



Developmental evaluation requires a set of conditions to be in place for it to be done effectively. The following questions may help nonprofits to think through the appropriateness and approach of a developmental evaluation.

Defining Scope

*What is it that those leading the initiative are hoping to do?
What do they think developmental evaluation might contribute to the work?*

Evaluations consume resources and so it's important to make informed decisions. If we can understand the circumstances and conditions in which the evaluation activity will take place, then we're better positioned to make assessments about what resources are required, who needs to be involved and how to approach the evaluation. Any development process, particularly when there is a high degree of innovation, is dynamic. It's helpful to anticipate how the scope of a developmental evaluation process will evolve and plan to periodically revisit it. Evaluators, funders and organizational leaders will make assessments about what is needed from the evaluation. As boundaries are pushed in an exploratory process, the scope may change. There may be surprises to be understood or a shift in emphasis and focus to be supported.

Internal capacity for critical thinking

*Does the organization currently make use of reflective practice and critical thinking?
If it does, does this inform decision-making?*

Developmental evaluation brings evidence to the process of innovation-reflection-evolution-innovation. If this is already embedded in the practice of the organization, then it may be appropriate to draw upon internal resources for developmental evaluation. If the organization is interested in developing these capacities internally, then there can be an element of coaching and capacity building to an external evaluator's role.

Decision-making models – both perceived and real

*When and where do decisions get made?
Exactly who is the decision-making "team"?*

At this phase of scoping out the developmental evaluation, it's helpful to think about who needs to be at the table at various points. Developmental evaluation can assist by mapping out the organization's decision-making system. By providing a typology of when and where decisions get made (both formally and informally), the process can be made more intentional and transparent.





Peel Region Evaluation Platform

Commitment to Developmental Evaluation

Is there buy-in for developmental evaluation?

It's vital that the evaluation be closely connected to the key decision makers and change agents. Evaluators need to walk a fine line between maintaining important relationships and fulfilling the "speaking truth to power" element of the role. The positioning of the evaluator as a member of the team is a key difference between developmental evaluation and traditional evaluation, where the evaluator is generally independent of decision-makers. Without organizational commitment, Developmental Evaluation's value is limited. Buy-in is crucial because developmental evaluation requires that leadership and change agents be accessible to test assumptions, gain perspective and articulate shifts in thinking. Without commitment, the learning produced in the evaluation will not inform decision-making. When organizations are committed to developmental evaluation, they are more likely to be intentional about managing the tension between the creative and the critical.

Scale of the Innovation

Is this innovation local or happening across distance?

Innovations in social change take place at different levels. Some are focused on a community while others happen on a national scale. There are initiatives that involve networks and collaborations and others that focus on specific-program or single purpose organizations. When the evaluator can be physically present at various events, it allows for trust building and observation of things that might be unanticipated or overlooked. Shared understanding and momentum more easily emerge from face-to-face and small-group meetings than from document exchanges and phone calls. Developmental Evaluation surfaces questions about assumptions and directions and then supports consideration of the responses and their potential impact on the initiative or organization. In some instances, being physically present at all the places where decisions are made would be impossible. Judgments need to be made about which events are critical for the evaluator and which are not.

Adapted from: J W McConnell Foundation: <https://mcconnellfoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/A-Developmental-Evaluation-Primer-EN.pdf>

