# The Promise and Pitfalls of Program Evaluation

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# The Evaluation Center

Advancing the theory, practice, and use of evaluation since 1965.

# Promise of Evaluation

- Programs (and organizations, sponsors) can find out what's working and what isn't so they can improve

- Nonprofits and government agencies allocate resources to effective programs

- Evidence-based decision-making leads to improved societal outcomes

# Evaluation

The systematic determination of something's merit, worth, or significance.

# Logical Steps of Evaluation
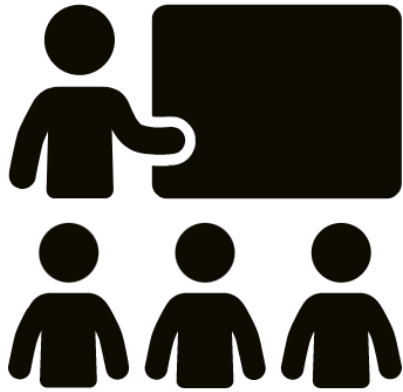
"How was the presentation?"

# Logical Steps of Evaluation

**1** **Define criteria**

Determine what makes something of this type good, valuable, effective, etc.
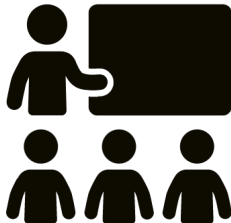
Relevance of content

Quality of slides

# Logical Steps of Evaluation

**1** Define criteria

**2** Define standards

Decide how well it needs to perform on these criteria to be acceptable, good, exceptional, valuable, etc.
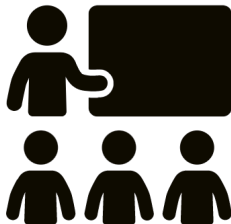
Relevance of content: Participants must be able to use the information in their contexts

Quality of slides: Visuals must reinforce content

# Logical Steps of Evaluation

**1** Define criteria

**2** Define standards

**3** Measure performance

Gather data on performance.
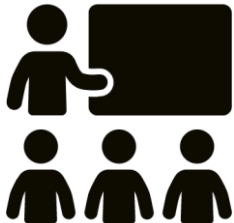
Observe, ask others, compare to other presentations

# ✓ **Logical Steps of Evaluation**

**1** Define criteria

**2** Define standards

**3** Measure performance

**4** Draw conclusion

Synthesize information about criteria, standards, and performance to reach conclusions about merit, worth, significance.

"How was the presentation?"

- "It was _____."

# Logical Steps of Evaluation

**1** Define criteria

**2** Define standards

**3** Measure performance

**4** Draw conclusion

# Program Logic Models

Illustrations of how programs translate resources into outcomes

## Rochester Public Library (top-left)

**Rochester Public Library: We strengthen community and enrich lives by sparking imagination, creativity, engagement, and learning.**

Inputs: Well-trained and engaged staff; Library Board; public; City of Rochester, Olmsted County, collaborators, Friends of Rochester Public Library, Rochester Public Library Foundation, grantors and donors, well-maintained building, furniture, and equipment; robust IT infrastructure, physical and digital books and materials; and volunteers.

| ACTIVITIES: | OUTPUTS: | SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES: CUSTOMERS HAVE: | INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES: CUSTOMERS/COMMUNITY MEMBERS HAVE: | LONG-TERM OUTCOMES: COMMUNITY MEMBERS HAVE/ARE: |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**PUBLIC SERVICES:** Circulation; reference, readers advisory, selection, acquisition, processing, cataloging, and classification of physical and digital book and material collections; computer and Internet access; wifi; providing and maintaining gathering and self-directed interactive spaces; facilities and room rentals; interlibrary loan; and website or digital branch.

**EVENTS, CLASSES, & PROGRAMS:** Engaging, educational, and creative activities offered at the main library for children, teens, and adults including: book discussions; films; storytimes; Wellness Corner, Rochester Reading Champions; Ready to Lead; digital literacy; local history program; LGBTQ Safe Space, Makerspace; and 3D printing.

**OUTREACH:** Activities which bring library services outside of the main library including: Bookmobile; BookBike; deposit collection; homebound services; Neighbors Read; Books on the Fly; hotspot access; scheduled visits; storytimes; events; programs; and classes.

**PUBLICITY & MARKETING:** Activities which inform the community about library services including: RPL marketing plan; newsletter; tours; paid advertising; annual report; branding; social media; library presence at community events; and speaking engagements.

**GENERAL:**
- # library cards issued
- # items circulated, ILLs and downloads
- # volunteers, volunteer hours, and retention
- # attendance
- # patrons using the library/% service pop.
- # social media usage
- # surveys
- # partnerships
- # marketing materials distributed

**PUBLIC SERVICE:**
- # reference and technical questions
- # patrons using spaces
- # of room rentals and room set-ups and purpose
- # website hits, database use and internet sessions
- in collection, amount added, turnover, discards
- # carts shelved and average time to shelf
- # informational handouts distributed
- # of circ per capita, holdings per capita, and collection turnover
- © for maintenance response
- % operating budget change
- % of collection RFID tagged

**EVENTS, CLASSES, AND PROGRAMS/OUTREACH:**
- # events, classes and programs
- # hands-on activities
- # mini-libraries
- # donated books distributed
- % assessment results
- # individual consultations/tutoring sessions
- # of homes with hotspots
- # grants submitted/awarded
- # oral histories
- # room set-ups/# recorded programs

**PUBLICITY AND MARKETING:**
- # general library information distributed (newsletters, snapshot, book marks)
- # presentations
- # off-site events
- # tours
- # commercials
- # branded items
- # billboards

**SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES:**
- **A** Improved access to library resources
- **B** Improved knowledge or skills
- **C** Expanded understanding of literacy programs and services: Early, Basic, Digital, Informational
- **D** Increased connections with each other
- **E** Increased awareness and understanding of the community and its resources
- **F** Increased creative expression
- **G** A positive experience with the library
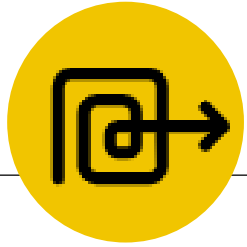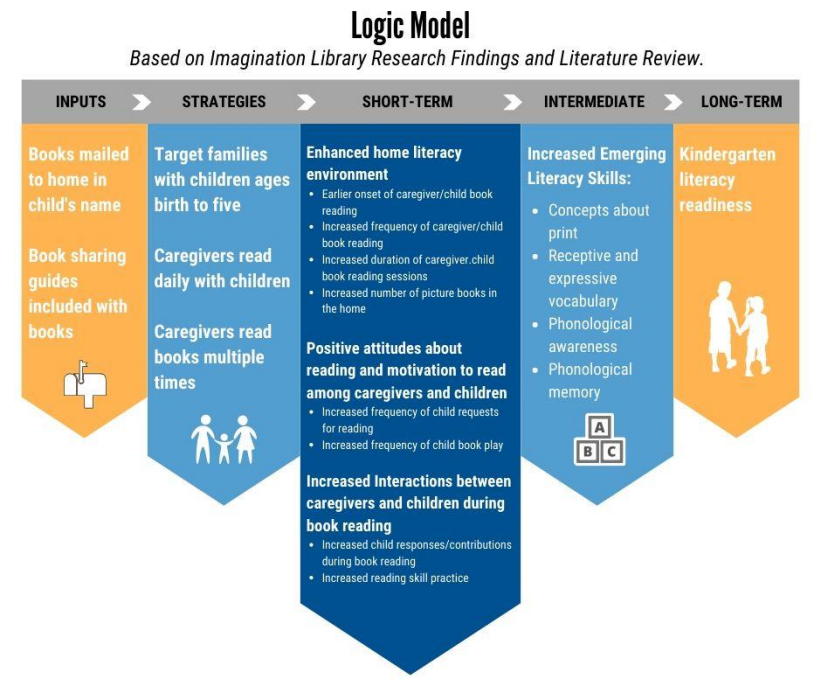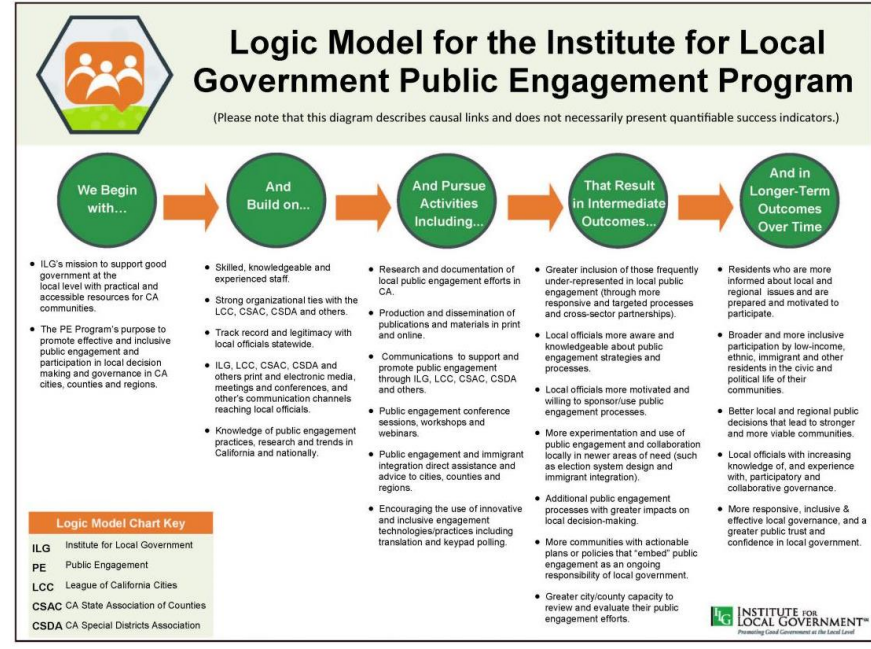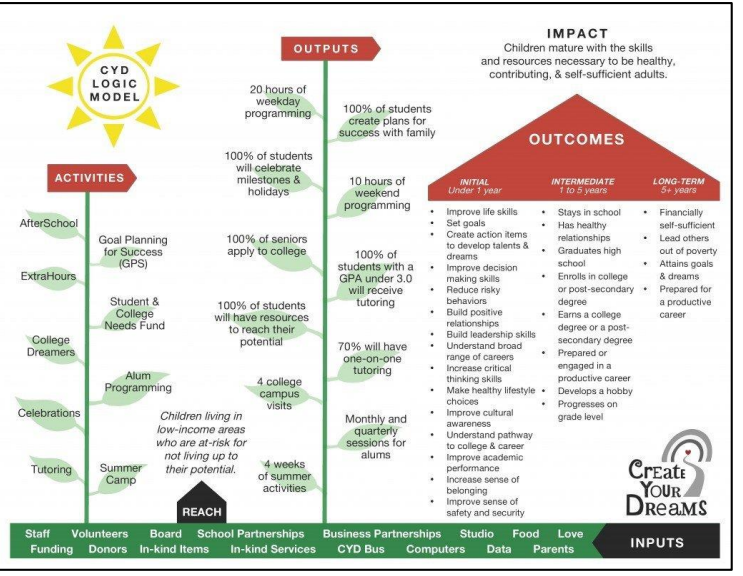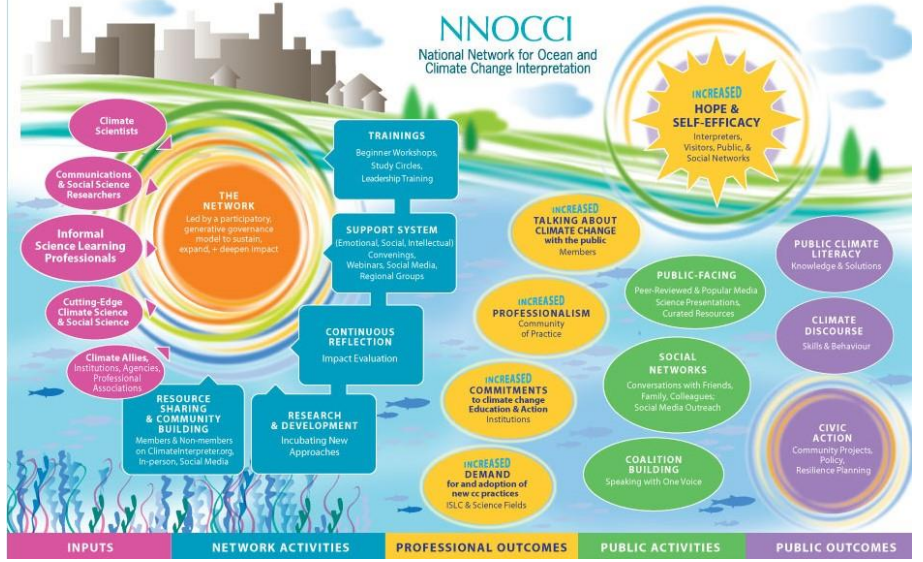- **H** Increased awareness of library services

**INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES:**
- **I** Improved knowledge of how to use library resources to make informed decisions
- **J** Improved literacy skills: Early, Basic, Digital, Informational
- **K** Improved engagement, self-expression, respect, and community participation
- **L** Increased enjoyment of reading
- **M** Greater understanding of the library's value in their lives

**LONG-TERM OUTCOMES:**
- **N** Improved quality of life, equity, and community vitality: Economy, Workforce, Public safety, Health, Education/Literacy, Civic engagement, Strong relationships, Inclusivity, Innovation
- **O** Lifelong library users and supporters

**Wilder Research** — Information. Insight. Impact.
This logic model was co-developed by Rochester Public Library and Wilder Research.

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## NNOCCI (top-right)

**NNOCCI — National Network for Ocean and Climate Change Interpretation**

| INPUTS | NETWORK ACTIVITIES | PROFESSIONAL OUTCOMES | PUBLIC ACTIVITIES | PUBLIC OUTCOMES |
|---|---|---|---|---|

- Climate Scientists
- Communications & Social Science Researchers
- Informal Science Learning Professionals
- Cutting-Edge Climate Science & Social Science
- Climate Allies, Institutions, Agencies, Professional Associations

**THE NETWORK** — Led by a participatory, generative governance model to sustain, expand, + deepen impact

**TRAININGS** — Beginner Workshops, Study Circles, Leadership Training

**SUPPORT SYSTEM** (Emotional, Social, Intellectual) — Convenings, Webinars, Social Media, Regional Groups

**CONTINUOUS REFLECTION** — Impact Evaluation

**RESOURCE SHARING & COMMUNITY BUILDING** — Members & Non-members on ClimateInterpreter.org, In-person, Social Media

**RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT** — Incubating New Approaches

**INCREASED PROFESSIONALISM** — Community of Practice

**INCREASED COMMITMENTS** to climate change Education & Action — Institutions

**INCREASED DEMAND** for and adoption of new cc practices — ISLC & Science Fields

**INCREASED HOPE & SELF-EFFICACY** — Interpreters, Visitors, Public, & Social Networks

**INCREASED TALKING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE with the public** — Members

**PUBLIC-FACING** — Peer-Reviewed & Popular Media Science Presentations, Curated Resources

**SOCIAL NETWORKS** — Conversations with Friends, Family, Colleagues; Social Media Outreach

**COALITION BUILDING** — Speaking with One Voice

**PUBLIC CLIMATE LITERACY** — Knowledge & Solutions

**CLIMATE DISCOURSE** — Skills & Behaviour

**CIVIC ACTION** — Community Projects, Policy, Resilience Planning

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## CYD Logic Model (bottom-left)

**CYD LOGIC MODEL**

**OUTPUTS** • **ACTIVITIES**

**IMPACT** — Children mature with the skills and resources necessary to be healthy, contributing, & self-sufficient adults.

**ACTIVITIES:** AfterSchool, Goal Planning for Success (GPS), ExtraHours, Student & College Needs Fund, College Dreamers, Alum Programming, Celebrations, Tutoring, Summer Camp

Children living in low-income areas who are at-risk for not living up to their potential.

**OUTPUTS:**
- 20 hours of weekday programming
- 100% of students create plans for success with family
- 100% of students will celebrate milestones & holidays
- 10 hours of weekend programming
- 100% of students with a GPA under 3.0 will receive tutoring
- 100% of seniors apply to college
- 100% of students will have resources to reach their potential
- 70% will have one-on-one tutoring
- 4 college campus visits
- Monthly and quarterly sessions for alums
- 4 weeks of summer activities

**OUTCOMES:**

| INITIAL (Under 1 year) | INTERMEDIATE (1 to 5 years) | LONG-TERM (5+ years) |
|---|---|---|
| Improve life skills; Set goals; Create action items to develop talents & dreams; Improve decision making skills; Reduce risky behaviors; Build positive relationships; Build leadership skills; Understand broad range of careers; Increase critical thinking skills; Make healthy lifestyle choices; Improve cultural awareness; Understand pathway to college & career; Improve academic performance; Increase sense of belonging; Improve sense of safety and security | Stays in school; Has healthy relationships; Graduates high school; Enrolls in college or post-secondary degree; Earns a college degree or a post-secondary degree; Prepared or engaged in a productive career; Develops a hobby; Progresses on grade level | Financially self-sufficient; Lead others out of poverty; Attains goals & dreams; Prepared for a productive career |

**REACH** — **INPUTS:** Staff, Volunteers, Board, School Partnerships, Business Partnerships, Studio, Food, Love; Funding, Donors, In-kind Items, In-kind Services, CYD Bus, Computers, Data, Parents

**Create Your Dreams**

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## Logic Model for the Institute for Local Government Public Engagement Program (bottom-center)

(Please note that this diagram describes causal links and does not necessarily present quantifiable success indicators.)

**We Begin with…** → **And Build on…** → **And Pursue Activities Including…** → **That Result in Intermediate Outcomes…** → **And in Longer-Term Outcomes Over Time**

**We Begin with…**
- ILG's mission to support good government at the local level with practical and accessible resources for CA communities.
- The PE Program's purpose to promote effective and inclusive public engagement and participation in local decision making and governance in CA cities, counties and regions.

**And Build on…**
- Skilled, knowledgeable and experienced staff.
- Strong organizational ties with the LCC, CSAC, CSDA and others.
- Track record and legitimacy with local officials statewide.
- ILG, LCC, CSAC, CSDA and others print and electronic media, meetings and conferences, and other's communication channels reaching local officials.
- Knowledge of public engagement practices, research and trends in California and nationally.

**And Pursue Activities Including…**
- Research and documentation of local public engagement efforts in CA.
- Production and dissemination of publications and materials in print and online.
- Communications to support and promote public engagement through ILG, LCC, CSAC, CSDA and others.
- Public engagement conference sessions, workshops and webinars.
- Public engagement and immigrant integration direct assistance and advice to cities, counties and regions.
- Encouraging the use of innovative and inclusive engagement technologies/practices including translation and keypad polling.

**That Result in Intermediate Outcomes…**
- Greater inclusion of those frequently under-represented in local public engagement (through more responsive and targeted processes and cross-sector partnerships).
- Local officials more aware and knowledgeable about public engagement strategies and processes.
- Local officials more motivated and willing to sponsor/use public engagement processes.
- More experimentation and use of public engagement and collaboration locally in newer areas of need (such as election system design and immigrant integration).
- Additional public engagement processes with greater impacts on local decision-making.
- More communities with actionable plans or policies that "embed" public engagement as an ongoing responsibility of local government.
- Greater city/county capacity to review and evaluate their public engagement efforts.

**And in Longer-Term Outcomes Over Time**
- Residents who are more informed about local and regional issues and are prepared and motivated to participate.
- Broader and more inclusive participation by low-income, ethnic, immigrant and other residents in the civic and political life of their communities.
- Better local and regional public decisions that lead to stronger and more viable communities.
- Local officials with increasing knowledge of, and experience with, participatory and collaborative governance.
- More responsive, inclusive & effective local governance, and a greater public trust and confidence in local government.

**Logic Model Chart Key**
- ILG — Institute for Local Government
- PE — Public Engagement
- LCC — League of California Cities
- CSAC — CA State Association of Counties
- CSDA — CA Special Districts Association

**ILG INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT** — Promoting Good Government at the Local Level

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## Logic Model (bottom-right)

*Based on Imagination Library Research Findings and Literature Review.*

| INPUTS | STRATEGIES | SHORT-TERM | INTERMEDIATE | LONG-TERM |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**INPUTS:**
- Books mailed to home in child's name
- Book sharing guides included with books

**STRATEGIES:**
- Target families with children ages birth to five
- Caregivers read daily with children
- Caregivers read books multiple times

**SHORT-TERM:**
- **Enhanced home literacy environment:** Earlier onset of caregiver/child book reading; Increased frequency of caregiver/child book reading; Increased duration of caregiver.child book reading sessions; Increased number of picture books in the home
- **Positive attitudes about reading and motivation to read among caregivers and children:** Increased frequency of child requests for reading; Increased frequency of child book play
- **Increased Interactions between caregivers and children during book reading:** Increased child responses/contributions during book reading; Increased reading skill practice

**INTERMEDIATE:**
- **Increased Emerging Literacy Skills:** Concepts about print; Receptive and expressive vocabulary; Phonological awareness; Phonological memory

**LONG-TERM:**
- Kindergarten literacy readiness

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## Grantsmanship Center model (top-center)

**PROBLEM** — **INTRODUCTION** / **SUMMARY**

**SIGNIFICANCE** — why it matters

**SITUATION** — motivating grant proposal

**CAUSE** — why it's happening

**OUTCOMES** — changes in the problem as a result of the program

**METHODS** — activities to produce outcomes; cause of problem drives choice of methods

**OUTCOME EVALUATION** — assesses if outcomes are being achieved

**PROCESS EVALUATION** — assesses if methods are implemented as planned

**EVALUATION**

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# Program Logic Models

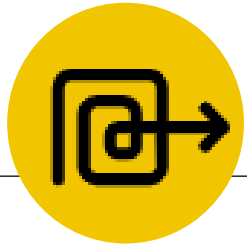INPUTS → ACTIVITIES → SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES → MID-TERM OUTCOMES → LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

# **Program Logic Models**

INPUTS → ACTIVITIES → SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES → MID-TERM OUTCOMES → LONG-TERM OUTCOMES
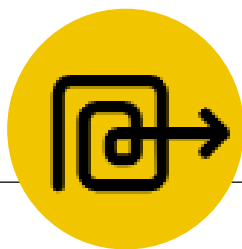
resources and assets that are be utilized by a program

Evaluation Questions

What are the most pressing needs in our context?

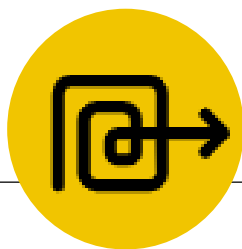How should we use our resources for optimal impact?

# Program Logic Models

INPUTS → ACTIVITIES → SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES → MID-TERM OUTCOMES → LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

what a program *does*

**Evaluation Questions**

Are we reaching the intended audience?

What are their perceptions of the program?

What is the quality of program services and materials?

# Program Logic Models

| INPUTS | ACTIVITIES | SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES | MID-TERM OUTCOMES | LONG-TERM OUTCOMES |

Changes for individuals, organizations, communities, or society

Evaluation Questions

To what extent do program activities lead to changes in what people know, think, or do?

To what extent are these changes sustained?

To what extent did the program affect conditions that initially led to its creation?
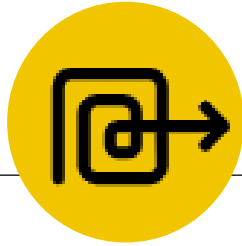
# Evaluation Across a Program's Lifecycle

INPUTS → ACTIVITIES → SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES → MID-TERM OUTCOMES → LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

• • • • • Evaluation can occur at any of these levels or across the continuum • • • •

# Pitfalls of Evaluation

- Only looking for high-level outcomes
- Thinking data will speak for themselves
- Assuming experimental and quasi-experimental designs will always yield the best information
- Assuming people will use evaluation

# Avoiding Pitfalls and Realizing the Promise of Evaluation

- Embrace the fact that evaluations may sometimes be unnecessary or not worth the cost

- Ask the right questions given a program's maturity, scope, and the resources available for evaluation

- Match methods to evaluation questions

- Nurture organizational commitment to learning, using data, and continuous improvement

# The Evaluation Center

**JCSEE** Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation
evaluationstandards.org

Evaluation Checklist Project
wmich.edu/evaluation/checklists

EvaluATE
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