!**

