

## Monitoring/Evaluation: A Tool for the Continual Improvement of Activities

### What Are Evaluations?

Often associated with reporting requirements from funders, monitoring/evaluation systems can sometimes be met with reluctance and resistance when time and resources are scarce. Yet this tool is of immeasurable value when it comes to gauging and improving outcomes or impacts of an activity, project or program. How can we use monitoring/evaluation to help reach our objectives? This document presents a general overview of the evaluation process and some crucial elements to facilitate the implementation of evaluations in your organization.

## MYTHS AND REALITIES



**MYTH** The only purpose of an evaluation is to report to funding partners on how funds were used.

**REALITY** Evaluations are, above all, an opportunity for organizations to improve their practices and culture around learning and to ensure that their operations appropriately respond to the needs of the communities they serve, as well as, on a more macro level, their own objectives and missions. Some of this data can also be used to fulfil reporting requirements to third parties as needed. However, these two processes respond to very different objectives.

**MYTH** There isn't enough time to be able to conduct a high-quality evaluation.

**REALITY** Conducting a high-quality evaluation depends on well-organized and optimally planned evaluation periods that are baked into the design of the activity or project.

# Evaluation...



## is...

- "Essentially, applying a value judgement to a given entity using methodically collected information, followed by a decision on actions that draw from this judgement and serve to improve the entity under evaluation."
- A way to celebrate victories.
- A step that fosters an appreciation for the learning process, helps formulate orientations, recommendations, or action items with the goal of continual improvement.
- A process that accompanies an activity or project.



## is not...

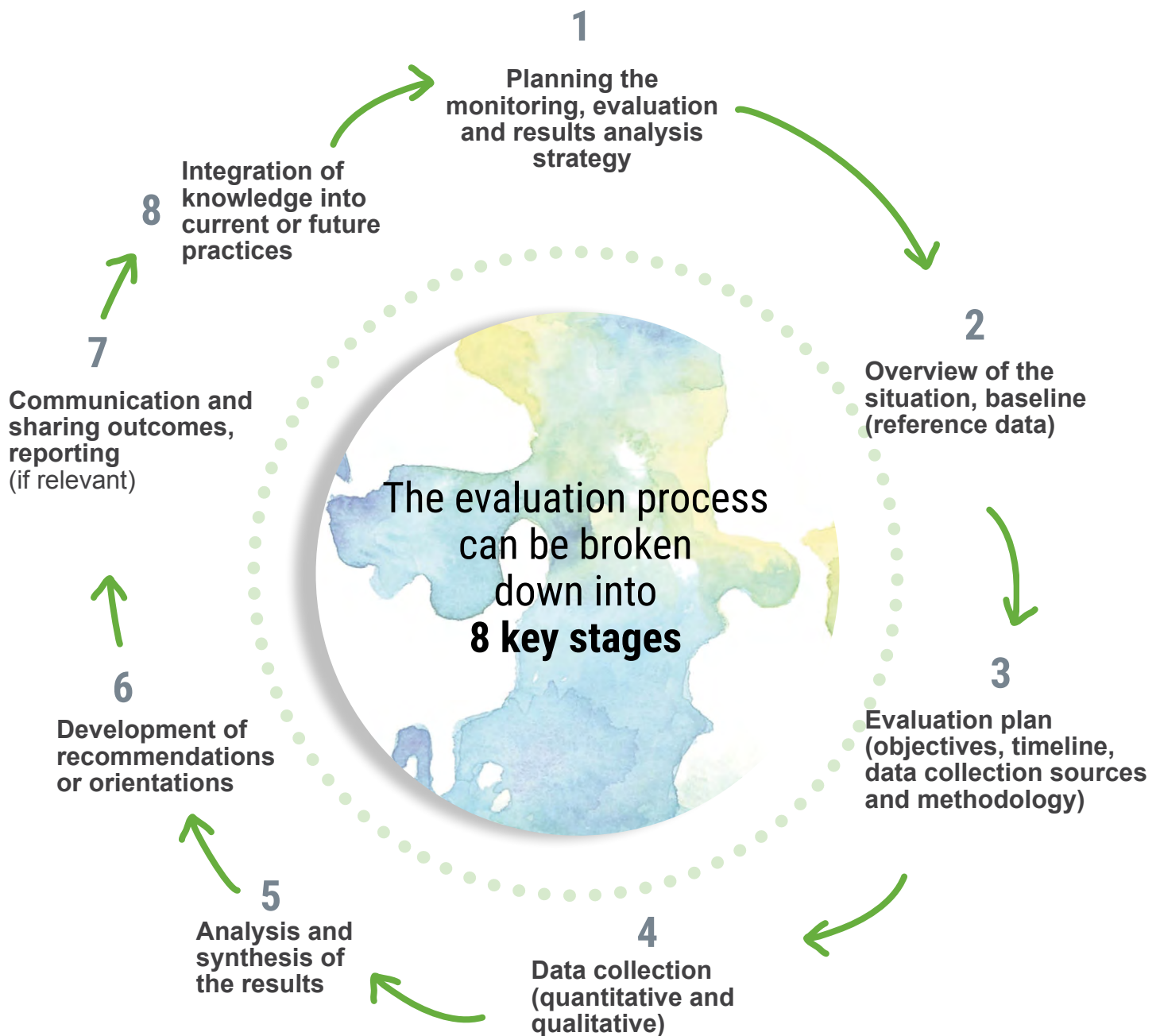
- Reporting.
- An end unto itself.
- Finding someone to blame.

## Conducting Evaluations... Yes, but for What Purpose?

Based on the information we collected, are we on track to obtain our target objectives? How can we do things differently? How can we improve? What have we learned? These are the questions that evaluations seek to answer. Evaluations allow us to account for and recognize the milestones we've reached, the ground we have left to cover, and how to get to our desired destination. In other words, only by accurately taking stock of a situation are we able to improve its outcomes.

In short, evaluations of ongoing or completed activities, including recommendations developed in light of these evaluations, provide support in decision-making processes from a perspective of continual improvements to the activity, project or program.

# What Are the Main Stages in an Evaluation Process?





## 1. PLANNING THE MONITORING, EVALUATION AND RESULTS ANALYSIS STRATEGY AND FRAMING THE EVALUATION PROCESS WITHIN THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENTS TO ACTIVITIES

Conducting high-quality evaluations that were not planned in advance as part of an activity or project could mean you'll need to make sacrifices in evaluation quality. By baking evaluations into the design process for activities or projects and setting aside periods for evaluation and analysis into the project timeline, evaluation quality, and by extension, the quality of analysis and takeaways, can be maximized.

Evaluations are part of a cross-cutting process of activity oversight and continual improvement. While they are two distinct tools, monitoring and evaluation are two complementary sides of the same coin which, together, provide an opportunity to appreciate and apply the progress and knowledge gained to future steps or projects.

To that end, MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation Accountability and Learning) is a method that seeks to define the gaps between projected and real outcomes. The MEAL method can fit within, among others, a results-based management (RBM) framework. In that case, it is "similar to a performance measurement framework, for which each level of desired results (changes in habits, behaviours, or knowledge, and effective performance in the planned activities) is detailed. The various outcomes are accompanied by quantitative and qualitative indicators used to measure the results (with baseline data, target data, data sources, methods and frequencies of data collection, etc.)."

## 2. GETTING A SENSE OF THE SITUATION FROM THE START, DEVELOPING AN OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION- WHAT IS OUR STARTING POINT?


Developing an overview (or baseline, or reference data) of the situation from the start helps in the selection of appropriate targets and mapping landmarks and points for comparison prior to and following the activity or project, in order to measure the degree of transformation or change more concretely. When relevant, this stage can also include the identification of benchmarks (meaning comparisons with other communities, activities and contexts).

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the original French. Source: AQOCI, Faits saillants du 2ème rendez-vous de l'éducation à la citoyenneté mondiale (ECM) du 13 et 14 décembre 2018, p.8

### 3. DEVELOPING AN EVALUATION PLAN, INCLUDING EVALUATION OBJECTIVES--HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT WE MEASURE WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO EVALUATE?

A good evaluation means starting with a definition of what we want to evaluate and why, with the help of evaluation objectives. What do we want to learn? What are the targets we want to hit? In the context of a Global Citizenship Education (GCE) activity, for example, we could evaluate, among others: motivation levels in our target audience, learning, engagement within our target audience, the sustainability of that engagement, changes in perceptions, behaviours, and habits, participation rates, etc., all while considering the diversity and composition of the groups of participants (age, gender, race, sexual orientation...).

After that, an evaluation plan will specify parameters such as: what strategy will be used to measure the outcomes? At what time(s)? By whom? For whom? With whom? For when? How much will this cost? This step is also intended to define the methodology used in the evaluation: information sources, data collection methods, indicators and criteria. A good evaluation objective makes it easy to select indicators and criteria.



**Consult the related document on *How to Formulate Evaluation Objectives in the Context of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) Activities?***

### 4. DATA COLLECTION--HOW DO WE GATHER THE INFORMATION?

Data collection involves gathering information to be measured against indicators and the evaluation objectives. There are a variety of ways in which to do so, from the traditional (surveys, questionnaires, individual interviews, documentation, focus or discussion groups...) to more creative methods including games, practical exercises, roleplaying, observation tools etc.

### 5. ANALYZING AND SYNTHESIZING THE RESULTS--WHAT DO THE DATA TELL US? WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED?

After collecting and compiling the data, analyzing and synthesizing the results are crucial steps for learning about and from the work that has been conducted and whether the targets established in the evaluation objectives were reached. This step lends itself to asking questions about the relevance of the activity or the project, as well as its efficiency, effectiveness, impact and viability.





## 6. DEVELOPING RECOMMENDATIONS OR ORIENTATIONS--HOW CAN WE DO BETTER?

Evaluations create an opportunity to develop recommendations or means for improvement in the future, based not only on the challenges we observed, but also on the successes. This stage is when decisions are made about how to integrate what we learned from the evaluation into our future practices.

## 7. COMMUNICATING ABOUT OUTCOMES, REPORTING (IF RELEVANT), KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER--HOW CAN WE APPRECIATE THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND WORK THAT WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED?

During dialogues about outcomes with people present during the presentation of the results, not only does the evaluation become an opportunity to share what we've learned, but the communication of the outcomes in itself also becomes an opportunity to refine our analyses, by taking participant feedback into account. We suggest using the appropriate communication strategies for your target audiences (participants, funding partners, partner organizations, general public, etc.) in order to optimize discussions and participation.

## 8. INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGE INTO PRACTICES--WHAT DOES THIS CHANGE FOR US?

Now is the time to examine the impact of the knowledge observed on our policies, practices or procedures, all while considering the discussions that took place during the communication stage. After the evaluation, what do we need to implement? What decisions do we need to make? Do we need to add a new step in the project design? Do we need to think about more appropriate methods of data collection for our target audience?

Integrating knowledge into practices also provides an opportunity to organize spaces for sharing reflections on what we learned, which also facilitates developing an overall portrait and discussing the techniques, methods or working documents that could be left behind in favour of more effective strategies.



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