

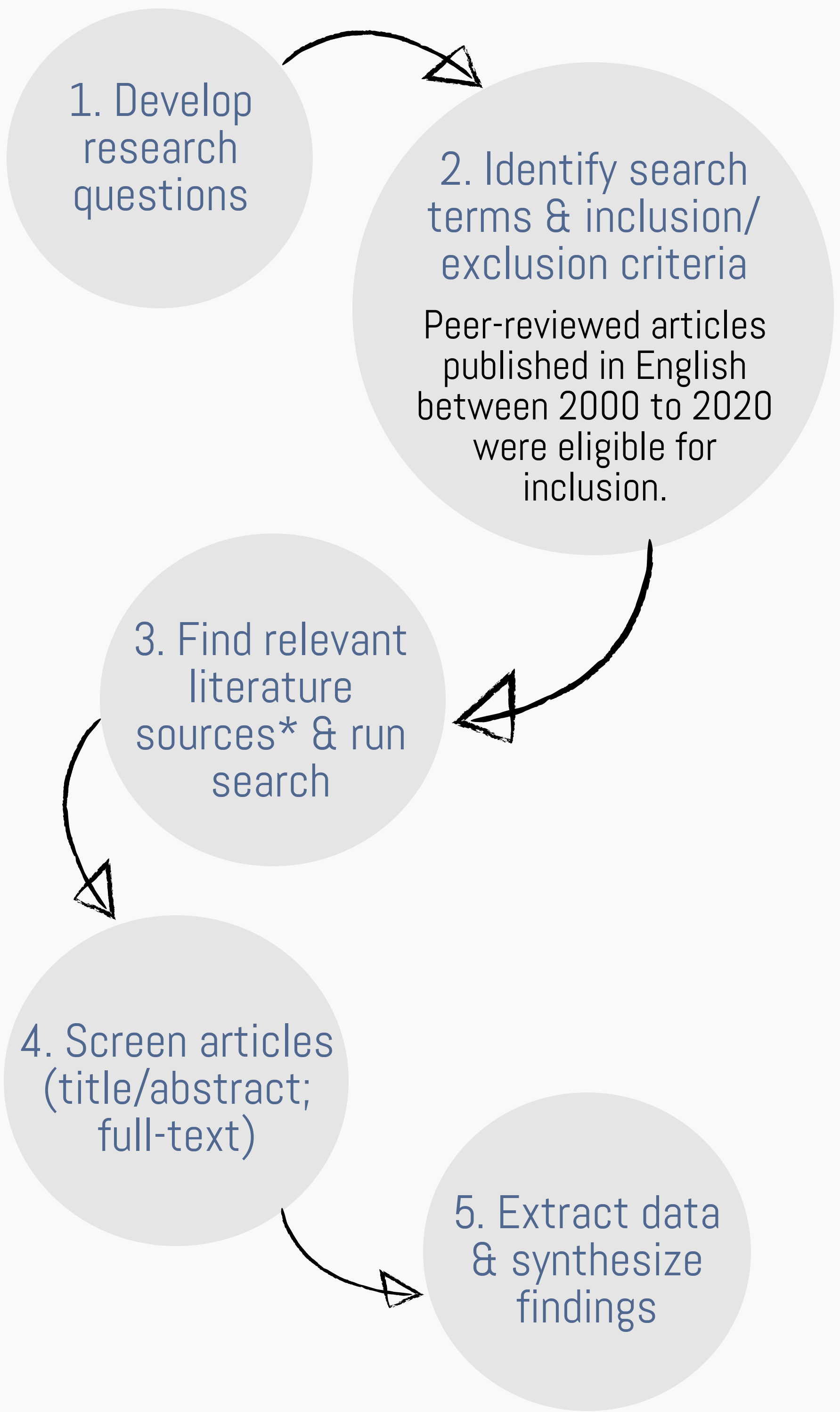
Collaboratively Developing Evaluation Capacity Building Strategies in the Social Sector

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BACKGROUND: Community organizations face pressures to demonstrate evidence of success as they seek or renew funding. Yet, rather than generating and using evidence to inform practices and programs, data is collected that minimally supports decision-making and action (Cousins et al., 2014). To counter top-down evaluation paradigms, there is a need to transform evaluation approaches, methods, and training. In efforts to better understand the evaluation landscape, we are conducting scoping reviews across core topical areas in evaluation, as presented below. At the intersection, we explore evaluation in the early childhood development (ECD) field, as this interdisciplinary space provides critical opportunities for innovations in social policy and practices.

METHODS

We conducted five scoping reviews guided by the Arksey & O'Malley framework (2005):



*Evaluation Journals Searched

- American Journal of Evaluation
- Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation
- New Directions for Evaluation
- Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation
- Evaluation
- Evaluation and Program Planning
- Evaluation Journal of Australia
- Evaluation in the Health Professions

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN EVALUATION

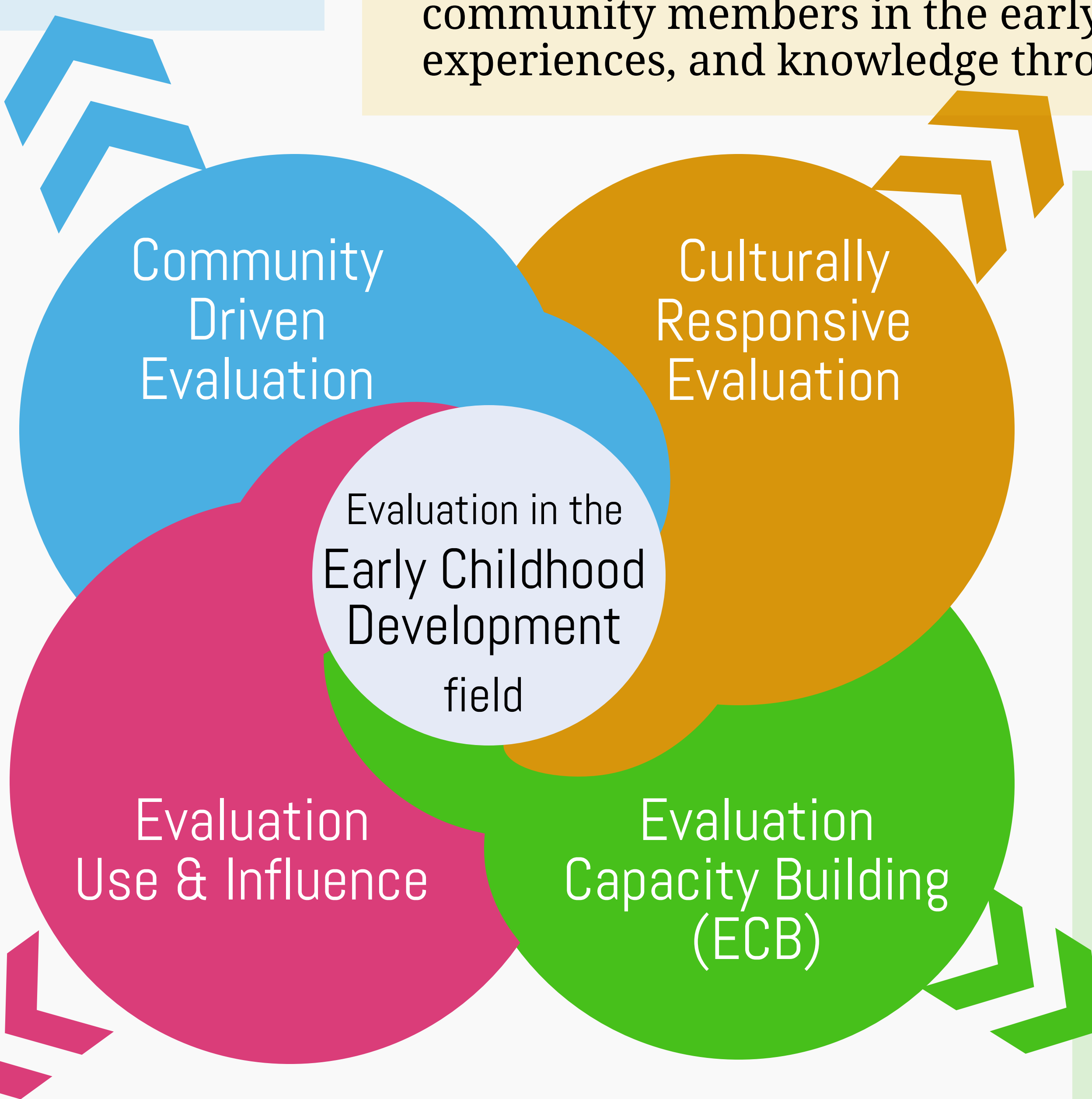
- This review is currently in its early stages. We are piloting the search strategy and refining the protocol at this time.
- **ECD Context:** A promising practice is to form stakeholder committees or working groups to leverage community knowledge and contributions to decision making.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EVALUATION (n=141)

- Ongoing challenge to find evaluators who have knowledge of community and its culture.
- Significant variation in how cultural protocols or frameworks are practiced, and which elements are emphasized (e.g., collaboration, reflective adaptation).
- **ECD Context:** Some studies use a community-driven approach to enhance the cultural relevance of the evaluation, engaging community members in the early stages to reflect their values, experiences, and knowledge throughout the process.

EVALUATION USE & INFLUENCE (n=60)

- Stakeholder engagement consistently appears as a predictor of use.
- Evaluation implementation characteristics, decision or policy setting, and stakeholder involvement are key facilitators or barriers to use.
- Evaluation is becoming recognized as a learning opportunity, resulting in the emergence of new roles for evaluators.
- **ECD Context:** Often no evidence of how evaluative information is used to inform programming.



EVALUATION CAPACITY BUILDING (n=180)

- Growing literature in ECB scholarship and practice over the past 2 decades.
- Direct forms of ECB (i.e., workshop or coaching) are more frequent than indirect (i.e., learning by engaging in participatory evaluation process).
- Commonly studied in areas of education, public health, social work, and public administration.
- **ECD Context:** ECB generally overlooked, with less than half the articles mentioning ECB efforts in varying degrees.

ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS: EVALUATION IN ECD (n=19)

- Community-based principles are not consistently or commonly integrated in the evaluation process. In many cases, while community-based approaches are used during program development and implementation, they are absent in the program evaluation.
- Evaluations indicated to be "community-based" were typically led by university-based evaluators or researchers, rather than community members or programming staff.

SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?

There is a definitional challenge in the study and practice of evaluation. A set of guiding principles or exemplars may promote more comprehensive approaches that are community-driven and culturally responsive. Many studies identify the need for more research across these areas. Informed by these reviews, and a forthcoming grey literature scan, we will develop 'engagement toolkits' to guide community dialogues and further explore emerging themes.

REFERENCES

Cousins, J. B., Goh, S. C., Elliott, C., Aubry, T., & Gilbert, N. (2014). Government and voluntary sector differences in organizational capacity to do and use evaluation. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 44, 1-13.

Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(1):19-32.