

## **Session ID 2369\_ Collaboratively Developing Evaluation Capacity Building Strategies in the Social Sector**

Research and our own experience with evaluation indicates that the public sector often lacks the capacity to develop evaluative systems that will produce meaningful information for taking action (Bakken, Núñez, & Couture, 2014; Cousins, Goh, Elliott, & Bourgeois, 2014). Strong approaches to building evaluation capacity can develop the systems, knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to foster these desired organizational changes (Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013; Bourgeois, Simmons, Hotte, & Osseni, 2016). Evaluation capacity is a priority in the early childhood sector, as programs and policies in the early years significantly impact children's development and contribute to the economic and social fabric of our communities. The Evaluation Capacity Network formed (Gokiart et al., 2017) to respond to the evaluation capacity needs of the early childhood sector, and we are accomplishing this through intersectoral partnerships with a range of organizations and academic institutions.

Our partnerships to date have highlighted the critical need to deepen our understanding across core topical areas in evaluation impacting the sector: community-driven evaluation, culturally responsive evaluation, evaluation capacity building, and evaluation use and influence. Four teams, including academics and graduate students at post-secondary institutions in Canada and the U.S., are conducting an environmental scan using scoping literature reviews, grey literature scans, and key informant interviews to explore these core topics. This poster presents preliminary findings from five scoping reviews.

### **Review 1 & 2: Community-Driven & Culturally Responsive Evaluation**

Historically, evaluation has played a role in the marginalization of specific communities. To ensure that the demand for and production of evaluative information reflects the plurality of culture, and is actionable at the community level, a shift from evaluation-as-judgment to evaluation-as-learning is needed. Two scoping reviews focus on describing how evaluators understand and practice community-driven and culturally responsive evaluation. Findings from this review will inform co-created evaluation initiatives that will promote sustainable community-driven and culturally responsive evaluation practice in the early childhood and social sectors.

### **Review 3: Evaluation Capacity Building**

Social service organizations often face a practical dilemma, they must conduct monitoring and evaluation work to meet funding requirements but do not have the experience in-house to conduct evaluations and make use of evaluative insights. What is an organization to do? One approach is to build internal evaluation capacity to conduct and use evaluation. Much has been published about evaluation capacity building (ECB) approaches since 2002 when the concept came into wide recognition. This scoping review explores the most prevalent ECB approaches in the literature, and the opportunities that exist for developing new, innovative ECB approaches to increase effective evaluation practice.

### **Review 4: Evaluation Use and Influence**

Evaluator practice requires evaluators to attend, both conceptually and pragmatically, to the concepts of use and influence. Synthesis of the literature advances our understanding by pulling together core concepts, empirical studies and identifying tensions or unknowns. In a recent

review of evaluation use, stakeholder involvement was found to be a supportive factor (Johnson et al., 2009). Yet the concept remains elusive. This scoping review explores evaluation use since the last published review, and explores the following question: How can an understanding of the present conceptualizations of evaluation use and influence enhance evaluation capacity building?

### **Review 5: Evaluation in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Field**

The early years profoundly impact children's development and the economic and social fabric of our communities. Despite significant investment in early supports and services in education, early learning and care, parenting programs and health, indicators persistently reveal shortfalls in child development. Evaluation, as a systematic approach for understanding how practice, programs, and policy are working, has the potential to generate valuable evidence that informs decision-making processes. With timely, informative, and relevant evidence in hand, decision makers can modify existing practices in ways that optimize child development. In this review, we explore evaluation in the ECD field at the intersection of the four core topics outlined above.

### **References**

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