

When choosing from among these strategies, it's important to recognize that various evaluation strategies satisfy certain learning objectives and produce different kinds of learning outcomes. Some of the strategies focus on knowing how, others on knowing what. Some support the co-creation of meaning and understanding and building stronger relationships, whereas others provide opportunities for skill development and feedback.

1. **Coaching/Mentoring:** building a relationship with an evaluation expert who provides individualized technical and professional support. Mentoring/coaching is an ongoing one-to-one relationship in which a more experienced individual offers advice, counsel, or guidance to someone less experienced. Mentors provide: emotional and psychological support, assistance with career and professional development, and role modeling.

Examples:

- *A university faculty invites a graduate student to work on an evaluation project after they have completed an evaluation course.*
- *An internal evaluator invites program staff to work on an evaluation study after they take a workshop on evaluation design and implementation.*

Mentors and coaches help individuals:

- develop knowledge and skills
- learn from others' experiences
- develop relationships
- develop political awareness
- build commitment
- create networks
- understand the larger picture
- practice according to a set of professional ethics
- integrate and use constructive feedback

Guiding questions for using mentoring/coaching as an evaluation capacity building (ECB) strategy:

- Who is available to be a mentor?
- Who are the potential mentees?
- What structures are there to support a mentoring program?
- To what extent is a "program" necessary - should it be more informal?
- What will be expected of mentees and mentors?
- Who will oversee the mentoring "program"?
- What benefits might be achieved from mentoring individuals?

Potential challenges with mentoring/coaching:

- Mentee or mentor/coach makes excessive demands on the time and energy of the other person
- Personality conflicts between mentor/coach and mentee
- Mentor/coach does not make the time - no follow through
- Mentor/coach and/or mentee have unrealistic expectations
- Mentor/coach has little faith in the mentee's ability
- Mentee feels superior to mentor/coach
- Mentor/coach manipulates mentee
- Overdependence of mentee on mentor/coach
- Jealousy of others

2. **Technical Assistance:** receiving help from an internal or external evaluator. Technical assistance may take forms such as instruction, skills training, working knowledge, consulting services, and may also involve the transfer of technical data. Technical assistance is about providing help and advice on a specialized subject matter.

Technical assistance typically involves one-on-one or small group support:

- telephone consultations
- newsletters
- specific knowledge and skill training
- information dissemination (via website, mailings)
- resources (databases, links, referrals)
- facilitation of meetings

Example:

Program staff are matched to experienced evaluators who are available to answer questions about the evaluation's design and implementation as needed. Communications are typically through email and the phone.

Guiding questions for using technical assistance as an ECB Strategy:

- Who might provide technical assistance?
- What resources are available for providing technical assistance?
- What is the scope of technical assistance service you might provide?
- Who would have access to technical assistance?

Potential challenges with technical assistance:

- Because technical assistance evolves over time with the development of its users, it must be flexible to grow and change with the users' needs
- Its success is dependent on two-way communication and the strength of relationships
- Users can become overly dependent on those providing technical assistance
- Intermittent assistance may leave gaps in capacity

3. **Technology:** using online resources such as websites and/or e-learning programs to learn from and about evaluation. The use of synchronous and asynchronous technologies can provide information and feedback on various aspects of evaluation practice. (e.g., email, knowledge management systems, twitter, blogs, websites, video-conferencing, web conferencing, video)

Examples:

- *A knowledge management database of previous evaluations has been developed that is accessible to all members in the organization. Employees may, at any time, review previous evaluation studies to learn more about an evaluation's methodology, findings, and recommendations.*
- *A list of websites that provide information on how to conduct evaluations is made available to all organization members.*

Guiding questions for using technology as an ECB strategy:

- What are we trying to achieve with using the various technologies?
- What are the most appropriate technologies for these various objectives?
- What are the strengths and limitations of each technology?
- What resources are available to build and use these technologies?
- What experiences do organization members have with using these technologies?
- How likely are members to use these technologies?

Potential challenges with using technologies:

- Can be costly to design, develop and implement
- Many organizations do not yet have the level of technology needed to facilitate capacity building
- There is an uneven distribution of technology among organizations
- Organization members must be committed to using technology (see the value of it)
- Organization members must be willing to contribute information to knowledge management systems

4. **Written Materials:** reading and using written documents about evaluation processes and findings. Organizations can design, develop, and use a variety of written materials to build evaluation capacity (e.g., how-to manuals, newsletters, books, brochures, evaluation plans and reports).

Examples:

- *A checklist of things to include in an evaluation plan.*
- *Evaluation textbooks made available in the organization's library.*
- *Newsletter articles about a completed evaluation with descriptive information on what was studied and why, its methods, findings, recommendations, and how the results will be (or are being) used.*

Guiding questions for using written materials as an ECB strategy:

- What kinds of written materials already exist in the organization?
- What kinds of written materials do organization members pay attention to?
- Who will write the new materials?
- What resources exist to design and develop new written materials?
- What might these written materials focus on?
- How will these written materials be distributed?

Potential challenges with using written materials:

- They may not be read
- Their abbreviated form may mislead individuals or the materials' content can be misinterpreted
- They can be costly to develop and distribute
- They are easily misplaced or lost

5. **Training:** attending courses, workshops, and seminars on evaluation. A workshop is a short-term learning experience that encourages active, experiential learning and uses a variety of learning activities to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Examples:

- *A 4-hr. workshop for program staff on how to design and conduct evaluations.*
- *A 2-hr. workshop on developing logic models.*

Guiding questions for developing ECB-related workshops:

- What is the purpose and focus of the training? (e.g., skill building, problem solving, increasing knowledge, personal awareness, self-improvement, systemic change)
- What are the goals and objectives?
- Who should be involved? What experience do they have with evaluation? How many people will be trained?
- Where will the training take place?
- How long will the training be?
- How will trainee's learning be shared with others?

Potential challenges with training:

- Not always developed with transfer of learning as a primary goal
- Often include individuals who are not in a position to use what they have learned - not “just-in-time”
- Take place outside of the work environment
- Are sometimes poorly designed and facilitated
- Are often one-shot
- Rarely take into account participants’ previous knowledge and skills
- Participants often lack effective post training management support and follow-up
- How transfer of learning will be supported is rarely addressed

6. **Involvement in an Evaluation Process:** participating in the design and/or implementation of an evaluation. Evaluation capacity may be an artifact of the evaluation when stakeholders are active participants in the design and/or implementation of an evaluation process. The difference between process use and evaluation capacity building is the intentionality of learning and the efforts made to support and sustain learning throughout the evaluation process (*Harnar & Preskill, 2007*).

Example:

In an evaluation of an early childhood education program, a group of 12 parents, educators, human service providers, and policy advocates is established to help guide the evaluation’s design and implementation. With guidance from a paid professional evaluator, the group engages in several in-person and virtual meetings to develop the program’s logic model, identify the evaluation’s key questions, and other aspects of the evaluation’s design, which results in a comprehensive evaluation plan. The evaluator and her team collect and analyze the data and bring the group back together to interpret the findings and to develop a set of recommendations. To ensure that participants are learning from and about evaluation, the evaluator embeds several different learning opportunities throughout the process so that participants can reflect on their learning at key points throughout the evaluation.

Ways to facilitate learning processes

- Dialogue - Individuals seek to inquire, share meanings, understand complex issues, and uncover assumptions
- Reflection - Individuals and groups review their ideas, understanding, and experiences; provide opportunities to explore values, beliefs, and assumptions
- Asking Questions - Identifies and frames issues of key importance, acknowledges prior knowledge, develops a culture and spirit of curiosity; leads to deeper levels of knowledge and understanding
- Feedback – Provide opportunities for reflection and modification of mental models; allows for integration of new with old knowledge and skills

Guiding questions for using this ECB strategy:

- Who is interested, willing, and able to participate?
- How will participants be chosen?
- What are participants' roles? How deep or wide is their involvement? What role will the evaluator(s) play?
- How will learning processes be integrated throughout the evaluation?
- To what extent will the physical location of participating stakeholders affect their level of engagement?
- What are some possible consequences (positive and negative) of involving stakeholders in the evaluation process?

Potential challenges of using this ECB strategy:

- Participants' time constraints
- Participant's limited level of evaluation knowledge and skills
- Finding the right balance between participant involvement and evaluator control
- Participants abiding by ethical and professional evaluation standards
- Participants wanting to use the "findings" before all of the data have been collected and/or analyzed
- Participants using the evaluation process as part of a political agenda

7. Internship: participating in a formal program that provides practical evaluation experience for novices.

Examples:

- *A consulting firm provides an internship position that allows an individual to be a team member on real evaluations.*
- *Internal evaluation unit creates a secondment position that allows the individual to work on real internal evaluation projects.*

Internships help individuals:

- develop knowledge and skills
- learn from others' experiences
- build commitment
- create networks
- understand the larger picture
- practice according to a set of professional ethics
- integrate and use constructive feedback

Guiding questions for using internship as an ECB strategy:

- Who can provide an internship?
- Who are the potential interns?
- What structures are there to support an internship program?
- To what extent is a “program” necessary?
- What will be expected of interns and their supervisors?
- Who will oversee the internship “program”?

Potential challenges with internships:

- The intern placement doesn’t give sufficient opportunity to gain experience
- The internship program supervisor isn’t able to provide sufficient supervision
- The intern doesn’t take the position seriously and give it adequate time and energy
- The intern and supervisor have unrealistic expectations

8. Meetings: allocating time and space to discuss evaluation activities specifically for the purpose of learning from and about evaluation.

Examples:

- *A meeting with key stakeholders at the beginning of an evaluation to discuss evaluation use, purpose, evaluation questions and logic model development.*
- *A meeting of key stakeholders following the data collection to present the preliminary summary of findings, interpret the findings and begin forming recommendations.*

Meetings help individuals:

- set priorities for the evaluation
- build understanding and commitment to the evaluation process
- promote a shared understanding of the program and the evaluation context
- give meaning to the findings
- develop useful, realistic recommendations

Guiding questions for using meetings as an ECB strategy:

- Who are the key stakeholders?
- How will the key stakeholders use the evaluation findings?
- To what extent do the different stakeholder groups have different perspectives?
- What is the significance of those different perspectives?

Potential challenges with meetings:

- Not everyone feels comfortable talking in a group
- Voices of marginalized people may not be heard
- Different people bring different levels of expertise and may result focusing on the lowest common denominator
- Divergent views may be so strong that arguments rather discussion occurs

9. Appreciative Inquiry (AI): using an assets-based, collaborative, narrative approach to learning about evaluation that focuses on strengths within the organization.

Example:

- *In an evaluation of a program to engage tenants in a social housing program, the tenants, housing supervisors, staff and board members are invited to an AI summit which includes:*
 - a. presenting the preliminary evaluation findings*
 - b. having conversations that draw out examples of what worked well, looking at the contributing factors*
 - c. envisioning what it would look like if all went well over the next five years*
 - d. discussing the steps that need to be taken to ensure things do go well*

Appreciative Inquiry helps individuals:

- focus on the strengths of the program and build on them
- think about the possibilities for the future
- develop recommendations that will allow movement towards the ideal future
- avoids blame and other negative aspects of more traditional evaluations

Guiding questions for using Appreciative Inquiry as an ECB Strategy:

- Is the program open to Appreciative Inquiry?
- Who are the key stakeholders?
- Are the evaluation questions and data collection tools worded consistent with an Appreciative Inquiry approach?
- Are there sufficient resources to support a large AI summit?
- Who is trained in conducting an AI summit?

Potential Challenges with Appreciative Inquiry:

- Some of the key stakeholders don't believe that AI will sufficiently address the issues.
- Some key stakeholders aren't willing to engage in a process that focuses on a program's strengths
- Facilitators aren't sufficiently versed in Appreciative Inquiry so they can't use it to its full potential.

10. Communities of Practice: sharing evaluation experiences, practices, information, and readings among members who have common interests and needs (sometimes called learning circles)

Examples:

- *Volunteer-run evaluation societies provide the opportunity for evaluators to network and connect with each other virtually, at conferences and through training events.*
- *Evaluation websites allows evaluators to contribute to a body of knowledge through formal submissions, videos, and blogs*
- *Evaluation Cafes, organized locally, create the opportunity for evaluators to meet for informal discussion and information on a topic of interest*

Communities of Practice help individuals:

- develop networks
- learn about innovative thinking in evaluation
- present innovative ideas
- find mentors

Guiding questions for using Communities of Practice as an ECB Strategy:

- Does the person have the time to join a community of practice?
- What is the best fit for the individual – virtual or face-to-face networking?
- Are there resources to sustain a community of practice?
- Is there someone who is willing take on the responsibility for coordination of the community of practice?

Potential challenges with Communities of Practice:

- Insufficient resources
- No one willing to take on the coordination role
- Insufficient interest among evaluators

Adapted from:

<http://www.unm.edu/~marivera/522%20readings%203/Multidisciplinary%20model%20of%20evaluation%20capacity%20building.pdf>

http://www.pointk.org/client_docs/tear_sheet_ecb-innovation_network.pdf