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Let's Get Strategic: An Exploration of the How-To's, What-Not-to-Do's, and Promising Upshots of Strategic Evaluation Initiatives

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Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Kathleen Doll as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology.

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Abstract

Let's Get Strategic: An Exploration of the How-to's, What-not-to-do's, and Promising Upshots

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Claremont Graduate University: 2020

Strategic planning has been both studied and utilized for decades in the business management sphere with high levels of success (Wolf & Floyd, 2017). More recently the act of strategic planning has been translated to the public sector, ushering in a wave of perceived benefits for organizational performance and learning (Bryson, Edwards, & Van Slyke, 2018). Extrapolation from these other fields suggests that strategic planning may be a mechanism to improve the practice of program evaluation (Preskill & Mack, 2013). While there are a few guiding frameworks for strategic evaluation planning initiatives, these frameworks have not been systematically documented or explored. As such, there is limited understanding of the current use of strategic planning in the field of program evaluation.

To address this gap, this study used an exploratory concurrent multi-phase mixed method design, leveraging a document review, survey, interviews, and a case study, to (1) systematically investigate the current landscape of strategic evaluation practices, (2) examine what factors contribute to the decision for an organization to undergo a strategic planning initiative, (3) explore the components involved in the process of creating a strategic evaluation plan, (4) understand how strategic evaluation initiatives are implemented, and (5) investigate the unique contributions the process and implementation of strategic evaluation plans may offer the field of evaluation.

Findings reveal common rationales for engaging in strategic evaluation work (i.e., a desire for organizational alignment, systematic decision-making, prioritizing evaluation efforts across wide portfolios), and guidance on conducting strategic evaluation initiatives (i.e., engaging a diverse team, leveraging incentives). In addition, the study offers evidence of the benefits associated with strategic evaluation initiatives, such as creating a shared understanding among stakeholders, providing alignment across programs, evaluations, and missions, as well as increasing the perceived value of evaluation.

In sum, this study provides the first systematic investigation of strategic evaluation initiatives in practice and highlights some of the perceived barriers, facilitators, and outcomes associated with their use. Findings suggest that strategic evaluation initiatives may serve as an intervention to promote process use, foster evaluative thinking, and build evaluation capacity among stakeholders. Ultimately, this study offers evaluation practitioners tangible actions that can be adopted when advancing the use of evaluation.

Keywords: evaluation planning, foundations, nonprofits, government agencies, process use, capacity building, evaluative thinking

Dedication

I held the year 2020 on a mental pedestal throughout my 5-year graduate school journey. 2020 would be the year I finally earned my doctorate, began my career, and ran a marathon—a trifecta of intellectual, professional and physical triumph. However, starting in January 2020, these plans suddenly seemed trivial and frivolous as numerous tragedies challenged the human spirit, on a global scale. As I sat in my home, writing this dissertation manuscript, news reports of devastating fires in Australia, Kobe Bryant's shocking death, and the COVID-19 pandemic played in the background.

As such, I dedicate this dissertation to all of the heroes of 2020. Here's to the medical professionals, first responders, hospital staff, grocery store workers, and the educators who have pivoted their entire curriculum online to meet the needs of our communities. Thanks to their sacrifices and courage, I was able to stay in the safety of my home and complete this dissertation. This accomplishment was an act of privilege, and this fact will never be lost on me.

Acknowledgements

It is only through others that we can accomplish amazing feats. As the late Kobe Bryant shared, *"Greatness isn't easy to achieve. It requires a lot of time, a lot of sacrifices. It requires a lot of tough choices. It requires your loved ones to sacrifice...People don't always understand how much effort, from how many people, goes into one person chasing a dream to be great."*

I am not insinuating that earning a PhD is some astronomically astounding act of greatness, but it was certainly a dream of mine that I achieved through the dedication and sacrifice of others. As such, I would like to formally acknowledge a few of the individuals who made this feat possible.

First off, many thanks for the folks who participated in my study at every stage of the process, from the design measurement to the actual interviews. Secondly, I have profound appreciation for my dissertation committee: Leslie Fierro, Tarek Azzam, Tiffany Berry, and Isabelle Bourgeois. I am especially grateful for Leslie Fierro's advising throughout the dissertation process, her enthusiasm for the topic, and her willingness to allow me to explore this topic with full force! Additionally, many thanks to Tiffany Berry for her mentorship during my time at CGU. Through her scaffolding, I have become a higher caliber evaluator, with a more discerning eye for high quality practice. She took a risk by giving me a paid role on an evaluation contract as a first-year graduate student; that gesture changed the trajectory of my life.

My CGU community has been nothing short of incredible. Thank you to Sunny Chau and Michael Thomas in the Office of Information Technology for hiring me as a first-year graduate student and always exuding kindness and humility. Moreover, my deep admiration goes to Linda Pillow and Sherry Nissen in the DBOS Office. They keep the department running and uplifted; both have been like family to me the past four years, especially during my three years as a

Table of Contents

Let's Get Strategic: An Exploration of the How-to's, What-not-to-do's, and Promising Upshots
of Strategic Evaluation Initiatives

Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Within the United States, the demand for program evaluation is on the rise, with more

money than ever being allocated for evaluation in both the federal government (Lemire, Fierro,

Kinarsky, Fujita-Conrads, & Christie, 2018) and philanthropic foundations (Kinarsky, 2018).

However, much of the program evaluation work currently being conducted in organizations,

whether in the philanthropic, nonprofit, for profit, or public sector, is ad hoc, lacks proper

funding, and goes unused (Preskill & Mack, 2013). This leads to the perception that evaluation

contributes little value to organizational decision-makers and is not worth the expenditure. This

perception is in contrast with the wide evidence base that demonstrates that evaluation can

influence decision-making (Sleezer, 1987; Johnson, Greenseid, Toal, King, Lawrenz, & Volkov,

2009), thus adding value to organizations (Mark & Henry, 2004). Preskill and Mack (2013)

speculate that the usability and significance of evaluation findings tend to go unrealized since the

majority of evaluative efforts within organizations are disconnected, "one off", and loosely

aligned.

Extrapolation from other fields, such as business management and the public sector,

suggests strategic planning as one possible mechanism to remedy this disjointed nature of

program evaluation in organizations, thus offering an opportunity to address the perception of the

inefficacy of evaluation. Strategic planning, defined in countless ways across numerous

disciplines, entails the intentional and periodic process to guide an organization's direction,

establish a course of action, integrate information sources, and influence decision making.

Typically, this planning and prioritizing exercise engages a range of stakeholders in a variety of

activities, such as meetings, document reviews, and creation of strategic plans (Bryson, 2018; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2010; Wolf & Floyd, 2017).

According to an annual survey by Bain and Company, strategic planning has remained one of the most popular techniques used in leading private sector companies worldwide for the last 50 years (Rigby, 2003). Additionally, within the last few decades, strategic planning has become prominent in the public sector and non-profit arena (Bryson, Edwards, & Van Slyke, 2018). Not only does ample literature cite the rampant use of strategic planning initiatives in these realms, scholars and practitioners also call for an *increase* in strategic planning, noting that strategic planning needs to be applied more frequently to collaborative enterprises (Bryson, Crosby, & Bryson, 2009) to enable organizations to hone in on the appropriate goals and then manage effectively to achieve these aspirations (Poister, 2010). The field of evaluation constitutes one enterprise that has potential to benefit from the deliberate and intentional act of strategic planning.

While a few guiding frameworks for strategic evaluation planning exist, these frameworks have not been systematically documented or explored. As such, there is limited understanding of the current use of strategic planning in the field of program evaluation. To address this gap, the current study used an exploratory concurrent multi-phase mixed method design to (1) systematically investigate the current landscape of strategic evaluation frameworks, (2) examine what factors contribute to the decision for an organization to undergo a strategic planning initiative, (3) explore the components involved in the process of creating a strategic evaluation plan, (4) understand how strategic evaluation initiatives are implemented, and (5) explore the unique contributions the process and implementation of strategic evaluation plans may offer the field of evaluation.

Prior to delving into the current study, the next section provides a review of theoretical and empirical literature on strategic planning, drawing upon research from the business management field, public sector, and evaluation discipline.

Strategic Planning in the Management Context

The notion of strategic planning has existed for thousands of years, dating back to Sun-Tzu's book, *Art of War,* in the 6th century BC (Mintzberg, 1994; Obloj, 2013), however the concept did not appear in the American business management sphere until the 1950s. First conceived as a budget exercise, by the mid-1960s, it became a standard management tool in nearly every large corporation. Within a decade, strategic planning dominated the management literature, becoming a "virtual obsession" among American corporations (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 6).

Since the onset of the widespread use of strategic planning in the 1970s, extensive debate has materialized within the business management literature regarding the definition of not only "strategic planning," but also around the formal and operational definitions of the terms, "planning" and "strategy." Obloj (2013) notes that the academic definitions have changed every decade for the last 50 years as a facet of the development of new theory. Despite the decades of definitional disputes, some consistency exists across the many definitions – contributing to a better understanding of what strategic planning entails. Specifically, definitional uniformity manifests in three dimensions: (1) strategic planning as an acknowledgment of complexity and interdependent decision-making, (2) strategic planning as a systematic and gradual process, and (3) strategic planning as more than "just lists of 'good things to do'," and rather as the logic of how to excel in a given scenario or environment (Shaw, Brown, & Bromiley, 1998 p. 42).

An encompassing definition of strategic planning. Most recently in the management literature, Wolf and Floyd (2017) offer a definition of strategic planning . This definition stems

from a review of the empirical research on strategic planning from the past 30 years, including 117 journal articles. Their definition encapsulates the notions of integrated decision-making, as well as systematic and gradual processing. The authors define strategic planning as a "more or less formalized, periodic process that provides a structured approach to strategy formulation, implementation, and control" (p. 1,758). The authors highlight that the purpose of strategic planning is to "influence an organization's strategic direction for a given period and to coordinate and integrate deliberate as well as emerging strategic decisions" (p. 1,758). The authors go one step further, stating that strategic planning consists of a range of various activities, such as strategy reviews, meetings, and creating strategic plans.

Previous literature illuminates what additional activities associated with strategic planning might entail. For example, Schendel and Hofer (1979) describe strategic planning as a series of logical steps that include the articulation of a mission statement, long-term goals, environmental analyses, strategy formulation, implementation, and control. Moreover, Ketokivi and Castañer (2004) assert that strategic planning is a periodic process involving annual assessment of performance goals, budgeting, and translating priorities into resource allocation decisions. Furthermore, Hopkins and Hopkins (1997), posit that strategic planning is "the process of using systematic criteria and rigorous investigation to formulate, implement, and control strategy, and formally document organizational expectations" (p. 637).

Benefits of strategic planning in the private sector. The business management literature outlines numerous benefits and desired outcomes of strategic planning. A focus on distal outcomes dominated the field's understanding of strategic planning until the early 1990s (Wolf & Floyd, 2017). Accordingly, these distal outcomes are first discussed, before shifting to an exploration of the more recent literature on proximal outcomes.

Distal outcomes. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, much of the literature on

strategic planning focused on distal outcomes, especially firm performance indicators, which are

mostly comprised of financial performance (Wolf & Floyd, 2017). Strategic planning has been

empirically demonstrated to have positive relationships with profitability (Miller & Cardinal,

1994), revenue growth (Miller & Cardinal, 1994), and earnings and sales growth (Ackelsberg &

Arlow, 1985). Furthermore, ample meta-analyses corroborate the findings that formal strategic

planning shares a positive relationship with financial performance (e.g., Armstrong, 1982; Boyd,

1991; Miller & Cardinal, 1994; Ramanujam, Venkatraman, & Camillus, 1986).

Researchers have explored strategic planning in relation to less tangible distal outcomes

as well (Wolf & Floyd, 2017), many of which are more relevant to the evaluation context.

Studies indicate that strategic planning influences strategy development, which includes how

organizations set objectives, analyze alternatives, and ultimately select a business strategy (e.g.,

Dutton & Duncan, 1987; Hopkins & Hopkins, 1997; Miller & Cardinal, 1994). For example,

Dutton and Duncan (1987) posit that an organization's strategic planning process systematically

influences the scope of issues considered by an organization, as well as the size, variety, and

turnover of the strategic issues under consideration. Similarly, Gibb and Scott (1985) highlight

that strategic planning promotes strategic awareness within an organization, meaning that

individuals begin to position new knowledge in terms of strategic advancement, rather than just

processing the information for general retention.

Additionally, recent studies suggest that planning offers a framework for adaptation,

enabling strategy-making to occur in a decentralized fashion and promoting development that is

flexible (Andersen, 2004). Furthermore, organizational learning has been associated with

strategic planning (Schaffer & Willauer, 2003; Wolf & Floyd, 2017). For instance, Eisenhardt

5

and Martin (2000) indicate that strategic planning promotes the development of organizational capability, which can be interpreted as a mechanism to learn and improve skills across an organization (Alexander, Burt, & Collinson, 1995; Houlden, 1995). Similarly, Teece (2010) describes the process of strategic planning as allowing organizations to learn to sense and seize opportunities.

In essence, extant business management research indicates that strategic planning results in an expansion of a wide array of subsidiary practices that enable an organization to be more aware, actionable, and adaptable when executing directives.

Proximate outcomes. Although the past three decades of business management literature on the distal outcomes of strategic planning have been resplendent, the research has been criticized for ignoring the intermediate outcomes of planning that mediate the connections between planning and organizational performance (King, 1983). Therefore, there has been an increased focus on the proximate outcomes of strategic planning in attempts to unpack the mechanisms that explain how strategic planning influences organizational outcomes (Wolf & Floyd, 2017). Overall, two major proximate outcomes have emerged that relate to decision-making and organization-wide coordination, both of which are pertinent to the objectives of evaluation.

First, Sinha (1990) contends that strategic planning may contribute indirectly to profitability through improved decision-making. Through analyzing 1,087 decisions made by 129 of the Fortune 500 companies during the years 1982–86, it was revealed that strategic planning increased the understanding of the market and other stakeholder demands, thus raising the quality of decision-making. This positive relationship between strategic planning and organizational decision making has also been supported by numerous other researchers

6

(Andersen, 2004; Grant, 2003). For example, Jarzabkowski's (2008) seven-year qualitative study of top managers at three universities found that strategic planning serves as a mechanism through which managers at various levels are able to influence decision making.

Second, scholarship emphasizes the role of strategic planning as a communication tool and coordinating mechanism (Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). For example, Ketokivi and Castañer's (2004) survey of 164 manufacturing plants, from five countries and three industries, identifies strategic planning as an integrative device that enables various divisions of an organization to adopt common organizational goals. In addition, using data from a major strategic reorientation of a national telecommunications firm, Lines (2004) discovered that two features of planning—participation and communication—have informational, affective, and motivational effects on different groups' commitment to a common goal. Similarly, the work of Jarzabkowski and Balogun (2009) found strategic planning to have integrative effects, uniting diverse units under common strategic goals through the activities of participation and communication. Each of these studies demonstrates the ability of strategic planning to enhance communication practices within an organization, which is an outcome that quality program evaluation, and evaluation capacity building efforts, also strive to achieve (Preskill & Boyle, 2008) .

High quality strategic planning in the business management context. As demonstrated by the literature discussed thus far, there are numerous beneficial outcomes associated with strategic planning in the private sector. However, Wolf and Floyd (2017) aptly assert that the primary question is no longer whether having a formal strategic planning system is effective for an organization, but rather what are the conditions that facilitate strategic planning that is high quality. Afterall, strategic planning that is of a high caliber is more likely to lead to

the beneficial proximal and distal outcomes previously cited. A review of the literature reveals four dimensions that are associated with high quality strategic planning: (1) wide personnel inclusivity, (2) organizational values, (3) organizational characteristics, and (4) clarity of the strategic plan.

Personnel inclusivity. The first key indicator of strategic planning quality explores who within an organization is involved in the strategic planning process, and how such participation is implemented. Wolf and Floyd (2017) identify that high-quality strategic planning should extend beyond the purview of top management. Strategic planning was initially a pursuit reserved for the upper echelon of an organization. However, since the 1990s, literature highlights that it is not advantageous for strategic thinking to strictly be conducted by top management with implementation relegated to the rest of the organization (Mintzberg, 1994). Instead, quality strategic planning includes a diversity of personnel in the process in the hopes of galvanizing support for the plan moving forward (Wolf & Floyd, 2017).

Alignment with organizational values. A growing body of literature explores the premise that high quality strategic plans align with an organization's values and culture (Williams, 2002). Harshman and Harshman (1999) posit that the integration of organizational values and strategy has the potential to articulate a unified purpose for an organization and its employees. In this way, values provide a framework from which strategy can be created (Parsons, 1997), garnering buy-in from personnel across the organization. A strategic plan that is rooted in shared values is an indicator of a high-quality plan since shared organizational values are considered drivers to decision making (Harrington, Miles, Watkins, Williamson, & Grady, 1996) and transformational change (Kotter, 1996).

Organizational characteristics. Factors such as firm size, age, structural complexity, capital intensity, and the stage of growth and development are also considered as subsidiary influences on the quality of strategic planning systems (Glaister, Dincer, Tatoglu, Demirbag, & Zaim, 2008; Odom & Boxx, 1988). For example, Glaister and colleagues (2008) surveyed 135 Turkish manufacturing firms and found that environmental turbulence, organization structure, and firm size all moderated the effectiveness of strategic planning (e.g., resulting in increased feelings of confidence, control, firm performance). Additionally, in a study of 175 churches that were engaged in strategic planning, Odom and Boxx (1988) report that strategic planning sophistication (e.g., goal specificity, sufficient range of time, recommended actions) was related to the size and growth rate of the organizations. As evidenced by these studies, attributes of the organization undergoing strategic planning, as well as the environment in which they operate, influences the effectiveness of strategic planning.

Clarity of the strategic plan. Overall, the literature indicates that clarity is key in a strategic plan. For instance, Greenley (1983) indicates that a good strategic plan has a clear statement of objectives and goals that are quantifiably measurable. The need for clarity expands beyond content, and also encompasses the visual aesthetics of the plan. The manner in which strategic plans are written, including visual and textual representations of strategy, influences how these plans are perceived and what behaviors they elicit (Wolf & Floyd, 2017). For example, Eppler and Platts (2009) conducted a series of case studies, demonstrating that visualization should not be viewed as merely a tool to communicate the outcomes of a strategic planning process, but as a powerful, hands-on mechanism that can facilitate strategic planning as a joint managerial practice. Specifically, the authors illustrate how visualization can improve the strategy process in terms of thinking, communicating and engaging others.

Strategic Planning in the Public Sector

Prior to the 1980s, strategic planning was virtually unheard of in the United States government (Poister, 2010) but is now pervasive. The integration of strategic planning into the fabric of the public sector was likely associated with the adoption of New Public Management, which constituted a series of program reforms intended to make national agencies more performance-oriented (Rosenbloom & Piotrowski, 2016). Practices like strategic planning were further reinforced by the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) which required all federal departments and agencies to periodically create strategic plans (Poister, 2010). This requirement was maintained in the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA, H.R. 2142, 111th Cong. (2011)).

Furthermore, survey data illustrates that strategic planning is also broadly used by state (Brudney, Hebert, & Wright, 1999) and local governments (Poister & Streib, 2005). Although strategic planning may have once been perceived in the government as a management fad derived from the private sector, it has endured and contributed to positive results for the public sector over the past three decades (Berry, 2007; Johnsen, 2015). The relevance and success of strategic planning in this setting may be, in part, due to what Nartisa and colleagues (2012) explain as the practice of public administration becoming "more flexible and transparent [in] meeting the needs of customer instead of bureaucracy" (p. 243).

Definitions of strategic planning in the public sector. Much like the private sector, multiple definitions of strategic planning exist in the public realm. However, there are fewer definitions, and most coalesce around similar concepts. Bryson (2010)'s definition is the most cited; strategic planning is a "deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why

it does it" (p. 256-257). According to Bryson (2018), the main purpose of a strategic plan is to promote strategic thinking, acting, and learning on an ongoing basis. Thus, strategic planning takes a holistic approach that integrates forward-thinking, objective analysis, and subjective evaluation of values, goals, and priorities to establish a future direction, and courses of action, to ensure an "organization's vitality, effectiveness, and ability to add public value" (Poister, 2010, p. 247).

   Differences from strategic planning in the private sector. Other scholars have offered expansions of Bryson's definition, highlighting some distinct attributes of strategic planning in the public sector. Several of these public-sector considerations are also salient to the evaluation field. First, Ring and Perry (1985) assert that the public sector faces both policy vagueness, which is often due to competing ideologies in the policy-making process, and incompatible program goals. Each of these notions complicates the task of establishing clearly delineated strategies within the public sector. Furthermore, public sector decision-making tends to be incremental, thus strategies are more likely to be emergent and based on minor modifications to existing strategies, rather than manifest as profound changes (Berry, 2007).

   Another key difference is that public sector organizations confront a unique set of stakeholder power dynamics. In this sector, a vast array of stakeholders exists, some of whom wield substantial power over the policy process. As such, stakeholder management becomes a critical element of the strategic planning process (Berry, 2007).

   Lastly, Berry (2007) notes that time constraints for actualizing strategies are often truncated due to electoral cycles—the short tenure of top officials complicates the strategic planning process. Overall, Ring and Perry (1985) summarize that the strategic planning process in the public-sector entails "the management of discontinuity. Coalitions are unstable, political

11

tenure is brief, agendas change constantly. Successful public-sector managers act to minimize discontinuity and bridge the gaps that it leaves in its wake" (p. 284).

Outcomes of strategic planning in the public sector. In contrast to the private sector, fewer studies have examined the desired outcomes of strategic planning in the public sector (Poister & Streib, 2004; Nartisa, Putans, & Muravska, 2012). Although there has been an increase in public-sector literature that focuses on strategic planning over the past decade, Positer (2010), as well as Bryson and colleagues (2018), contend that there has not been enough focus on synthesizing what has been learned, how strategic plans are executed, and what results they incur. Accordingly, Poister (2010) argues that there is a need for comprehensive studies about how strategic planning in the public-sector influences performance and the outcomes it renders. Additionally, Bryson et al., (2018) argue there is a need to get strategic about strategic planning research.

Despite the relative deficiency of empirical literature, some studies have explored the outcomes of strategic planning in the public sphere. Much like the business management literature, organizational performance has constituted the primary outcome under investigation. Frentzel, Bryson, and Crosby (2000) present a six-year case study of a strategic planning initiative within the United States Navy. Findings indicate that strategic planning in this context helped those involved refocus and develop strategies better suited for the demands associated with military readiness (e.g., mobilization, training, medical relief preparedness). The authors concluded that strategic planning can result in public organizations that "better serve their mission and create real public value" (p. 421).

In alignment with the notion that strategic plans may assist public organizations with attaining their mission, Lee, McGuire, and Kim (2018) designed a 10-year-long mixed methods

12

study, involving 145 county-level strategic plans from 124 county governments in the US. The study explores the linkage between collaboratively developed strategic plans and reductions in homelessness. Findings indicate that having a strategic plan, was associated with increases in the number of beds made available for homeless individuals in the US. This result supports the assertion that strategic planning may influence organizational performance.

Another case study, involving surveys and interviews with fourteen departments within the City of Milwaukee, supports the notion that effective strategic planning has the potential to result in increased organizational satisfaction and performance within public agencies (Hendrick, 2003). Additionally, Poister and Streib (2005)'s survey of municipal governments in the US found that strategic planning efforts are perceived by municipal managers as enhancing organizational capacity and performance. Overall, these case studies suggest that aspects of organizational performance, such as goal attainment and employee satisfaction, constitute key outcomes of interest in the public sector.

Positer (2010) broadens the scope of research on the desired outcomes of strategic planning in the public sector. Case study evidence from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), reveals that proximate outcomes of strategic planning are also worth exploring. For instance, Poister highlights that the discussions generated by the formal planning efforts at PennDOT led managers to: (1) increase their systematic thinking about the future of the organization and the environment in which it operates, (2) engage in learning and discussion about priorities and best practices, (3) create consensus around and commitment to strategic initiatives, and (4) broadly communicate direction, overall strategy, priorities, and plans to constituencies inside and outside the organization.

More recent work by Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen (2016) examine strategy implementation (the actual ability to carry out a strategic plan) as a proximate outcome of formal strategic planning. Findings from a structured online questionnaire, used to collect data from 120 public service organizations in Canada, suggest that formal strategic planning has a strong positive relationship with implementation success (i.e., how well a strategic plan has been implemented). The authors also note that the linkage is mediated by managerial involvement. These results highlight the need for more studies that examine the relationship between strategic planning and additional outcomes, such as organizational learning (Bryson, 2010).

High quality strategic planning in the public sector. Similar to strategic planning in the business management context, not all strategic planning in the public sphere is of equal caliber; adherence to certain criteria signal high quality strategic planning practices. It is asserted that strategic planning that is high quality is more likely to result in beneficial outcomes. While the field still grapples with what quality strategic planning actually constitutes (Bryson et al., 2018), the following criteria offer insights on indicators of high-quality strategic planning in the public sector. The following features expand upon those discussed in the management realm but are not exhaustive.

Inclusive. Like quality strategic plans in the private sector, inclusivity is instrumental in the government. However, inclusivity in this sector expands beyond personnel, also incorporating varied methods of analysis. Poister (2010) contends that if planning is to be done well, strategy needs to be created by a wide swath of personnel, including top executives, line managers, and actual planning professionals.

Measurable. Expanding upon Poister (2010)'s support of employing multiple methodologies in the strategic planning process, Hendrick (2003) highlights that strategic plans

14

need to have some element of measurability. Research illustrates that strategic planning is more likely to be successful in departments that engage in more extensive monitoring practices and have plans that possess clear and easily measurable objectives (Hendrick, 2003).

Action-Oriented. As evident in the definitions of strategic planning in the public sector, quality strategic plans should be actionable. In their review of strategic planning over the past decade, Albrechts and Balducci (2013) espouse that strategic planning in the public sector is action- or project-oriented. Moreover, Hatry (2002) observes that strategic planning becomes more meaningful when organizations not only identify desired outcomes but also develop strategies to achieve them.

Contextually Responsive. Context responsivity is a key feature of high-quality strategic planning. In their study involving interviews with representatives of fourteen cabinet-level federal agencies, Long and Franklin (2004) note that the top-down, one-size-fits-all approach, that was formerly required by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), reduced agencies' abilities to customize strategic planning efforts to their needs. This in turn restricted the agencies' efforts to adapt and learn. As such, strategic plans should be contextually flexible, allowing for modification based upon circumstance (Roberts, 2000).

The Need for Strategic Planning in the Evaluation Context

Like any field, evaluation is faced with several shortcomings, many of which might be remedied through the integration of strategic planning principles. For example, Preskill and Mack (2013) observe five deficiencies currently present in the practice of evaluation. First, they note that most program evaluations focus strictly on one program and are not "designed to answer important strategic questions within and across programs" (p. 5). This results in a

disjointed and uncoordinated expenditure of resources that are siloed from one program to the next.

Second, Preskill and Mack (2013) assert that little alignment exists between the types of evaluation data being collected and the needs for making strategic and organizational decisions. For the most part, there is a lack of coordination between data collection initiatives and making strategic decisions, which promotes inefficiency. Additionally, the authors indicate that the foci of evaluations are largely ad hoc, failing to reflect the needs of the organization. Since a substantial portion of program evaluation is conducted at the end of a program, there is limited opportunity to make mid-course corrections to improve programmatic functioning.

Moreover, Preskill and Mack (2013) note that most evaluation does not receive proper budgetary allocation. The lack of resource allocation leaves the work underfunded and lacking critical resources. Finally, the authors contend that most organizations lack internal infrastructure to "capture, store, access, and share learnings from evaluations" (p. 6). Thus, few organizations possess the infrastructure to fully take advantage of learning and acting upon evaluation findings.

Based on the understanding of strategic planning gleaned from the business management and public sector literature, it appears applying the concept to the field of evaluation may constitute a promising practice to mitigate these issues and potentially usher in a wave of additional benefits.

Strategic Planning in the Evaluation Context

Little direction is currently available regarding planning evaluation across numerous programs/initiatives over time. In the evaluation planning literature, most resources and scholarship cater to the design of discrete studies that produce one or more reports, often conducted by a person external to the organization that is implementing the target programs

16

(Scheirer, 2012). Moreover, Scheirer (2012) asserts there is not yet a unifying framework that brings together the various methods for evaluating a program(s) in a single evaluation plan.

Existing literature does offer some insights on evaluating strategy; which is sometimes also called "strategic evaluation". Although a similar term, evaluating strategy differs from both project evaluation (Patrizi & Patton, 2010) and strategic evaluation planning. While the evaluation of strategy does focus on evaluation at the entire agency level, this concept specifically examines an organization's overall mission and strategy (Patton, 2018), rather than systematically evaluating the numerous programs housed within that organization.

While there are no academic publications dedicated to exploring strategic evaluation planning specifically, the practice is referenced several times within the current body of evaluation literature. Perhaps the first mention of creating strategic evaluation plans comes from Preskill and Portzline (2008), in which the authors articulate the process for developing and implementing an evaluation system. In this context, strategic evaluation planning is cited as the second task in "establishing a direction" (p. 3) for an evaluation system. The authors highlight that strategic evaluation plans "describe how, when, by whom, and to what extent various programs, services, processes, or policies will be evaluated" (p. 3). They expand upon this definition, noting that the plan's development should involve an array of stakeholders who have insights on the program's need for evaluation, the ideal timing, the frequency that evaluation is needed, and the appropriate methodology to utilize.

The same year, Preskill and Boyle (2008) include strategic evaluation planning as an element of their Multidisciplinary Model of Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB). In their model, the authors identify strategic evaluation planning as one "sustainable evaluation practice" that may be used to fortify an ECB effort. Preskill and Boyle (2008) note that not all initiatives are

suitable for strategic evaluation planning. For example, they assert when creating a strategic evaluation plan, it is vital to consider: 1) the length of time the program(s) has operated, 2) what kinds of decisions will be made from the findings, and 3) how frequently the program(s) is offered.

Definitional alignment across business management, public sector, and evaluation. Although the definition of strategic planning in the evaluation field, offered by Preskill and Portzline (2008) is less theoretical and more practitioner-oriented, it substantially aligns with the definitions in the business management and public-sector literature. All three definitions indicate that strategic planning has a role to play in decision-making. While Bryson (2010) and Wolf and Floyd (2017) are more explicit in stating this, the definitions in the evaluation space include the notion that strategic planning is meant to inform "what changes are needed," implying there is an essence of decision-making inherent in the process. Additionally, all three fields indicate that strategic planning is a continuous process, that periodically necessitates formal review and adaptation. Finally, each conceptualization of strategic planning is rooted in action. Specifically, in the evaluation context, the primary action is the implementation of the outlined evaluations.

Strategic evaluation planning guiding frameworks. In the current evaluation landscape, it is unclear how evaluators and organizations engage in strategic evaluation planning, if at all. Preliminary systematic searches of the primary academic evaluation journals (e.g., *Evaluation, American Journal of Evaluation, Evaluation Review, Evaluation and Program Planning)*, as well as several online evaluation practitioner blogs (e.g., Better Evaluation) did not render relevant insight on the practice of strategic evaluation planning.

However, through conversations with other evaluators, several instances of strategic evaluation planning have been discovered. Although these processes seem to be similar, they

have different names and appear to use different terminology. Additionally, only some of these efforts leverage formal guiding frameworks. For example, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers formal guidance for creating Strategic Evaluation Plans (SEP). FSG, a consulting firm, created a framework for building a Strategic Learning and Evaluation System (SLES). Recently, the public sector is abuzz with "learning agendas" given the passage of the Foundations for Evidence Based Policymaking Act of 2018 recommends the practice. While each of these formal guiding frameworks are distinct, they also share substantial similarities.

   CDC's Strategic Evaluation Planning (SEP) framework. The CDC seemingly provides the most robust resources and information on strategic evaluation planning. CDC's National Asthma Control Program (NACP) published an educational resource, "Learning and Growing Through Evaluation," that offers a six-step framework for building strategic evaluation plans (CDC, 2010). These materials are accessible online, free of charge, and are intended for use by state and territorial public health departments, and groups that focus on improving asthma management practices.

   In these materials, strategic evaluation planning is described as the creation of a strategic evaluation plan, which can be thought of as a "program's evaluation portfolio" (CDC, 2010, p. 2-2). The guide goes on to define the strategic evaluation plan as a document that "lays out the rationale, general content, scope, and sequence of the evaluations to be conducted during [the] cooperative agreement funding cycle" (normally five years; CDC, 2010, p. 2-2). The guide asserts that "over time, the set of evaluations will show how well a program is working and what changes are needed to make the program work better" (p. 2-2). Additionally, the documents contend that strategic evaluation plans should address all major program components and be reviewed and updated (as needed) each year.

The CDC draws critical distinctions between strategic evaluation plans and an individual evaluation plan. The materials note that a strategic evaluation plan is a proposal for how multiple evaluations will be conducted and coordinated over a funding period, which is often five years. This includes developing high-level details about what each individual evaluation may look like, such as potential evaluation questions and data collection methods, as a mechanism to gauge the scope, timing, and resources required. Conversely, an individual evaluation plan focuses on only *one* of the numerous evaluations proposed in the strategic evaluation plan. An individual evaluation plan provides more depth than is reflected in the strategic evaluation plan about how the evaluation will be implemented; furthermore, the membership of the teams tasked with developing the respective plans differ. Overall, the key difference is that in strategic evaluation planning the emphasis is on "looking at which aspects of a program are most important to evaluate given resource constraints, and how to prioritize and sequence those evaluations that are chosen to do" (p. 2-25).

This six-step framework includes establishing a strategic evaluation planning team, describing the program, prioritizing the various activities to be evaluated, estimating resources needed, developing a cross-evaluation strategy, and developing a "communications plan" for the final product (CDC, 2010). Although the CDC's framework does not directly reference the guidelines for strategic planning proposed in the private and public sector, it does correspond with, and expands upon, the private and public sector literature. Each highlights the importance of direction setting, using a variety of data collection mechanisms, being mindful of key stakeholders, and emphasizing how the process should inform decision making, action, and continuous monitoring of results. To date, there has been no empirical study of this framework.

FSG's Strategic Learning and Evaluation System (SLES) Framework. Put forth in

2013, a Strategic Learning and Evaluation System is intended to provide organizations, mostly

philanthropic foundations, with a tool to be more systematic, coordinated, and intentional when

measuring their impact (Preskill & Mack, 2013). The SLES contains four main components: (1)

Evaluation Vision, (2) Strategy and Focus, (3) Monitoring and Evaluation Activities, and (4)

Supportive Environment. Together, these elements help organizations boost the timeliness,

credibility, and usefulness of their evaluation practice. Explaining these four components,

Preskill and Mack (2013) posit that "a strategic approach to evaluation requires a clear vision for

evaluation; a culture that fosters individual, group, and organizational learning; a compelling and

cogent strategy; coordinated evaluation and learning activities; and a supportive environment"

(p. 6). Ideally, these elements ensure that learning and evaluation activities reflect and promote

the organization's most current thinking.

FSG provides further step-by-step guidance on how to navigate each of these four

elements via a free, online PDF titled, "Building a Strategic Learning and Evaluation System for

Your Organization." Additionally, they offer full consultation services to their clients to coach

them through this four to six-month process. No empirical study of this framework has yet

occurred.

Strategic Learning Agendas. Strategic learning agendas constitute a fairly recent

practice that responds to a growing awareness that learning and evidence-based decision-making

are vital for improving organizational and programmatic effectiveness (USAID, 2017). As

defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), a learning agenda is "a set of broad

questions directly related to the work that an agency conducts that, when answered, enables the

agency to work more effectively and efficiently, particularly pertaining to evaluation, evidence,

and decision-making" (Office of Management and Budget, 2017, p.1). Additionally, learning agendas prioritize an organization's questions in the short and long-term and are intended to promote more efficient operations (USAID, 2017).

In 2017, USAID published a landscape analysis of learning agendas. Their six-month in-depth exploration of learning agenda includes 60 interviews with staff from 20 USAID bureaus and staff from five federal agencies. Through this study, USAID highlights four general steps in the process. These steps include: (1) gathering stakeholders and identifying relevant areas of exploration, (2) curating existing research, (3) formulating and prioritizing questions, and (4) developing a plan to address the questions. While neither explicitly nor solely used for planning evaluations within an organization, learning agendas certainly fulfill many of the same intentions that strategic evaluation plans do, such as improving the coordination of information to assist decision-making.

Potential benefits of strategic evaluation. Besides mitigating some of the challenges faced by the field of evaluation, strategic planning may also usher in a whole host of other benefits. These include but are not limited to: (1) promoting evaluation process use, (2) streamlining resource allocation, (3) encouraging wide collaboration, and (4) aligning evaluative expectations.

Strategic evaluation as a mechanism for process use. In the late 1990s the idea of process use emerged to address the notion that evaluation activities, instead of an evaluation's findings, influence the individuals and the organization involved in the evaluation (Alkin & King, 2016). Accordingly, Patton (1997) formally defined process use as "changes in thinking and behavior...that occur among those involved in the evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process" (p. 90). He elaborated, noting "changes in program or

organizational procedures and culture may also be manifestations of process impacts" (Patton, 1998, p. 225).

With this definition in mind, the act of engaging in strategic evaluation planning initiatives greatly aligns with the field's conceptualization of process use. As cited by all three previously discussed strategic evaluation planning frameworks, the process of engaging in strategic evaluation planning intends to affect programmatic and organizational procedures, striving to cultivate a culture that embraces evaluation. As such, strategic evaluation planning has tremendous potential for being a mechanism to promote process use.

Furthermore, Preskill, Zuckerman, and Matthews (2003) posit that through the process of evaluation, individuals construct knowledge and develop a shared reality by collaborating with others. Strategic evaluation initiatives, as outlined by the three examples of guiding frameworks described above, rely upon inclusive dialogue and reflection to assist individuals in understanding their organization's portfolio of programming, themselves, each other, and the practice of evaluation. From this perspective, strategic evaluation is well-poised to promote process use.

Streamlining organizational resource allocation. Another perceived benefit of strategic evaluation planning pertains to organizational resource allocation, such as staff time, money, and data. It seems logical that systematically planning for evaluation allows an organization to anticipate the data and resources they will need, ensuring that the proper time and energy is invested to promote program planning and improvement (CDC, 2010). Similarly, a strategic evaluation plan may also increase confidence that evaluation resources are being used efficiently and effectively (Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Preskill & Mack, 2013).

Opportunity for collaboration. The act of creating a strategic evaluation plan also presents an opportunity for an organization to engage in an inclusive and participatory dialogue. The process has potential to build not only relationships across departments and programs, but also cultivate a shared understanding of an organization's objectives and need for evaluation. Since strategic evaluation plans should be revisited periodically (CDC, 2010), strategic evaluation planning constitutes a continuous process that can hopefully foster a culture that values evaluation (Preskill & Mack, 2013).

Alignment in expectations. Strategic evaluation planning may also reinforce why evaluation is important, how it will be used, and who stands to benefit most, thus aligning the expectations of a wide array of stakeholders (Preskill & Mack, 2013). Communicating a clear strategic evaluation plan has the potential to mitigate confusion and prevent further misunderstandings regarding how evaluation is meant to be conducted and used. Preskill and Boyle (2008) assert that creating a strategic evaluation plan may enhance sustainable evaluation practice by promoting a clearer vision as to why evaluations are commissioned at specific times.

The Current Study

The current study builds on strategic planning literature from the business management sphere, public sector, and evaluation field to explore how organizations and individuals are thinking strategically about evaluation. To guide this exploration, a three-stage understanding of strategic evaluation planning was devised. This conceptualization was based on four preliminary scoping interviews, with eight individuals. *Figure 1* presents a simplified visual of the three stages.

1. Decision to undergo or adopt a strategic evaluation initiative

2. Engagement in the strategic evaluation planning process

3. Implementation of the devised strategic evaluation plan
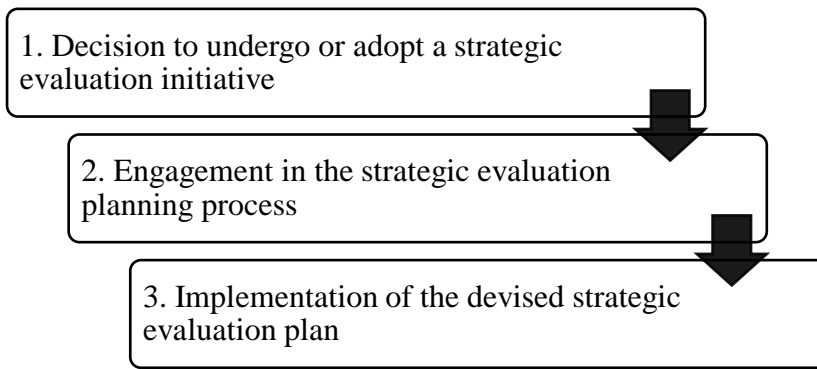
Figure 1. Three stages of strategic evaluation

Stage 1: decision to undergo or adopt a strategic evaluation. Perceived as the first stage of Strategic Evaluation, this step is concerned with *why* a strategic evaluation initiative was adopted and *what purpose* it seeks to serve. This phase may involve the actual *design* of a guiding strategic evaluation framework. Various "frameworks" may include: the CDC's Strategic Evaluation Planning framework, Strategic Learning and Evaluation Systems (SLES), learning agendas, and more.

This stage takes place at a macro-level, involving stakeholders who make organization-wide decisions or have specific informational needs, across programs and time. This might include entities such as funders, organizational leadership, external consulting agencies, or external evaluators.

Stage 2: engagement in the strategic evaluation planning process. This step involves the enactment of the strategic evaluation initiative or framework to devise an actual plan to strategically evaluate the initiatives within an organization. This is a process-oriented step, resulting in the creation of a document that highlights how the strategy will be carried out. Sometimes this step is based upon a formal framework, such as the CDC's framework or SLES, other times it may just be a generic initiative.

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Presumably, this effort will entail collaboration between whomever initiated the strategic evaluation process, those actively involved in the programs needing evaluation, and the individuals tasked with implementing the strategic evaluation.

Stage 3: implementation of the strategic evaluation plan. In the third stage of strategic evaluation, the organization implements the plans outlined in the strategic evaluation document in context to conduct evaluation activities across their various programs/initiatives over time. This stage primarily includes: internal organizational staff, program directors, and hired evaluators.

Research Questions

With these stages of strategic evaluation planning in mind, the current study sought to address five main lines of inquiry.

1. **Current Landscape.** What evidence of strategic evaluation planning or similar practices currently exist in the field (e.g., strategic evaluation plans, learning agendas, etc.)?

    a. What are similarities and differences across adopted strategic evaluation initiatives, formal guiding frameworks, or other practices that overlap with critical features of strategic evaluation planning?

2. **Stage One: Decision to Undergo Strategic Evaluation.** What factors contribute to the decision to undergo a strategic evaluation initiative (e.g., motivations, desired outcomes, values)?

3. **Stage Two: Engagement in the Strategic Evaluation Planning Process.** How does the strategic evaluation process occur and what are the main components associated

with engaging in the strategic evaluation planning process (e.g., personnel involved, timing)?

    a. What barriers, facilitators, and benefits, if any, exist as a part of the process?

4. **Stage Three: Implementation of the Strategic Evaluation Plan.** How do individuals implement the strategic evaluation plan within their organizations/programs?

    a. What barriers, facilitators, and benefits, if any, exist as a part of the implementation process?

5. **Unique Contribution.** What unique added-value, if any, does the process or implementation of strategic evaluation planning offer the field of evaluation?

Chapter 2: Methods

To address the research questions posed in Chapter 1, the current study used an exploratory concurrent multi-phase mixed-methods design, incorporating two phases. Phase I included three sub-studies: Study One was primarily qualitative, Study Two was quantitative in nature, and Study Three utilized qualitative methods. Given the lack of evaluation-specific literature on this topic, Study One was exploratory, with findings from this study informing the design and analysis of Study Two and Study Three. Phase II was a one-site embedded qualitative case study. This study provided additional depth on the topic to compliment the breadth offered in Study One (see Figure 2). Phase II occurred concurrently with Phase I.
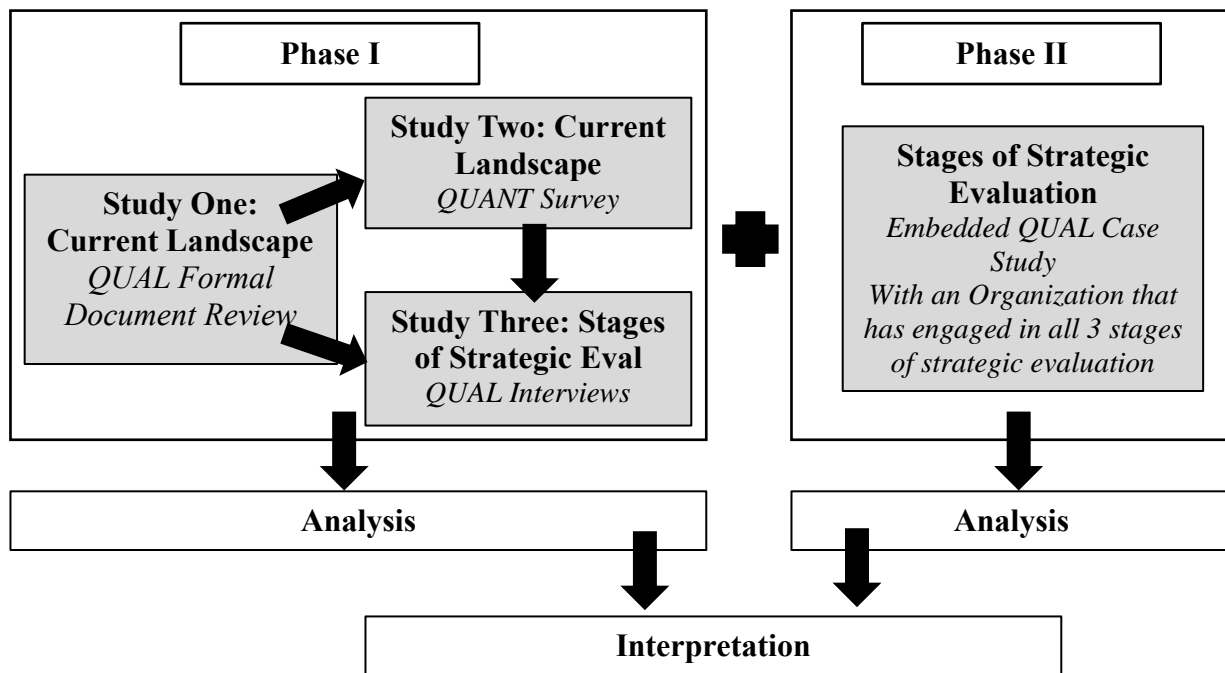
Figure 2: Overview of Mixed Methods Design

Phase I

    Study One: document review. As the first data collection method of the three nested within Phase I of the research study, the formal document review had three main objectives: (1) develop an understanding of the current landscape of strategic evaluation initiatives, (2) identify the critical features of strategic evaluation initiatives, and (3) inform the terminology for the design and development of the subsequent sub-studies (Study Two and Study Three). A document review was selected for this study due to the method's ability to provide background and context on strategic evaluation, as well as raise additional questions that can be asked in later phases of the research (Bowen, 2009). As Yin (2009) states, document reviews provide broad coverage, allowing the researcher to cover a wide span of time, many events, and numerous settings. These attributes were ideal for the study's intent—to develop an understanding of the current landscape of strategic evaluation and inform the terminology (e.g., defining characteristics of strategic evaluation planning) used in the proceeding studies' surveys and interviews.

    Procedure. Documents included in this review were selected via a systematic process, using specific search engines, journals, and websites, as well as guided by targeted search terms. Search engines and journals that were leveraged included: WorldCat (the world's largest library catalog), the Claremont College's Honnold Mudd Library Catalog (online and print), and Google Scholar. Additionally, specific journals that were not already included within the above catalogs, such as *New Directions for Evaluation,* were searched. Evaluation journals outside the United States, specifically the *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation,* were also included. However, only instances of strategic evaluation in the United States were incorporated in the document review. Furthermore, the following websites were explored: Better Evaluation, AEA365 Blog

Archive, and past American Evaluation Association (AEA) conference programs archived on the AEA website.

Within these platforms, search terms were informed by the identified characteristics of strategic planning in the business management and public sector literature. These terms included: "stakeholder inclusivity in evaluation planning," "context responsivity evaluation planning," and "evaluation planning to increase communication quality." Additional search terms included: "strategic evaluation planning," "evaluating strategically," "evaluation strategic plans," "evaluation strategy," "strategically planning evaluations," "learning and evaluation systems," and "learning and evaluation agendas."

Document sample. According to Bowen (2009), the quality of the documents reviewed should be more of a concern than the quantity. Since the intent of Study One was mainly exploratory and aimed at supporting further strands of the research, the 47 documents identified were deemed to be of sufficient quality for completing the objectives of the study (Bowen 2009). Please see Appendix A for a full list of documents reviewed. The types of documents widely ranged and included: actual strategic evaluation plans, blogs, peer reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and conference presentation abstracts (see Figure 3).

Number of documents
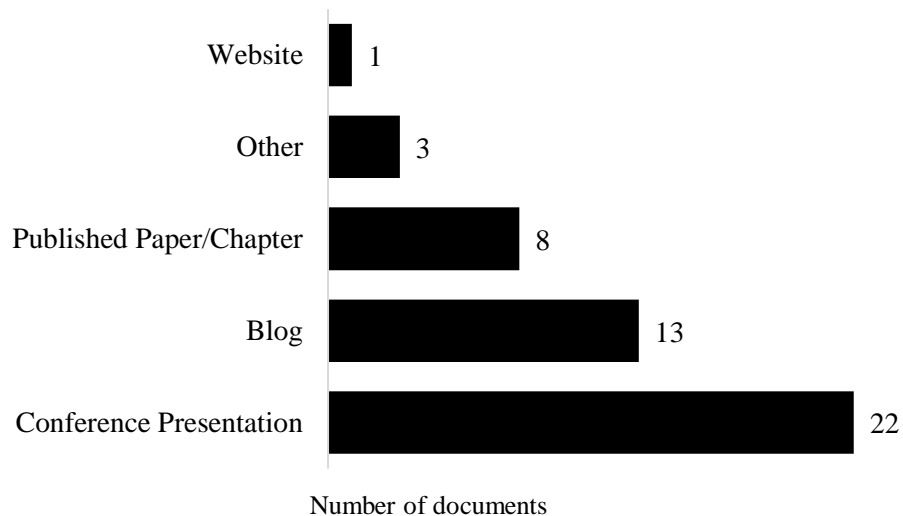
Figure 3. Frequency of document types leveraged during the documents review (*N*=47)

Documents were considered for the review if they were published between 2008 and 2019 (see Figure 4). This timeframe was selected since Preskill and Portzline first published on the topic in 2008. The majority of the documents were produced between 2010 and 2015, with an uptick in relevant documents published between 2018 and 2019.
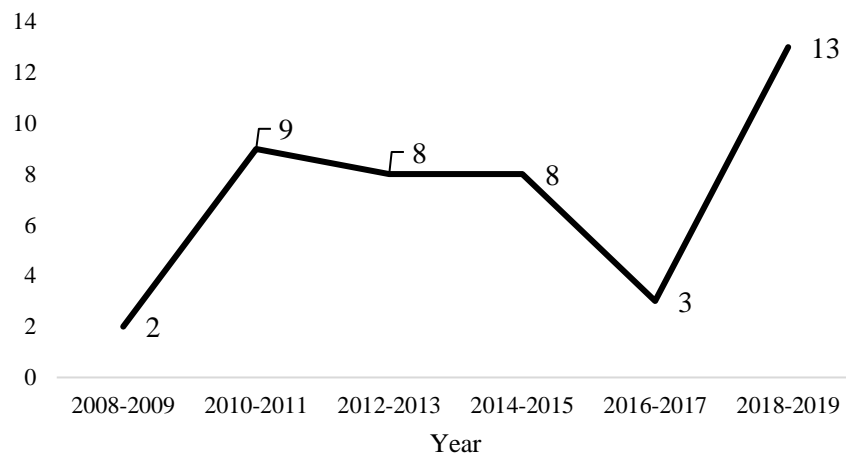
Figure 4. Frequency publication dates of documents reviewed. Four sources had no date of publication referenced.

Document quality was determined using criteria proposed by Bowen (2009). First, documents were rated on the relevance of the document to the inquiry at hand (i.e., strategic evaluation initiatives), as well as on authenticity and credibility. Additionally, the original purpose of the document (i.e., the reason it was produced) and the intended audience were documented.

Study Two: survey. To continue understanding the current landscape of strategic evaluation planning, a structured survey of evaluators, and other individuals who may have

engaged in a strategic evaluation initiative, was developed and disseminated. The purpose of this survey was to (1) obtain an enhanced perspective on the various ways strategic evaluation initiatives are approached in the field and (2) generate a list of individuals to interview in Study Three.

Participants. The researcher attempted to recruit survey participants through numerous channels, contacting nine organization for permission to share the link to the survey. Four organizations agreed to send the survey to their email lists. These included: (1) a random sample of 1,000 AEA members and the AEA Government Evaluator Topical Interest Group (TIG) Listserv, (2) the Evaluation Roundtable Twitter account, which is managed by the Center for Evaluation Innovation, (3) GEO Fund Strategic Learners Listserv, and (4) an informal email list of evaluation directors at foundations which is moderated by Tom Kelly, the Vice President of Knowledge, Evaluation & Learning at the Hawaii Community Foundation. It is unclear exactly how many individuals were in the sampling frame due to the nature of some of the dissemination channels (e.g., there is no way to discern how many individuals saw the Twitter posting).

In total, 196 individuals completed at least 40% of the survey, with 158 individuals completing the entire survey (i.e., 38 participants did not complete the full survey). Within this sample, there were a range of professional roles identified and the participants' years practicing evaluation varied (see Table 1).

Table 1

Survey Participant Characteristics and Frequencies

Respondent Characteristic	Freq (%) ($N = 196$)
Professional Role	
External Evaluator	66 (33.7)
Internal Evaluator	35 (17.9)
Evaluation Officer	31 (15.8)

Program Staff	14 (7.2)
Organizational Leaders	5 (2.5)
Not reported	22 (11.2)
Years Conducting Evaluations	
Less than 1 year	3 (2.0)
1 to 5 years	35 (17.8)
6 to 10 years	31 (15.8)
11 to 15 years	32 (16.2)
16 to 20 years	22 (11.2)
More than 21 years	27 (13.8)
Do not conduct evaluations	5 (2.5)
Not reported	40 (20.7)

Of the 196 participants, 107 (55%) reported that they have engaged in some aspect of strategic evaluation, as defined in the introduction to the survey[1]. Among those who reported engagement, 74 participants (69%) indicated that they were involved in Stage 1 of strategic evaluation, 84 (82%) were involved in Stage 2, and 77 (78%) had engaged in Stage 3. Across the sample, 21 participants (19.6%) had been involved in all three stages. See Figure 4 for a visual depiction of these numbers.

Survey Participants
(N=196)

Yes: Engaged in Strategic Eval
(n=107, 55%)

Engaged in Stage 1
(n=74, 69%)

Engaged in Stage 2
(n=84, 82%)

Engaged in Stage 3
(n=77, 78%)

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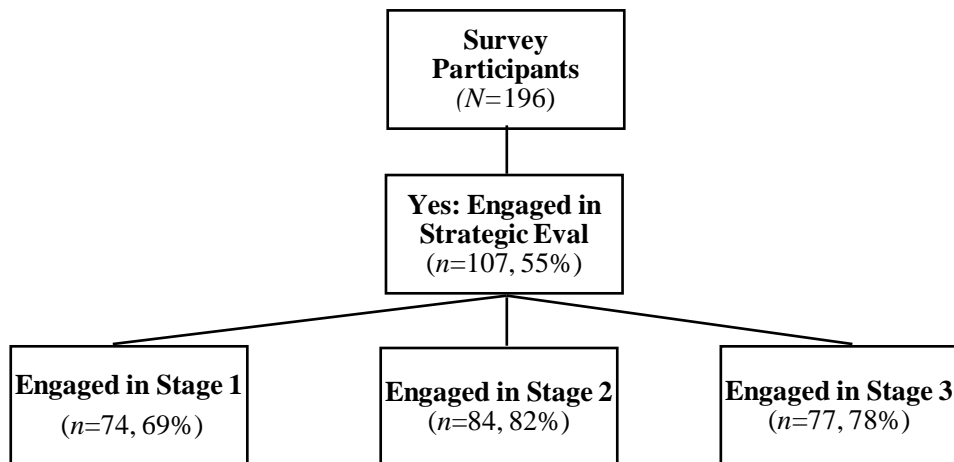
[1] A comprehensive planning process that guides and coordinates how evaluations are prioritized and sequenced across the many projects/programs/initiatives within an organization, over a determined period of time (e.g., 5 years).

Figure 4. Breakdown of survey participants.

One of the primary objectives of this survey was to generate a list of ten individuals to interview in Study Three. In total, 38 participants (36%) provided their contact information for the purpose of engaging in a follow-up interview.

Procedure. Survey recruitment occurred in multiple stages. First, the researcher submitted a research request to AEA administrators to access a random sample of 1,000 AEA members as well as the complete mailing lists for the Government Evaluator and Nonprofit and Foundations TIGs. Concurrently, the researcher solicited interest from eight other relevant professional networks and organizations regarding their ability to share the survey link.

Once approval was granted from a selection of the contacted organizations (listed in the previous section), the researcher disseminated an email invitation and survey link to the participants (see Appendix B). Participants were informed that their data were confidential and that the research was being conducted by a PhD student at Claremont Graduate University. When a respondent clicked on the survey link, they were taken to a page that welcomed them and included the consent form, which they were asked to read and complete. When they finished the survey, they were thanked for their help. Invitees had three weeks to participate (October 15, 2019 to October 30, 2019); a multiple reminder approach was used to boost response rates (Dillman, 2000).

Measures. Using data gleaned from the Study One document review, an online survey was created in the online platform, Qualtrics. During the survey creation process, cognitive interviewing was leveraged to increase the reliability and validity of the data. A cognitive interviewing plan was designed to identify and analyze sources of response error in the survey

(Willis, 2004), as well as to understand whether respondents comprehended the question, as intended by the researcher (Collins, 2003).

For the study, a hybrid approach to cognitive interviewing was adopted, leveraging both think-aloud and verbal probing (Willis, 2005) approaches. Survey respondents were first asked to read the instructions and questions silently to themselves and openly verbalized their thought processes aloud throughout. Probing questions were concurrently integrated at key points in the survey. For example, probing questions were included after the working definition of strategic evaluation planning and the articulation of the three stages of strategic evaluation initiatives.

In total, five individuals were invited to engage in the cognitive interview process and all five of the invited individuals agreed to participate. Participants spanned the public, philanthropic, and academic sectors. The interviews lasted between 35 and 60 minutes, each one providing the researcher with ample insights. The survey draft was modified between each cognitive interview, resulting in five unique survey drafts over the course of the cognitive interview cycle.

Additionally, the survey underwent two rounds of pilot testing, at the conclusion of the cognitive interviews, to improve the measurement tool. In total, 12 colleagues and members of a state health department piloted the survey. These pilot tests provided guidance on the skip logic, question clarity, and formatting of the online survey.

Overall, the final draft of the survey (see Appendix D) presented a working definition of strategic evaluation[2] as well as the three stages of strategic evaluation initiatives, as distilled from Study One. Participants were first asked to report their familiarity with the concept of

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[2] A comprehensive planning process that guides and coordinates how evaluations are prioritized and sequenced across the many projects/programs/initiatives within an organization, over a determined period of time (e.g., 5 years).

strategic evaluation (scale of 1 to 5; very unfamiliar to very familiar) as well as their awareness of similar terms for the practice. From there, participants were introduced to each of the three stages of strategic evaluation planning and asked to report their level of past or current engagement with each stage (scale of 1 to 5; not very involved to very involved). Respondents who were not involved in any strategic evaluation initiatives were asked why they have not previously engaged in such an initiative. When applicable, participants were also asked to identify frameworks or systems they have used to guide their practice of strategic evaluation.

Numerous open-ended questions gauged the process, successes, and challenges faced throughout the participants' experiences with the various stages of strategic evaluation initiatives. Additionally, all participants were asked three demographic questions. Finally, participants who reported engaging in strategic evaluation initiatives were asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview in November 2019.

Study Three: interviews. Using the information gleaned from Study Two, a sample of individuals was selected to engage in follow-up interviews that explored the three stages of strategic evaluation more deeply. The main objective of the interviews was to obtain a broad understanding of how individuals decide to undergo a strategic evaluation effort, what engagement in the strategic evaluation planning process entails, and how implementation of a strategic evaluation initiative unfolds.

Participants. One of the primary objectives of Study Two was to generate a list of ten individuals to interview in Study Three. In alignment with Creswell and Poth's (2017) guidance, this sample size allowed the researcher to explore the phenomena of strategic evaluation planning within several contexts. In total, 38 of the 107 eligible participants (36%) provided their

contact information for the purposes of engaging in a future interview (See Figure 5). From this

group of volunteers, a purposive sample of 12 interview participants were initially invited.

Survey Participants (*N*=196)

Yes: Engaged in Strategic Eval (*n*=107, 55%)

Agreed to an Interview (*n*=38, 36%)

Stage 1 (*n*=26, 68%)

Stage 2 (*n*=32, 84%)

Stage 3 (*n*=33, 87%)
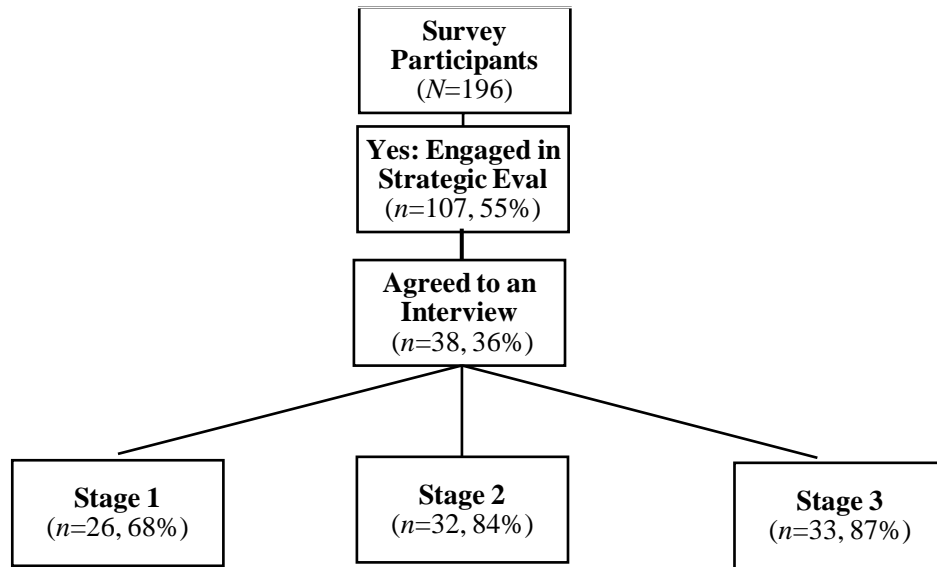
Figure 5. Breakdown of survey participants who volunteered for interviews.

The selection criteria to determine who to invite for an interview was three-pronged.

First, the researcher purposively sampled participants from each of the three stages of strategic

evaluation initiatives (see Table 2 for the spread of participants by stage engagement). Second,

individuals were selected based upon the setting in which their strategic evaluation initiative took

place and the professional role they assumed during the initiative (see Table 2 for a full range of

settings). Third, the depth and richness of respondents' open-ended commentary was taken into

consideration, with those providing more detail being selected for an interview. In total, 12

survey participants were invited to an interview. Of these, 10 accepted the invitation and

completed.

Three additional individuals (*n*=3) were invited to engage in interviews, following the

AEA annual conference in November 2019. After attending a panel session about learning

agendas, the researcher felt it would be fruitful to extend an invitation to these panelists, based on their expertise with a relevant strategic evaluation initiative. One of these individuals (n=1) was able to participate in an interview.

Table 2

Interview Participant Characteristics

Participant	Stage(s) Engaged	Role During Strategic Evaluation	Setting of Strategic Evaluation	Accepted Interview Invitation
1	Stage 1 and 2	Evaluation Officer	Foundation	X
2	Stage 1 and 2	Evaluation Officer	Foundation	--
3	Stage 1 and 2	Internal Evaluator	NGO	X
4	Stage 2	Internal Evaluator	Nonprofit	X
5 & 6[3]	Stage 2 and 3	Program Staff	Higher Education	X
7	Stage 3	Internal Evaluator	Nonprofit	X
8	Stage 3	External Evaluator	UN Agency	X
9	All Stages	Evaluation Officer	Foundation	X
10	All Stages	Internal Evaluator	State Government	--
11	All Stages	Evaluation Officer	Foundation	X

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[3] During this interview, the invited interviewee brought a colleague who was also highly engaged in the strategic evaluation initiative at the same organization.

Participant	Stage(s) Engaged	Role During Strategic Evaluation	Setting of Strategic Evaluation	Accepted Interview Invitation
12	All Stages	Evaluation Director	Federal Government	X
13	All Stages	Evaluation Officer	Federal Government	X
14	All Stages	Evaluation Director	Federal Government	X
15	All Stages	Evaluation Professor	Higher Education	--
16	All Stages	Evaluation Director	Federal Government	--

Procedure. In Study Three, interviewees were recruited via an email invitation to participate. The email included details regarding the length of the interview, topics to be discussed, and a link to Square Up, an appointment scheduling website (see Appendix B for the emails). One day prior to the scheduled interview, participants received an email reminder with the consent form which was also reviewed at the start of the interview (see Appendix C). Interviews were conducted through the conference-calling platform, FreeConferenceCall.com or in person at the 2019 AEA annual conference in Minneapolis, MN. All interview audio was recorded with participant permission. Interviews took place between November 15, 2019 and December 9, 2019.

Measures. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed that offered variations in questioning, depending upon the participants' survey responses and self-reported engagement with strategic evaluation (see Appendix H for the interview protocol). In alignment with Preskill, Zuckerman, and Matthews' (2003) guidance on studying process use, the protocols were

specially designed to have interviewees think deeply about their experiences with strategic evaluation initiatives and the learning that has resulted from those experiences, especially since participants were asked to recall experiences from several months or years before.

Schwarz and Oyserman (2001) indicate that "Recalling relevant behaviors from memory often takes considerable time, yet most research interviews allocate less than a minute to each question asked. More problematic, frequent behaviors are poorly represented in memory, and individual instances are difficult to retrieve, even with considerable time and effort" (p. 129). To overcome this limitation, an innovative interview method called the DATA model was used.

The DATA model for reflective practice is comprised of four stages: (D)escribe, (A)nalyze, (T)heorize, and (A)ct (Peters, 2009). This interview framework is intended to assist practitioners and researchers become more aware of their practice and more knowledgeable of how to improve it (Smith, Barlow, Peters, & Skolits, 2015). The four stages of the DATA model involve identifying one's assumptions, beliefs, values, and motivations, and contemplating how they are linked with practice (Peters, 2009). Utilizing the DATA framework is an introspective, action-based process that is iterative in nature. Reflection is not linear, requiring a recursive process where the interviewee reflects on each of the stages of the model at different times during the process (Smith, Barlow, Peters, & Skolits, 2015). Using the DATA model aided the interviewees in thinking more critically about their previous experiences with strategic evaluation planning as they progressed through the interview.

Phase II: Case Study

The purpose of Phase II was to gain a deeper understanding of how individuals within an organization experience the three stages of strategic evaluation. Thus, a one-site embedded case study (Yin, 2009) was selected to obtain in-depth understanding of strategic evaluation initiatives

across a single institution. A case study was chosen due to this study's intent to describe a phenomenon (i.e., strategic evaluation planning) and the real-life context in which it occurs. In addition, a case study was useful in exploring the unclear outcomes associated with strategic evaluation initiatives (Yin, 2009).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Asthma Control Program[4] served as the case study's sample frame. The case study targeted (1) evaluation team members and affiliates from the Asthma and Community Health Branch (ACHB) and (2) CDC National Asthma Control Program (NACP) grantees from six state health departments (see Figure 6).

The ACHB evaluation team and the six NACP state health department grantees were selected as the ideal case study for several reasons. First, as evidenced by the literature reviewed in Chapter 1, ACHB has published some of the seminal materials on strategic evaluation planning. Moreover, strategic evaluation planning is a mandatory element of the granting process for states seeking funding as a part of the NACP. As such, CDC's ACHB is one of the few verified entities that are actively and openly engaging in this process. Second, through professional connections, the researcher was able to informally gain access to the individuals within the CDC who have worked extensively with strategic evaluation.

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[4] This case study was in no way formally associated with the CDC
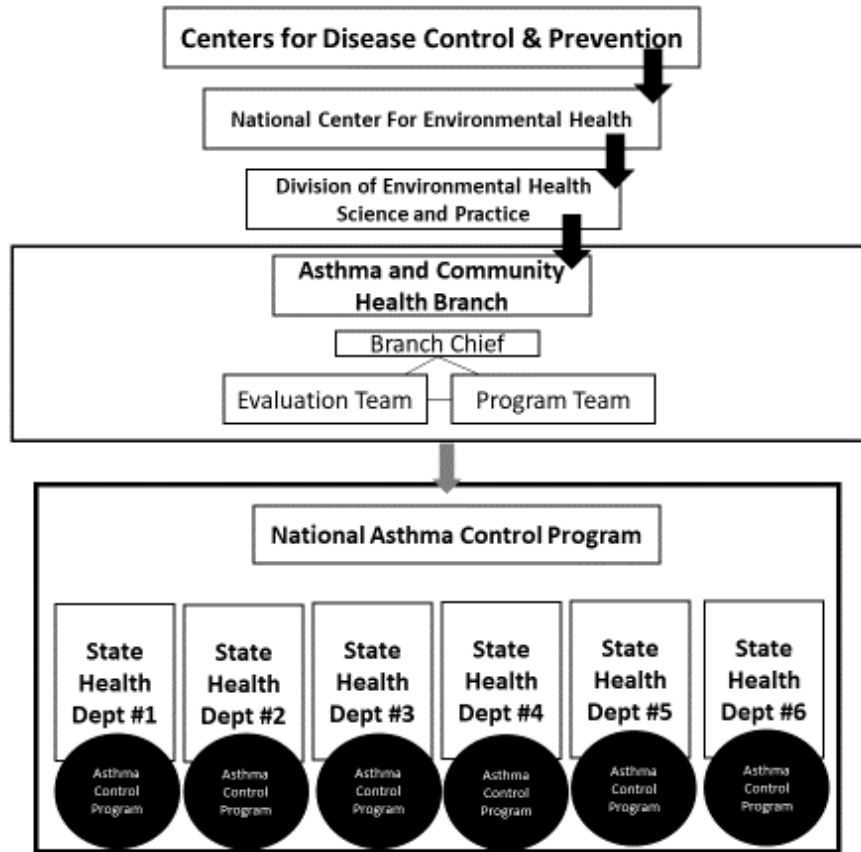
Figure 6. Visual depiction of the case study sample organizational structure

Participants. The case study targeted two types of participants (1) evaluation team members and affiliates from the ACHB and (2) CDC National Asthma Control Program (NACP) grantees from six state health departments. These two varieties of participants were selected based upon their expertise with the three identified stages of strategic evaluation initiatives.

Asthma and Community Health Branch Evaluation Team Members. Current and past evaluation team members and affiliates from the ACHB were recruited based upon their familiarity with Stage One: Decision to Undergo Strategic Evaluation. In total, six individuals (*N*=6) were identified and agreed to participate in the interview portion of the case study. These six individuals played various roles in the creation of CDC's Learning and Growing Strategic

Evaluation Planning documentation (see Table 3 for a description of the participants' roles in the

process). Only one of the interviewed individuals is still an employee of the CDC.

Table 3

Asthma and Community Health Branch Interview Participant Characteristics

Participant	Role During Strategic Evaluation	Accepted Interview Invitation
1	Evaluation Technical Assistant	X
2	Evaluation Technical Assistant	X
3	Evaluation Technical Assistant	X
4	External Evaluation Consultant	X
5	Evaluation Team Lead	X
6	Branch Chief	X

State Health Departments. To learn more about Stage 2: Engagement in the Strategic

Evaluation Planning Process and Stage 3: Implementing the Strategic Evaluation, the researcher

recruited participants from across the state health departments that were NACP grantees. Ideally,

representation was to be elicited from a heterogeneous mix of states with respect to geographic

location and level of engagement with the strategic evaluation planning process. However, this

was not possible due to participant availability. Additionally, an evaluator, epidemiologist, and

program coordinator from each of the six states was invited to participate in the case study to

provide insights on the strategic evaluation planning process and implementation efforts.

However, due to turnover, this was not always possible (see Table 4 for highlights). In total, 11

states were invited to participate and six ($n=6$) accepted the invitation.

Table 4

State Health Department Interview Participant Characteristics

State	Region	Number of Interviewees	Accepted Interview Invitation
1	East	3	X
2	East	--	--
3	East	--	--
4	Midwest	1	X
5	Midwest	3	X
6	Midwest	--	--
7	Midwest	--	--
8	Mountain West	3	X
9	South	--	--
10	Southwest	3	X
11	Southwest	3	X

Procedure. Case study recruitment occurred in multiple stages. First, the researcher was granted access to a NACP grantee listserv and sent an email soliciting participation in the case study. After this tactic proved ineffective, a chain-referral sampling (Berg, 1988) technique was adopted to engage participants from the ACHB Evaluation Team. To recruit state health departments, targeted emails were crafted and sent directly to program coordinators at the selected states. The contact information for these program coordinators was found online on the NACP website.

44

Both types of case study participants were recruited via an email invitation. This invitation included details regarding the scope of the case study, topics to be discussed during the interviews, and a disclaimer regarding the study's lack of formal affiliation with the CDC. Once participants agreed to engage in the study, the researcher shared a link to Square Up, an appointment scheduling website. One day prior to the scheduled interview, participants received an email reminder with the consent form which was also reviewed at the start of the interview (see Appendix I). Interviews were conducted through the conference-calling platform, FreeConferenceCall.com or in person at the 2019 AEA annual conference in Minneapolis, MN. All interview audio was recorded with participant permission. Interviews took place between November 16, 2019 and January 7, 2020.

Measures. The Phase II Case Study leverages one of the most commonly selected data collection methods for case study research, interviews (Yin, 2009). According to Yin (2009), interviews are commonly included in case study research because they are considered targeted and insightful mechanisms for gathering information. Two semi-structured protocols were devised for the interviews; individuals working directly within the ACHB engaged in interviews exploring the decision to undergo a strategic evaluation initiative, while individuals in the state health departments participated in interviews regarding their experiences with planning and implementing the strategic evaluation plans. Both protocols were similar to those devised for the Study Three interviews (see Appendix J and K for the protocols). Additionally, both protocols also leveraged the DATA model, engaging the participants in an exercise to reflect on their experiences with strategic evaluation initiatives.

Chapter 3: Phase I Results

This chapter shares results from the three sub-studies that comprised Phase I of the overall investigation. For each of the three sub-studies within Phase I, the analysis approach and main results are presented.

Study One: Document Review

Analysis approach. The analysis of the document review materials combined elements of content analysis and thematic analysis, involving both a superficial examination and thorough examination of the documents (Bowen, 2009). Content analysis, the process of organizing information into categories related to the main research questions, began with a first-pass review of the compiled documents (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this first step, relevant excerpts of the documents were identified by simply reading through the documents. From there, thematic analysis facilitated pattern recognition within the data, with emerging themes becoming the categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Specifically, this thematic analysis step consisted of a more thorough, focused review of the documents and excerpts. During this thematic analysis, themes pertinent to strategic evaluation and critical features of strategic evaluation planning initiatives emerged. These themes were created iteratively and were refined as the documents and excerpts were reviewed several times. This analysis was conducted by hand, without the use of qualitative analysis software.

Results. In total, three themes were developed as a result of the thematic analysis; these themes were then used to inform the design of the subsequent survey and interview portions of Phase I. The themes were: (1) Terminology, (2) Characteristics of Strategic Evaluation Initiatives, and (3) Perceived Benefits. Each of these themes is explained below.

Terminology. Analysis of the 47 documents was guided by the intention of discovering what terminology was being used in the field to describe the concept of strategic evaluation initiatives. In total, 16 unique terms were identified (see Table 5). Of these, "strategic evaluation planning" was the most common (*n*=9). The fact that affiliates of the CDC authored each of these nine documents explains this high frequency. Additionally, mentions of "learning agendas" (*n*=3) and "monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks" (*n*=3) or "systems" (*n*=2) each appeared a few times within the document review as well.

Additionally, two terms arose from the data that shed light on what strategic evaluation initiatives are not. Both "cluster evaluation" and "strategic evaluation" were found to be concepts with similar purposes and goals as the strategic evaluation initiatives presented in this study, but ultimately each have different processes and practices. Cluster evaluation refers to a practice that seeks to aggregate outcomes from multiple sites or projects, looking across projects to identify common findings (Bitar, Hbeichi, Al-Zou'bi, & Russon, 2015). "Strategic evaluations" were defined as evaluations that address issues of concern to the organization as a whole, such as evaluating an actual organizational strategy. Accordingly, they relate directly to one of the primary objectives of an organization (Wind & Carden, 2015). While both of these ideas may be in alignment with strategic evaluation planning, or could even be integrated into the overall process, they are not synonymous with the concept in question.

Table 5

Terminology identified during the document review

Terms Used (*N*=16)	Frequency
Strategic evaluation plan	9
Learning agenda	3
Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework	3
Learning and evaluation systems	2
Priority setting method/Evaluation prioritization	2
Evaluation agenda	1

Portfolio of proposals	1
Multi-year evaluation plan	1
Evaluation Strategic Plan	1
Evaluation action plans	1
Design, monitoring, evaluation and learning (DMEL) system	1
Portfolio Evaluation Strategy (PES) framework	1
Measurement, learning, and evaluation systems	1
Learning compass	1
Cluster evaluation (not synonymous)	1
Strategic evaluations (not synonymous)	1

Characteristics of strategic evaluation initiatives. The document review also sought to illuminate characteristics of strategic evaluation initiatives. Seventeen of the analyzed documents were coded in relation to this theme. Across these documents, two sub-themes emerged: (1) definitions of strategic evaluation initiatives and (2) steps in the strategic evaluation planning process.

Definitions of Strategic Evaluation Initiatives. Six of the analyzed documents provided unique insight on facets of strategic evaluation initiatives. Table 6 depicts these definitional aspects, each lending insight on how to present the concept in Phase I, Study Two (survey).

Table 6

Identified Definition Terminology

Aspect of Definition	Textual Evidence from Document Review	Source
Coordinated	*"This evaluation function within an organization should be conceived as a unified, interrelated, and coordinated 'mission-support function.'"*	Newcomer & Brass (2016)
Comprehensive & Cross-cutting	*"An overall framework for evaluations across different programs or different evaluations of a single program."*	Better Evaluation (2018)

Inform Learning	*"A comprehensive framework that guides entire organization."*	UN Women (2017)
Intentional	*"Framed by some level of strategic intentionality."*	Patton & Patrizi (2010)
Sequenced	*"Strategically sequence evaluations to augment evaluation capacity building activities"*	Orians, Wilce, & Mercier (2009)

Steps in the Strategic Evaluation Planning Process. Nine of the documents contained insight on elements involved in the process of strategic evaluation planning (see Table 7). Although no single document fully articulated all these steps, when combined, these prescribed steps align closely with the six steps outlined by the CDC. As discussed previously, the steps include: establishing a strategic evaluation planning team, describing the program, prioritizing the various activities to be evaluated, estimating resources needed, developing a cross-evaluation strategy, and developing a "communications plan" for the final product (CDC, 2010).

Table 7

Steps in the Strategic Evaluation Planning Process

Steps in the Strategic Evaluation Planning Process (*N*=9)	Textual Evidence from Document Review	Source
Gather a Team (*n*=2)	*"The SEP process incorporates a participatory evaluation approach and involved forming a strategic evaluation planning team (SEPT) composed of diverse stakeholders to prioritize the CAP activities to be evaluated, design the evaluation plans, and assist with the data analysis and action planning."*	Disler (2017)
Identify and Set Objectives (*n*=1)	*"Strategic planning: (1) taking stock of the situation, (2) picking your targets and setting objectives, (3) formulating your plans"*	Nickols (2014)

Prioritize the Initiatives (*n*=2)	*".... systematically identifying high-priority evaluations to conduct throughout the funding lifecycle."*	Fierro (2010)
Design the Evaluations (*n*=1)	*"1) identifying learning priorities, 2) designing activities to gather information, and 3) intentionally setting aside time to reflect on learnings and use them to adjust initiative design or inform other strategic decisions."*	Parkhurst (2016)
Sequence the Evaluations (*n*=1)	*"....evaluation frameworks embody the up-front thinking and planning that is required to determine exactly what will be monitored on an on-going basis and what will be evaluated from time-to-time, how often these activities will take place, and who will be responsible for what functions."*	Better Evaluation (2018)
Determine Roles and Responsibilities (*n*=1)	*"It should specify the monitoring strategies, any studies, reviews or evaluations to do, with details about data sources, timing, management processes, as well as an overall program theory/logic model."*	C4D Hub/Better Evaluation (nd)
Plan How to Use the Findings (*n*=2)	*"Part of our planning template explicitly requires that the intended users plan for and document how they intend to use the evaluation findings."*	Kuwahara & Wilce (2019)

Perceived Benefits. The final theme that emerged from the thematic analysis of the documents was in relation to the purported positive outcomes associated with undergoing a strategic planning initiative. Fifteen of the documents specifically addressed the potential benefits of strategic evaluation planning (see Table 8). Each of these six identified benefits (see Table 8) correspond with ideas in the literature review presented in Chapter 1, they included: (1)

promoting evaluation process use, (2) streamlining resource allocation, (3) encouraging wide

collaboration, and (4) aligning evaluative expectations.

Table 8

Potential benefits identified during the document review

Potential Benefits	Textual Evidence	Source
Programmatic Learning & Improvement (*n*=9)	*"A more coordinated evaluation approach can allow for more systematic accumulation of evidence on the viability of implementing program theories or interventions in diverse contexts"*	Newcomer & Brass (2016)
Evaluation Capacity (*n*=3)	*"The short-term goals of this process include increasing stakeholder knowledge of evaluation techniques and involvement in the definition of key streams of work and outcomes. Longer-term goals include increasing the relevancy of evaluation, the appreciation for and distinctions between evaluation and monitoring tasks, inter- and intradepartmental coherence, internal capacity among the departments to self-monitor their work, and the articulation of evaluation and research agendas."*	Doll, Foster, Espino, & Smith (2008)
Increased Collaboration (*n*=3)	*"It presents opportunities for learning and cross-departmental collaboration."*	Schenker & Tran (2015)
Overall Efficiency (*n*=3)	*"...outlining a framework and set of practices aimed at helping organization be more systematic, coordinated, and intentional about evaluation. The guide seeks to ensure a better understanding of what, when, why, with whom, and with what resources to evaluate."*	Preskill & Mack (2008)
Resource Allocation (*n*=2)	*".... promotes useful and cost-effective evaluations."*	www.energy.gov

Decision-Making (*n*=2)	*".... ensure that decision-making, planning and growth is informed by strong evidence and knowledge."*	Strong & Field (2014)

Summary. The document review leveraged during Study One provided a clearer understanding of the current landscape of strategic evaluation initiatives and helped identify the critical features of strategic evaluation initiatives. These findings offer emergent insights about how the various aspects of strategic evaluation initiatives work together. Furthermore, these results illuminate how the practice of strategic evaluation initiatives expands upon the benefits already provided by more generalized evaluation planning. For example, the document review positions the prioritization of evaluative initiatives and the sequencing of these evaluations as critical differentiators of strategic evaluation initiatives. Unlike general evaluation planning, strategic evaluation initiatives offer a mechanism to systematically address a program or organization's numerous evaluative foci over time.

Figure 7 offers a preliminary visual depiction of how the various aspects of strategic evaluation initiatives may piece together based upon the findings from the document review. Specifically, Figure 7 summarizes how the steps in the strategic evaluation process relate to the potential benefits of the process.
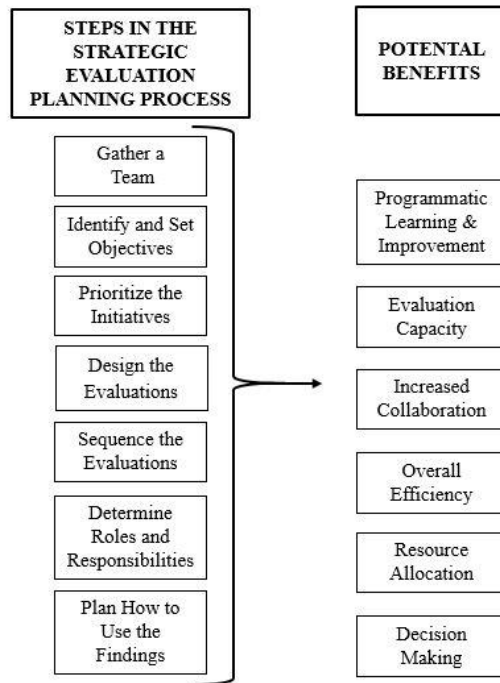
Figure 7. Visual model of Study One findings related to the relationship between steps in the strategic evaluation process and potential benefits of the process

Study Two: Survey

To continue understanding the current landscape of strategic evaluation planning, a brief, structured survey of evaluators, and other individuals who may have engaged in a strategic evaluation initiative, was developed and disseminated. The purpose of this survey was to (1) obtain an enhanced perspective on the various ways strategic evaluation initiatives are approached in the field and (2) generate a list of individuals to interview in Study Three.

Analysis approach. Analysis of the quantitative data began with cleaning of the SPSS data file. Individuals who completed less than 40% of the survey, after taking into consideration the skip logic patterns, were removed from the sample. This involved ensuring that each item was appropriately named and correctly labeled. Analysis of the quantitative survey responses mostly involved descriptive statistics. Frequencies provided deeper insight into the levels of participant

53

familiarity and involvement with strategic evaluation initiatives, as well as characteristics of participant involvement in the work (i.e., setting within which the strategic evaluation initiative occurred, professional role during the initiative).

Open-ended responses. Exploration of the open-ended questions involved Conventional Content Analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Conventional Content Analysis is a flexible method for analyzing text data that involves the subjective interpretation through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. This qualitative analysis approach involved several steps, as outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). Data analysis first began with the researcher skimming through all the data to obtain a sense of the whole. Then the data was read line by line to inductively identify codes and initial impressions. As this process continued, themes and subthemes were determined. The researcher avoided using preconceived categories, instead allowing the themes, and subthemes, to flow from the data. From there, the open-ended responses were re-read, and specific quotes were coded/highlighted within the survey commentary. These highlighted quotes were pasted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet where they were organized based on theme. Using the filter features within Microsoft Excel, each theme was sorted to obtain a quantitative count. This provided a sense of which themes were most salient.

Results. Overall, analysis of the survey data aligned with four of the research questions, and thus the themes centered around four topic areas: (1) Current Landscape of Strategic Evaluation Initiatives, (2) The Decision to Undergo a Strategic Evaluation Initiative, (3) Engagement in the Strategic Evaluation Planning Process, and (4) Implementation of the Strategic Evaluation Plan. Several of these topic areas provided a foundation for the protocols

54

developed for follow-up interviews performed in Study Three, as well as the interview protocols

used in the Phase II case study.

Current landscape. Survey data provided insights on the current use of strategic

evaluation initiatives in the field of evaluation, by exploring (1) survey respondents' familiarity

with the concept, (2) names used for the approach, and (3) domains in which the approach has

been applied by survey respondents.

The first survey questions presented asked participants to reflect on their familiarity with

a working definition of strategic evaluation initiatives[5], as a blanket term, and their awareness of

similar concepts that were derived from Study One (document review). As illustrated in Figure 8,

overall, a modest percentage of participants were very familiar (19%, *n*=37) or familiar with the

concept (26%, *n*=51), while most respondents were neither familiar nor unfamiliar (23%, *n* =43),

or unfamiliar (*n* =61, 31%).
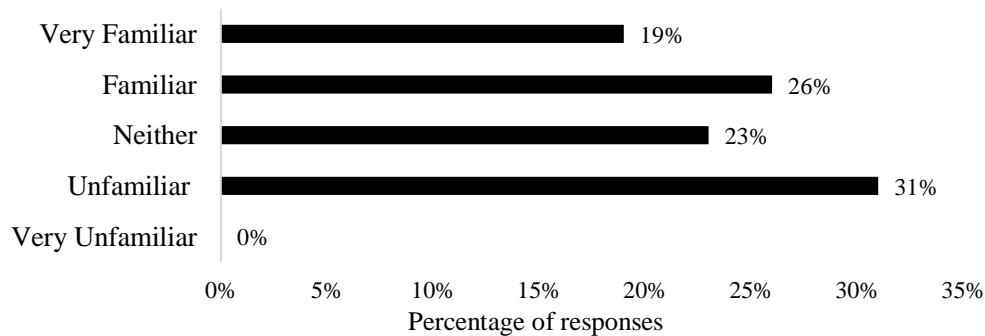
Figure 8. Percentage of participants familiar with the concept of strategic evaluation planning

Many participants had heard of terms that were identified in the document review as

being similar to strategic evaluation initiatives (i.e., as described in the working definition). As

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[5] A comprehensive planning process that guides and coordinates how evaluations are prioritized and sequenced across the many projects/programs/initiatives within an organization, over a determined period of time (e.g., 5 years).

depicted in Figure 9, the majority of respondents had been exposed to monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks (*n* =157, 80%). Approximately half of respondents had heard of learning agendas (*n* =104, 53%) and strategic evaluation plans (*n* =97, 50%).
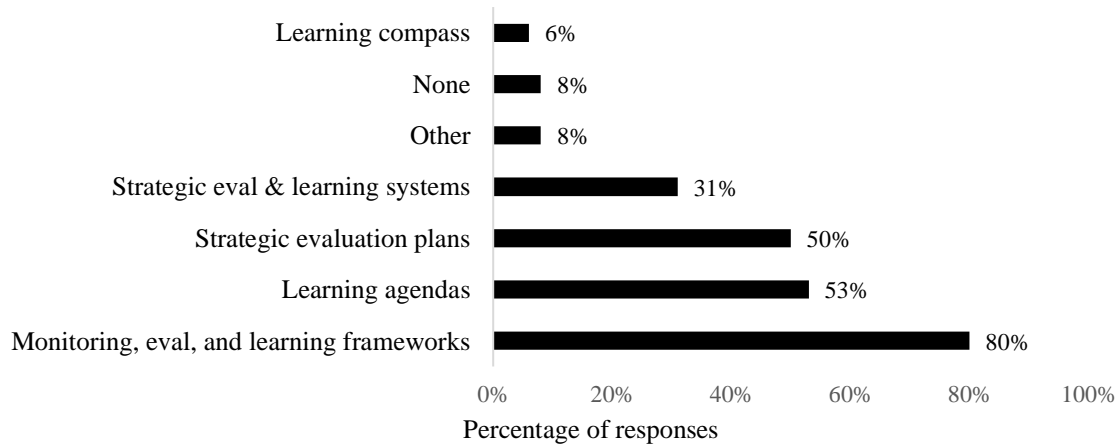
Figure 9. Percentage of participant aware of concepts similar to strategic evaluation

Respondents also cited an array of "other" terms that they viewed as aligning with the working definition of strategic evaluation initiatives. These "other" terms included: Evaluation Plan/Planning (*n* =4), Strategic Planning (*n*=3), Strategic Learning (*n* =2), Logic Model/Theory of Change (*n* =2), Institution Evaluation Policy (*n* =2), Data collection plan (*n* =1), Evaluation strategy (*n* =1), and Organizational Evaluation Plan (*n* =1).

Survey respondents who indicated engagement in a strategic evaluation initiative (*n*=107) were asked some additional questions about the context within which the initiative took place – including the timeframe and sector/setting. As indicated in Figure 10, the majority of respondents noted that the strategic evaluation initiative in which they were most significantly involved began after 2014 (*n* =61, 57%). Of these 61 instances, 10% began in 2019 (*n*=6), 26% started in 2018 (*n*=16), 20% began in 2017 (*n*=12), 13% each began in 2016 (*n*=8) and 2015

(n=8), and 18% started in 2014 (n=11). Furthermore, 91% (n=97) of the cited strategic

evaluation initiatives spanned multiple years.
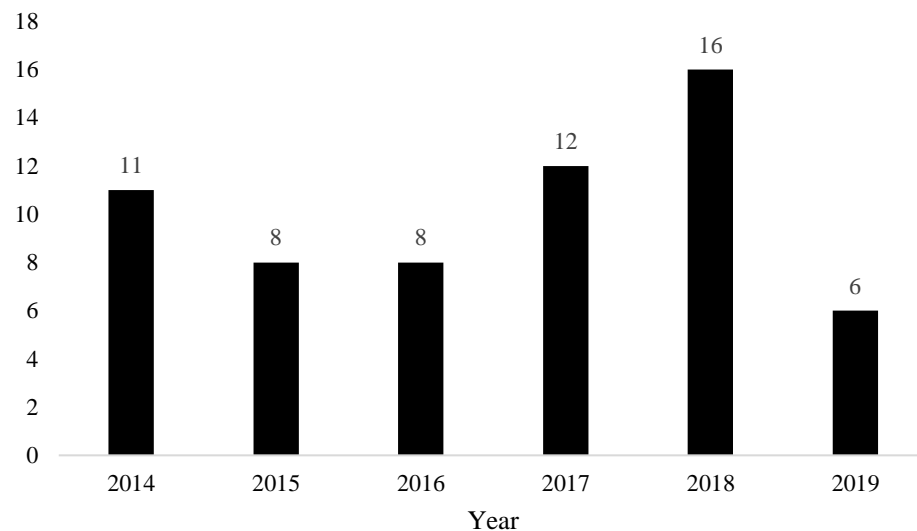
Figure 10. Frequencies of the reported year that the strategic evaluation initiative started

Additionally, respondents were asked about the type of organizations in which the

strategic evaluation initiative they were most involved with took place[6]. As depicted in Figure

11, survey respondents most frequently shared that they engaged in these initiatives within

nonprofit organizations (n =40, 37%). Other settings frequently mentioned include the federal

government (n =26, 24%), local government (n =20, 19%), foundations (n =19, 18%), and state

government (n=18, 17%). Rarely did respondents note the engagement occurring in the private

sector (n=5, 5%).

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[6] Respondents were allowed to "check all that apply" regarding the type of organization
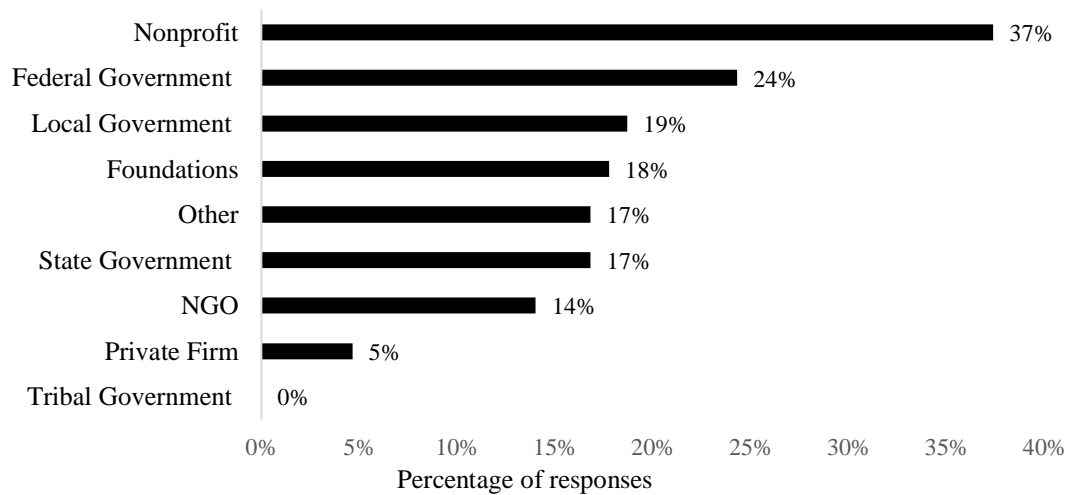
Figure 11. Percentage of setting in which strategic evaluation initiatives occurred

Respondents also cited an array of "other" settings in which they engaged heavily in a strategic evaluation initiative. These "other" settings included: universities (*n* =6), international development contexts (*n* =3), and United Nations Agencies (*n* =2).

Engagement in Stage 1 - decision to undergo strategic evaluation. Survey respondents were asked to share insights on their perceptions of what factors contributed to the adoption of a strategic evaluation initiative in their context. Respondents were specifically asked to provide information about: (1) where the idea for a strategic evaluation initiative came from and (2) why a strategic evaluation initiative was pursued.

Open-ended survey comments frequently highlighted *individuals* as being the origin of the idea for a strategic evaluation initiative, rather than previous literature or other resources (see Table 9). Specifically, respondents mentioned three types of individuals most frequently: organizational leadership, funders, and evaluation professionals.

Table 9.

Representative quotes regarding the origin of the ideas for a strategic evaluation initiative

Organizational Leadership (*n =34*)	Funders (*n =34*)	Evaluation Professionals (*n =21*)
"As a member of our senior leadership team, I spoke with other senior leaders to develop our decision-making criteria for prioritizing evaluations. I facilitated a meeting with my team to create the process" -Internal Evaluator & Organizational Leader	*"The strategic evaluation initiative followed from a directive from the budgetary body in the department: each bureau administering foreign assistance funds developed a bureau evaluation plan, listing and prioritizing evaluations for the next three fiscal years."* -Evaluation Officer	*"It came from the learning and evaluation team. The idea of planning out and sequencing evaluations is a core part of how we work."* -Evaluation Officer

Survey respondents also shared their perspective on why a strategic evaluation initiative was pursued and what problem(s) or outcome(s) it was intended to address. Across the open-ended responses, four major rationales for pursuing strategic evaluation emerged: organizational alignment, decision-making, prioritization/resource efficiency, and funder mandate (see Table 10).

Table 10.

Representative quotes regarding the rationales for the use of a strategic evaluation initiative

Organizational Alignment (*n =24*)	Prioritization & Resource Efficiency (*n =24*)	Decision-Making (*n =20*)	Funder Mandate (*n =15*)
"The problem was simply that evaluation had never been done in a thoughtful or cohesive way across the organization. It had only been done in	*"Process was a means to organize and prioritize the work of evaluators within the organization due to multiple, competing*	*"To create a clear process, set expectations, and ensure that evaluations were actually used to support learning and*	*"I suspect the funder wanted to ensure that all states were pursuing evaluation efforts in a similar capacity, particularly for the 2018-2023*

Moreover, of the 107 survey respondents who indicated participation in strategic evaluation initiatives, 74 (69%) reported engagement with Stage 1 and were a part of the decision-making process to utilize a strategic evaluation initiative. This subset of individuals offered further insight on various aspects of how the strategic evaluation initiative came to fruition. For example, the respondents who engaged in the decision-making process reported on whether a strategic evaluation framework was adopted or created (see Figure 12). Higher percentages of respondents indicated that their organization developed a new framework (n=35, 47%) or used a combination of pre-existing resources and a newly created framework (n =26, 36%) compared to those who indicated their organization used a pre-existing strategic evaluation framework (n =8, 11%). Of the individuals[7] who cited using a pre-existing framework, several mentioned either a CDC framework (n =5; 7%) or documents from FSG (n =2, 3%).
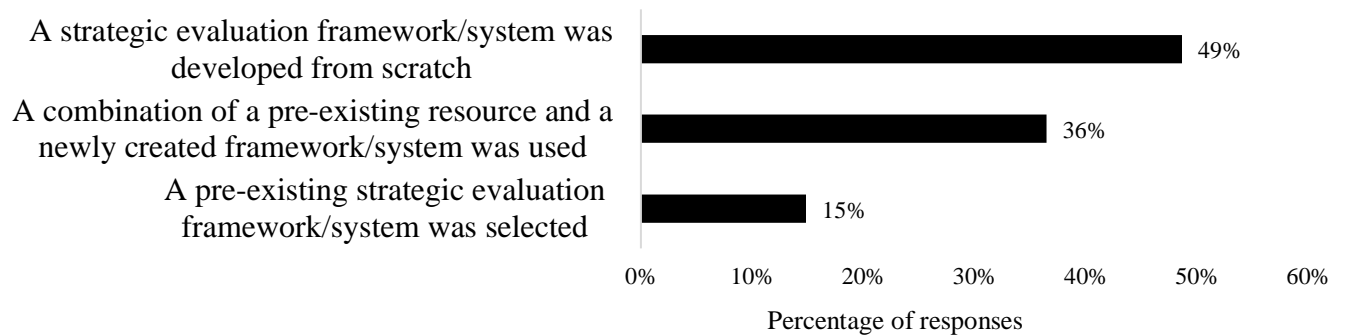
Figure 12. Percentage of participants reporting on if a formal framework/system for strategic evaluation designed or adopted/modified.

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[7] Since data was collected at an individual level, not at an organizational level, there may be overlap between the respondents.

An additional survey question provided respondents with an opportunity to expand upon why their organization chose to develop a new strategic evaluation framework. From this open-ended question, two main rationales for developing a new framework emerged: a lack of awareness about existing frameworks and a belief that they were operating in a unique context that warranted the need for an original framework (see Table 11).

Table 11.

Representative quotes regarding rationale for developing a new strategic evaluation framework

Theme	Qualitative Quote
Unaware of Other Frameworks (*n* =15)	*"We didn't realize there were pre-existing frameworks/systems and we didn't realize that we were creating a strategic evaluation framework/system when we did it. There were just so many interconnected programs/projects that we were evaluating/going to evaluate, that it just seemed natural to determine how they were connected."* -Internal Evaluator
Unique Framework Needed (*n* =9)	*"The unique approach and services provided by the organization required a custom framework for evaluation."* -Internal Evaluator & Organizational Leader

Engagement in Stage 2 - the strategic evaluation planning process. Of the 107 survey respondents who indicated participation in strategic evaluation initiatives, 84 (82%) reported engagement with Stage 2 – participating in the creation of the strategic evaluation plan or documents. These survey participants were asked about barriers/challenges and benefits associated with the planning process. Regarding the barriers encountered, survey respondents' open-ended commentary coalescence on five main challenges (see Table 12). These challenges touched on topics related to stakeholder related issues, such as buy-in, achieving consensus, and capacity. Challenges also included barriers associated with resources and timing.

Table 12.

Representative quotes regarding barriers/challenges associated with the strategic evaluation

planning process

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Securing the Necessary Stakeholder Buy-in ($n =$14)	Ability to secure commitment and support from stakeholders who engage in the strategic evaluation planning process. These stakeholders might include program staff, community partners, organizational leadership, and evaluators.	*"Organizational leaders not seeing the development of the plan as a priority. However, when we developed the catalogue of all the programs in our bureau, they sat up and took notice. The Director of the Policy/Planning Office was an ally who helped convince the hard to win over folks."* -Internal Evaluator & Organizational Leader
Reaching Consensus on Evaluation Prioritization ($n =$20)	Building agreement on the criteria used to determine the evaluations to be conducted and then actually selecting the programs/areas to evaluate.	*"Challenges in the process were mainly around disagreements between different stakeholders on the priorities for evaluation. For example, program staff vs. office leadership."* -Evaluation Officer
Building Capacity & Educating Stakeholders ($n =$9)	Stakeholders engaged in the process have varying degrees of evaluation knowledge and skills. As such, bringing some stakeholders up to speed was a challenge.	*"Initially it was a challenge building the capacity of the coalition coordinators and local staff to engage in the strategic planning process while introducing the concept of making data-informed strategic decisions/plans."* -External Evaluator
Time & Resources Attainment ($n =$8)	The strategic evaluation planning process required ample time from stakeholders. An array of resources, including money, were also seen as necessary, yet hard to obtain.	*"Time for collaborative in depth discussion and questioning was always an issue."* -Internal Evaluator & Organizational Leader

| Appropriately Timing the Initiative to Inform Decision-Making ($n = 12$) | Ensuring that the strategic evaluation planning process aligned with the actual data needs in a timely fashion. | *"Making sure the learning agenda actually aligned with decision-making processes (i.e., planned evaluations would be timed so that findings could be used to inform key program decision points)."* -Evaluation Officer |

Conversely, survey respondents also disclosed several benefits that resulted from the process of creating the strategic evaluation plans or documentation (see Table 13). Six main benefits emerged: (1) shared understanding, (2) overall organizational alignment, (3) building evaluation knowledge and skills, (4) increases in the perceived value of evaluation, (5) evaluation process use, and (6) relationship building.

Table 13.

Representative quotes regarding benefits associated with the strategic evaluation planning process

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Shared Understanding ($n = 41$)	Creating a unified language of program elements, expectations, and vision for the work being done. A common understanding laid the foundation for the rest of the work.	*It built trust. Having everyone at the table in the development of the plan made a huge difference. It also created a culture of sharing ideas and making their struggles and successes more about serving the community and less about their own insecurities.* -External Evaluator
Overall Organizational Alignment ($n = 19$)	Assisting individuals and organizations in unpacking the intricacies of a body of programming and thus promoting an alignment, across departments, in values, goals, and missions.	*"Much deeper understanding of our work, and how work across different departments intersects and supports common outcomes. This led to greater partnership across departments and intentionally focusing on the intersections of different systems we work in to reinforce each other's efforts."* -Evaluation Officer

Built Evaluation Knowledge and Skills (*n* =9)	Helping stakeholders who are involved in the process further their understanding of evaluation, build knowledge, and refine their evaluative skills.	*"The process built awareness of program design and evaluation in program staff. An important by-product of this process was a subtle redesign of the program model to bring it into closer alignment with the Collective Impact model."*-Evaluation Officer
Increased the Perceived Value of Evaluation (*n* =9)	An expanded belief in the importance and benefits of evaluation.	*"At the end of the day, the participants became more informed about the value of evaluation, as well as its complexity. This led to more support for more evaluation, and more resources for evaluation."* -External Evaluator
Evaluation Process Use (*n* =4)	Occasions where stakeholders indicated changes to their work and decisions based on their engagement with the strategic evaluation planning process.	*"It helps us all be more clear on what decisions we need to make, and what information we need to get there. It also forces us to map out learning moments and consider the evidence we'll need at that point."* -Evaluation Officer
Relationship Building (*n* =4)	The proliferation of stronger relationships between individuals and teams, often across departments.	*"The process resulted in richer relationships and partnerships with practitioners which gives us a better understanding of challenges in the ground and how these challenges are overcome - adaptations that moved things forward, etc."*-Internal Evaluator

Engagement in Step 3 - Implementation of the strategic evaluation plan. Of the 107 survey respondents who indicated participation in strategic evaluation initiatives, 77 (78%) reported engagement with Stage 3 –implementing the strategic evaluation plan. Survey respondents were asked open-ended questions about barriers/challenges and benefits that exist as a part of the implementation process.

Much like barriers/challenges encountered in the planning process of strategic evaluation initiatives, survey respondents cited securing the necessary stakeholder buy-in and resource attainment as issues associated with implementing the strategic evaluation plan (see Table 14).

Table 14.

Representative quotes regarding barriers associated with the strategic evaluation implementation process

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Time & Resource Attainment (n =19)	The strategic evaluation planning process required ample time from stakeholders. An array of resources, including money, were also seen as necessary.	*"Lack of funding has not allowed the plan to be implemented as devised."* -Internal Evaluator
Securing the Necessary Stakeholder Buy-in (n =12)	Ability to secure commitment and support from stakeholders who engage in the strategic evaluation planning process. These stakeholders might include program staff, community partners, organizational leadership, and evaluators.	*"Buy-in from the employee groups was inconsistent across county departments. Variation in participation skewed the overall county-wide results summary; they were not felt to be valid for certain groups."* -External Evaluator

Additionally, three barriers/challenges that were unique to the implementation of strategic evaluation plans also emerged from respondent commentary (see Table 15). These challenges included gaining access to data, revising the strategic evaluation plan as issues arose, and staff turnover.

Table 15.

Representative quotes regarding barriers/challenges associated with the strategic evaluation

implementation process

Gaining Access to Data (*n* =14)	Revising the Plan as Issues Arose (*n* =6)	Staff Turnover (*n* =5)
"Funding, data collection realities (as opposed to ideals), initiative not as advanced as assumed in the plan, capacity, things that were assumed (e.g., a particular data collection system) did not materialize as planned." -External Evaluator	*"Adjusting the plan based on unexpected findings or shifts/changes in the system being evaluated. This then caused issues with maintaining long-term commitment of the funder to the learning agenda."* -Evaluation Officer	*"It is difficult to keep momentum on this once there is not one person who is exclusively in charge of it."* [staff member in charge had left the organization] -External Evaluator

Respondents were also asked to share benefits associated with having a strategic evaluation plan to reference when conducting evaluation activities. Similar to the planning process of strategic evaluation initiatives, there were several stakeholder related upshots of having a strategic evaluation plan during implementations, including the promotion of a shared understanding, the development of evaluation knowledge and skills, and an increase in the perceived value of evaluation. Additionally, another benefit was that the strategic evaluation initiative promoted the use of evaluation (see Table 16).

Table 16.

Representative quotes regarding benefits associated with the strategic evaluation

implementation process

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Shared Understanding (*n* =16)	Creating a unified language of program elements, expectations, and vision for the work being done. A common understanding laid the foundation for the rest of the work.	*"Departmental unity that increased staff morale. People could see how their work connected to their colleagues' work. It made things less choppy when reporting impact. It made our data cleaner, streamlined and standardized."* -Internal Evaluator & Organizational Leader
Built Evaluation Knowledge and Skills (*n* =9)	Helping stakeholders who are involved in the process further their understanding of evaluation, build knowledge, and refine their evaluative skills.	*"Supported internal organizational growth and understanding of evaluation, and also supported similar understanding among network organisations that benefitted from our programming."* -Internal Evaluator
Promoted the Use of Evaluation (*n* =7)	Occasions where stakeholders indicated changes to their work and decisions based on their engagement with the strategic evaluation planning process, or findings rendered from the implementation of the strategic evaluations.	*"It can inform which strategies we choose to implement our strategic plan and help tailor those strategies to our context. So far, staff has become far more aware of the power of data, what data is available, and more strategic in their use of data - in short, so far there's been a lot of capacity building regarding how to understand and use data, and we anticipate to see the fruits of this labor when we begin implementation of the new strategic plan."* -Evaluation Officer
Increased the Perceived Value of Evaluation (*n* =6)	The proliferation of stronger relationships between individuals and teams, often across departments.	*"It served as a way to legitimize not only the work of the organization but also the work of the monitoring, evaluation and learning team. People wanted this work to be done as opposed to us having to fight for it to be done."* -External Evaluator

Two additional perceived benefits of having a strategic evaluation plan to guide

implementation were highlighted in the survey commentary (see Table 17): respondents

perceived that the evaluation work became higher quality and there was a sense of accountability

to a plan.

Table 17.

Additional quotes regarding benefits associated with the strategic evaluation implementation

process

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Accountability to an Institutionalized Plan (*n* =27)	The strategic evaluation planning documents provided a roadmap to stakeholders implementing the evaluations, offering guidance and something to be held accountable to.	*"I believe that have a framework for what activities you intend to do, when, how, and what particular outcomes you hope to achieve were helpful in keeping us in the scope of our work. Though we faced challenges in meeting all of our deadlines and desired outcomes, having a strategic plan helped us stay on the right path."*-External Evaluator
Higher Quality Evaluation Work (*n* =6)	Having the strategic evaluation planning documents during implementation increased the perceived caliber of the resulting evaluation work.	*"Our strategic framework guided the use of appropriate research questions, data collection methods and the data themselves, analysis, and reporting within the required timeframe/budget."* -Program Staff

Summary. The survey conducted during Study Two offered insights about the current

landscape of strategic evaluation planning and enhanced the perspective on the various ways

strategic evaluation initiatives are approached in the field. As such, Figure 13 expands upon the

visual depiction presented at the end of Study One—further clarifying how the various aspects of strategic evaluation initiatives may piece together.

Study Three: Interviews
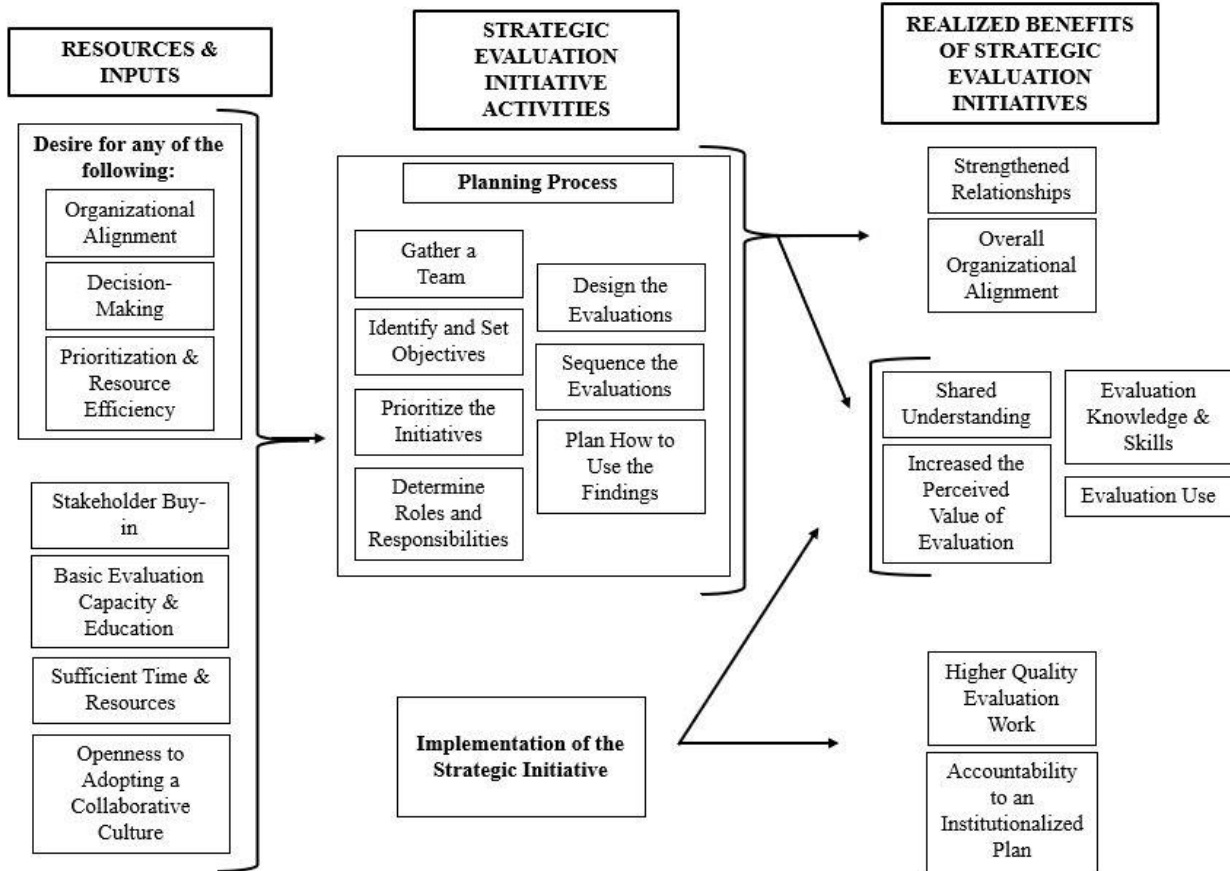
Figure 13. Visual model of Study One and Study Two findings related to the relationship between activities involved in strategic evaluation initiatives and realized benefits. Please note, the vertical components of the figure (e.g., stakeholder buy-in), grouped under each heading, are not displayed in terms of thematic importance or prevalence.

Using the information gleaned from Study Two (survey), a pool of individuals was selected to engage in a follow-up interview that explored the three stages of strategic evaluation initiatives. The main objectives of the interviews were to obtain a broader understanding of: (1)

69

why individuals and organizations decide to undergo a strategic evaluation effort, (2) what engagement in the strategic evaluation planning process entails, (3) how implementation of a strategic evaluation initiative unfolds, and (4) perceptions on the added value of strategic evaluation initiatives.

Analysis approach*.* Analysis of the interviews involved Conventional Content Analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), and leveraged the same steps outlined previously for the Stage 2 open-ended survey responses. However, the analysis process for the interview data was conducted several months after the open-ended survey analysis was completed. Codes and themes developed during the survey analysis were not referenced during the interview analysis. As such, the themes presented below are not a priori.

Results. Much like the results from the previous two studies within Phase I, themes derived from the analysis of the interview data corresponded with the research questions. As such, the findings are presented below in accordance with each research question: (1) Current Landscape of Strategic Evaluation Initiatives, (2) The Decision to Undergo a Strategic Evaluation Initiative, (3) Engagement in the Strategic Evaluation Planning Process, (4) Implementation of the Strategic Evaluation Plan, and (5) Unique Contribution of Strategic Evaluation Initiatives.

Current landscape. Interviewees shared insights on what evidence of strategic evaluation initiatives currently exist in the field, most notably what terminology was used for their approach. Each interviewee cited a unique name that had been given to their strategic evaluation initiative. These names included: Community Investment Plan, Learning Agenda, Knowledge Agenda, and The Outcome Assessment. However, one interviewee (Evaluation Director)

commented that the field should attempt to not get distracted by the many terms for this type of work, instead focusing on the intent of such initiatives at large.

> The terminology and the jargon's gonna shift, and what we're talking about now has built on prior efforts within the government and I think it'll just continue to evolve. So, I just hope that people don't lose sight of the actual foundation of this work by getting distracted by different terms, and different champions of it. I just think it's a common thread that if you look across government.

Expanding upon this, the same interviewee also noted the importance of devoting more effort to formally delineating what strategic evaluation initiatives actually are, and their value, to avoid confusion with stakeholders.

> We all [as evaluators] understand basically the objectives of it [learning agendas]. But I would say that outside offices of evaluation, people frankly get very confused. 'How is it different from our strategic plan, how is it different from the performance metrics that we have to report and map to our strategic plan? What do you mean a learning agenda?' It's a very foreign sort of notion for anyone outside of the evaluation space.

Decision to undergo strategic evaluation. Interviewees offered commentary on the adoption of a strategic evaluation initiative. Insights were largely in relation to the resources that were leveraged to generate the strategic evaluation framework or system, and perceptions of why a strategic evaluation initiative was used.

Of the seven interviewees that were a part of the creation of Stage 1, decision to undergo a strategic evaluation process within their organization, four cited specific resources that were formative in developing their strategic evaluation framework/system. These resources included: evaluation theory, engagement with external consulting firms, ideas from other organizations, and literature from other disciplines (see Table 18).

Table 18.

Qualitative quotes highlighting resources used to design strategic evaluation frameworks

Evaluation theory (n =1; 9%)	External consulting firms (n =1; 9%)	Ideas from other organizations (n =1; 9%)	Literature from other disciplines (n =1; 9%)
"Patton's UFE (utilization focused evaluation) was always underlying everything that we did...And so the strategic approach to how we set up evaluation across the organization was always about who are the users and intended audiences." -Evaluation Director	*"We hired FSG. We used their 'Building a Strategic Learning and Evaluation System for your Organization', a high-level framework."* -Evaluation Officer	*"And so, when I came here, I had that model that we had built at Walton Family Foundation."* -Evaluation Officer	*"The focus for us to be strategic came from my quality management background. We thought, what other industries or sectors have something that we can adapt?"* -Evaluation Director

Moreover, interviewees shared their perspective on why a strategic evaluation initiative was used. Across the responses, four major rationales for strategic evaluation emerged: (1) organizational alignment, (2) systematic decision-making, (3) increased prioritization and focus, and (4) budget constraints (see Table 19). Three of these themes, organizational alignment, decision-making, and prioritization align with data gleaned from Study 2 (the survey).

Table 19.

Representative quotes regarding the rationales for a strategic evaluation initiative

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Organizational Alignment (n =4; 36%)	A desire to promote an alignment in values, goals, and missions across personnel and departments.	*"Staff would come to me and say how they didn't feel like they were part of this department, because it was so big, and everybody was on their own little island. And I thought, 'Okay. Well, if we did a strategic evaluation plan, it would be a way*

		for them to see how all of their work connects.'"-Internal Evaluator
Systematic Decision-Making (*n* =4; 36%)	A need to institute more widespread organization, rigor, and systematized processes when making decision.	*"Our strategic evaluation efforts should focus on bringing that information to light and analyzed and reported in a way that can be helpful to those audience for those purposes...When I think about strategic evaluation, it's not just about evaluation, it's thinking much more strategically around who are we evaluating for, for what purpose, and who do we hope will use the findings of the evaluation to do something or decide something."*-Evaluation Officer
Prioritization & Focus (*n* =4; 36%)	A desire to rank priorities and arrange evaluation work in a more coherent way, sharpening the collective sense on what needs attention.	*"Yes, so trying to make sure that the right projects are being focused on for the organization rather than folks just going and doing what they think is necessary."* -Program Staff
Budget Constraints (*n* =2; 18%)	A lack of fiscal resources.	*"The two projects were selected for evaluation for a number of reasons, particularly given the budget constraints, they could not evaluate everything."* -External Evaluator

Engagement in the strategic evaluation planning process. Of the 11 interviewees, nine

engaged with Stage 2, participating in the creation of the strategic evaluation planning process.

These interviewees were asked about the general planning processes, barriers, strategies and

facilitators of this work, and benefits associated with creating strategic evaluation planning

documents.

Process. When asked about general processes that were instrumental in the planning

process, interviewees first and foremost provided commentary on the various individuals who

played a role in the planning process. The majority of interviewees (*n*=7; 64%) shared that the

team consisted of a wide array of individuals, from across departments. For example, one

interviewee (Program Staff) shared *"So we pulled together a group of individuals, a cross-*

functional group of individuals, throughout the organization to make sure that we had

representation from all the various units." By and large, this quote is indicative of the types of

teams cited across the 11 interviews.

Additionally, interviewees spoke most extensively about two main practices that these

teams of individuals engaged in: mapping and modeling and prioritization dialogues. Three of

the 11 interviews (27%) spoke in detail about the importance of logic modeling or creating visual

maps when developing the strategic evaluation planning documents. For example, one

interviewee (Evaluation Officer) shared this example:

> And so, we worked with them [various program departments] to build logic models
> around their strategic plans to really get into what they meant; what actually were those
> strategies and what were the inputs, outputs, outcomes, and how were the pieces
> connected? So that was actually our first step.

In addition to modeling and mapping as an initial step in the strategic evaluation planning

process, five of the 11 (45%) interviewees also shared that facilitating prioritization dialogues

was a critical piece of this stage of the strategic evaluation initiative. These group conversations

provided a space for a wide array of stakeholders to discuss what they deemed as important and

worthy of being included in the strategic evaluation initiative. As one interviewee (Evaluation

Director) shared:

> It was our evaluation unit that came up with the criteria. And we ran it by our boss who
> was the chief of policy. And then it went up to our assistant secretary who was the head
> of our entire bureau; they cleared off on the criteria. In that clearance process, our boss
> did bring it up with the heads of each of the major sections....We really had to take baby
> steps and we really had to bring people along.

During these prioritization dialogues, various criteria were used to guide the conversations about which evaluations would make it into the strategic evaluation plan or framework. Interviewees shared a myriad of prioritization criteria that was used within each of their respective contexts. Examples of prioritization criteria included: community needs for program services and evaluative information, scalability of information to other projects, and feasibility (i.e., proximity/geography of programs and whether or not there was previously collected data to leverage).

Barriers. Regarding the barriers faced during the planning process, interviewee commentary highlighted four main challenges (see Table 20).Two of these challenges, securing buy-in and building trust, were related to stakeholders, while the other two barriers were associated with time constraints. One of these themes, securing the necessary stakeholder buy-in, also emerged in Study 2 (survey).

Table 20.

Representative quotes regarding barriers associated with the strategic evaluation planning process

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Securing the Necessary Stakeholder Buy-in (*n* =5; 45%)	Ability to secure commitment and support from stakeholders who engage in the strategic evaluation planning process. These stakeholders might include program staff, community partners, organizational leadership, and evaluators.	*"Our director refuses to give us indicators that would reflect her work for political reasons."* -Internal Evaluator
Building Trusting Relationships	Difficulty in cultivating meaningful and trusting connections with stakeholders to	*"This is a relationship-based endeavour and it has to be grounded in trust, and if you don't spend that kind of time listening,*

75

(*n* =5; 45%)	overcome vulnerabilities and anxieties associated with evaluation.	*understanding, doing that give and take, that back and forth. It's just literally gonna be a 'check the box and put it on the shelf.' If you haven't spent the time building the trust, respect, and relationship with the folks that you're partnering with, then they have no reason to engage in the process and it ultimately makes it a more relevant document, it makes it a more ultimately more likely to use type of document and process if you invest that kind of time."* -Evaluation Director
Budgeting Sufficient Time (*n* =4; 36%)	Deterring the proper amount of time in which to engage stakeholders in the process; the planning process often take more time than anticipated.	*"We were hoping for three to four months, and then based on where we were and what we were doing, it was more important that we take the time to make sure that it was the right way that we needed to develop the plan. So, extending it to the six months was welcomed."*-Program Staff
Accommodating Stakeholders with Little Time (*n* =3; 27%)	The strategic evaluation planning process required ample time from stakeholders, which was often cumbersome to obtain.	*"You're working with people that are so preoccupied with other priorities. And they are very valid priorities, like meeting the needs of the people that they're serving, or making sure they're getting their grant reports in on time, or just the basic stuff you have to deal with as being an employee, like getting your trainings up to date...So it's been really hard to get them to focus on this, and see that if you put energy and time in this, it is gonna help you save time in the long run."*-Internal Evaluator

Strategies and facilitators. To meet these challenges, interviewees disclosed an array of

strategies and facilitators that promote effective strategic evaluation planning processes (see

Table 21). Interviewees shared that articulating the value of strategic evaluation, maintaining an

engaged team, finding a champion higher up within the organization, and developing proficient

people management skills were all facilitators of the planning process.

Table 21.

Representative quotes concerning strategies and facilitators of the strategic evaluation planning

process

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Articulating the Value (*n* =4; 36%)	Putting forth a compelling value proposition as to why a strategic evaluation is a fruitful expenditure of time and resources. When done successfully, this generates stakeholder buy-in.	*"What you're doing needs to show value. If you want people to buy into something, and if you want them to begin using something, they need to see value from it, and they need to see value from it pretty quickly, and pretty tangibly. And so, we have a lot of sayings, like little sayings here that we use to keep us on the mark, and one of them is like 'We don't do intellectual curiosity.' We're here to support program staff, and so that is our primary focus, that is our prime directive. Program staff, all staff, leadership, the board, they need to see value from the things that we produce, and if we're doing intellectual curiosity, then that's not producing value for the people that need to see it."* -Evaluation Officer
Maintaining an Engaged Team (*n* =4; 36%)	A motivated and invested team is critical for a successful planning process. Maintaining high levels of engagement throughout the process is helpful.	*"When we were meeting to develop this process, there was a lot of eagerness from everyone to have input and to help build what we were going to come up with. We picked two strategic projects as our pilots for the process that we developed. And I remember there being a lot of good energy among everyone in terms of developing what these evaluation plans were going to look like for Project A versus Project B. They were really good conversations. I remember being in*

		meetings, and a colleague said, 'I love this meeting. I love this work.' So, there was a lot of eagerness to have input."-Program Staff
Finding a Champion Higher Up ($n =3$; 27%)	Gaining the support and commitment of an individual(s) with power within an organization as a way to propel the work forward in a meaningful way.	*"The CEO wasn't just supportive of the work but was an active champion for it. And that's critical. If your CEO is sort of a tacit supporter or a passive supporter, you can get pretty far. In my experience, you cannot get to the level of buy-in and engagement that you really need to do this work well unless you have a CEO, or a leader who is an active and vocal champion for the work."* -Evaluation Officer
Developing People Management Skills ($n =2$; 18%)	Much of the planning process is about building relationships and brokering conversations. Sharp interpersonal skills (e.g., facilitation, organization, conflict resolution) aid in this work.	*"I would say that the current list of [evaluator] competencies around the soft skills is so short and not comprehensive enough. What this process really drilled down for me is the need to develop a whole lot more soft skills, as well as management skills. But not in terms of project management, but in terms of people management."* -Internal Evaluator

Select interviewees also shared specific strategies that promoted higher levels of engagement within teams tasked with creating the strategic evaluation planning documents. These tactics included: creating break-out groups within the larger planning team, assigning homework and tasks outside of group meetings, and leveraging informal communication (e.g., water cooler conversations) to keep the conversation going outside of formalized meetings.

Benefits. Interviewees also spoke about numerous benefits that resulted from the process of creating the strategic evaluation plans or documentation. Six main benefits emerged: (1) overall organizational alignment, (2) increases in perceived value of evaluation, (3) building

evaluation knowledge, (4) shared understanding, (5) asking better questions, and (6) relationship building (see Table 22). Five of these themes also emerged during Study 2, including: overall organizational alignment, increases in the perceived value of evaluation, building evaluation knowledge, shared understanding, and relationship building.

Table 22.

Representative quotes regarding benefits associated with the strategic evaluation planning process

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Overall Organizational Alignment (n =4; 36%)	Assisting individuals and organizations in unpacking the intricacies of a body of programming and thus promoting an alignment, across departments, in values, goals, and missions.	*"We also didn't realize how much similar work was happening across the departments and they were extremely siloed. They weren't leveraging each other's learnings; they weren't leveraging each other's relationships. And what we've realized through that analysis is that there was a ton of intersection where they could mutually reinforce each other's work."* -Internal Evaluator
Increased the Perceived Value of Evaluation, (n =4; 36%)	An expanded belief in the importance and benefits of evaluation.	*"And so, I had a number of offices coming to me saying, 'When are you going to evaluate us? We want data, because we're seeing that the programs you have done, they can now talk about, with both quantitative and qualitative data, the effects that they're having, and the outcomes that they're achieving."* -Evaluation Director
Building Evaluation Knowledge and Skills. (n =3; 27%)	Helping stakeholders who are involved in the process further their understanding of evaluation, build knowledge, and refine their evaluative skills.	*"It was helping to educate folks too to what evaluation's all about and what it truly takes to do evaluation. It's not easy, and it takes time. So, helping to create that educational component throughout the organization was also another benefit to doing this."*

Shared Understanding (n =2; 18%)	Creating a unified language of program elements, expectations, and vision for the work being done. A common understanding laid the foundation for the rest of the work.	*"So, we now have, as an organization, a common language to talk about."* -Program Staff
Asking Better Questions (n =2; 18%)	Posing inquiries that examine a more holistic view of a situation. Thinking critically and openly.	*"The other major surprise was once data got supplied to people and they started looking at it, how quickly they matured in wanting data. They were beginning to ask better questions that were becoming more sophisticated."* -Evaluation Director
Relationship Building (n =2; 18%)	The proliferation of stronger relationships between individuals and teams, often across departments.	*"Honestly, the relationships we have built with the [redacted] department, they no longer are resistant to us, and so that has kind of pushed away some of the aggravation and delayed email responses or that kind of stuff. There's an excitement to work with each other, which is good because that means that the collaboration could really move along things faster."*-Internal Evaluator

Implementation of the strategic evaluation plan. Of the eleven interviewees, nine indicated engagement with Stage 3, the implementation the strategic evaluation plan. Survey respondents were asked questions about barriers, strategies and facilitators of this work, and benefits associated with implementing strategic evaluation initiatives.

Barriers. In addition to mentioning the routine issues faced when conducting program evaluation (e.g., small budgets, tight timelines, unpredictable stakeholders), interviewees cited accommodating stakeholders with limited time and evaluation ability, as well as ensuring stakeholders refer back to the strategic evaluation plan and documents, as barriers associated

with implementing the strategic evaluation plan (see Table 23). These were both unique themes that did not emerge in the earlier studies.

Table 23.

Representative quotes regarding barriers associated with the strategic evaluation

implementation process

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Accommodating Stakeholders with Limited Time & Evaluation Ability (*n* =4; 36%)	The act of implementing a strategic evaluation plan required ample time from stakeholders, which was often lacking. Moreover, implementation was inhibited by stakeholders who lacked a basic understanding or ability to conduct evaluation tasks.	*"A lot of them feel like not only do they not have the time, but they also don't have the expertise. The same person who is filling out these reports or conducting evaluation are the people who are serving children or making sure the bathrooms are cleaned up because they do everything. There wasn't the time or expertise."*-Internal Evaluator
Ensuring Stakeholders Refer Back to the Plan and Documents (*n* =3; 27%)	A failure to actually use and reference the planning documents during the many evaluations.	*"It just runs the risk of becoming one more thing that people feel like they have to do, and they check the box in it's done, but it doesn't mean they're actually using it."* -Evaluation Director

Strategies and facilitators. To facilitate the implementation process, interviewees offered two strategies to promote effective strategic evaluation planning processes. These strategies were also viewed as mechanisms in partially addressing the challenges listed above. These included: building in time to periodically revise the documents during the implementation phase and reminding stakeholders that they had a voice during the planning process (see Table 24).

The act of allotting time for document revisions was perceived as a mechanism to ensure that stakeholders were referencing the strategic evaluation planning documents, therefore serving as a partial suggestion to overcome this challenge. Additionally, creating a space for discussing

revisions to the plan, in real time, also potentially (1) provided an opportunity to assess

stakeholders' ability to engage in the implementation of the plan, and make mid-course

adjustments, if needed, (2) helped troubleshoot unexpected funding and data collection issues as

they arose, (3) allowed new stakeholders, who may be introduced to the process mid-way as a

result of turnover, a chance to contribute to the initiative.

Similarly, the intentional act of reminding stakeholders of their voice during the planning

phase provided another opportunity to reintroduce the strategic evaluation planning documents,

thereby encouraging stakeholders to refer back to these resources throughout the implementation

process.

Table 24.

Representative quotes highlighting strategies and facilitators to promote implementation

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Creating Time to Revise the Documents (*n* =7; 64%)	Reserved time to reflect and modify the planning documents throughout the project as a way to address and overcome implementation challenges in real time.	*"So, we were getting information from the studies that we were doing that would affect our future work. And then we would update our plans."*-Evaluation Director
Reminding Stakeholders of Their Voice in the Planning Process (*n* =2; 18)	When the work gets tough, criticisms run rampant. Refreshing stakeholders' memories that their voice helped to shape this work.	*"One of the things we would do as a reminder when we reported out to our teams or to the community...you always have to remind people that it wasn't us sitting in a room being like, 'Oh, we're going to do this.' Because that's what they want to lash out at us. We remind them that this was done with all your input."* -Evaluation Director

Benefits. Interviewees also highlighted two main benefits associated with having a

strategic evaluation plan during the evaluation implementation efforts (see Table 25). These

included promoting a shared understanding and using the document to make a compelling case

for increases in funding. The theme of shared understanding also was salient in Study 2 (survey).

Table 25.

Representative quotes regarding benefits associated with strategic evaluation implementation

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Shared Understanding ($n =3$; 27)	Creating a unified language of program elements, expectations, and vision for the work being done. A common understanding laid the foundation for the rest of the work.	*"I think it made implementation a lot easier because you had brought so many people along for so many months and nothing was a surprise."* -Internal Evaluator
Increasing Funding ($n =2$; 18)	The resulting data from the evaluations provided compelling information for funders.	*"The programs weren't tracking stuff, and now that we quote on quote 'made them do it,' they're like, "You made us do it. It was terrible, but now we're also getting more money."* -Internal Evaluator

Unique contribution of strategic evaluation initiatives. Lastly, interviewees were asked

to share their perspective on the unique value of strategic evaluation initiatives. Across the

responses, five major themes emerged. Strategic evaluation initiatives (1) foster alignment within

organizations, (2) were useful in addressing complex systems and large bodies of programming,

and (3) assisted with more effective resource allocation for evaluation (see Table 26).

Table 26.

Representative quotes regarding the added-value associated with strategic evaluation initiatives

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Foster Alignment within Organizations ($n =7$; 64%)	Assisting individuals and organizations in unpacking the intricacies of a body of programming and thus promoting an alignment,	*"So, I think the added value of doing the strategic evaluation plan was to take inventory of what's already been done, and then see where we need to go. 'What are the new things that are happening that we need to learn from?' Instead of*

	across departments, in values, goals, and missions.	*just trying out all these things, we need to be doing some sort of evaluation of them to see what's working and what's not, and then help to promote those cross-regional learnings...So I think it helps to take inventory of what's been done, and then where are we going, and what are the learnings that could be useful across regions."* -Internal Evaluator
Address Complex Systems and Bodies of Programming (*n* =6, 55%)	Helping stakeholders view the work as a part of a large, complex, and interconnected system.	*"We moved from identifying program and project issues to identifying systemic issues. We then adding in how evaluation can be used, not only for addressing those issues and identifying root cause, but also replicating and expanding success. That was a big part of also what we're doing...looking at how can evaluation be used and thought of as a regular part of the program."* -Evaluation Director
More Effective Resource Allocation for Evaluation (*n* =3; 27%)	Collectively planning, prioritizing, and sequencing evaluations over a period of time helps determine when and where resources will be most needed.	*"I can see how that is going to help us be more resourceful as we evaluate...because there's different things that are going to be happening, but if we can be mindful in how we approach the evaluation for them to make use of things I think is going to be hugely beneficial."* -Program Staff

Additionally, interviewees (*n* =7, 64%) highlighted how their work with strategic evaluation initiatives changed the way evaluation was thought about and acted upon within their organizations. As one interviewee (Internal Evaluator) shared,

I'm seeing the strategic value of it right now in terms of how people are thinking, it's been a huge culture shift in terms of how people think about their work and what's the point of it and what are we trying to get to. It's much more outcomes focused now, is much more

impact-focused even, what's the ultimate impact of what we're trying to do, what do I want for families ultimately as a result of what we're doing now and how does it all tie together? What's my hypothesis there?

While this comment speaks to general changes in thinking or behavior that resulted from the strategic evaluation initiative, these reported changes in thinking also manifested in a desire to more thoroughly integrate evaluation, increases in the perceived value of evaluation, and asking better questions (see Table 27).

Table 27.

Representative quotes regarding changes in thinking or behavior associated with strategic evaluation initiatives

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Desire to More Thoroughly Integrate Evaluation (*n* =4; 36%)	A desire to embed evaluation into routine practices, across the duration of a project or program's lifecycle.	*'I think it's one of the greatest potentials of something like this, is that it just becomes a best practice and a standard way of doing business.''* -Evaluation Director
Increased the Perceived Value of Evaluation (*n* =3, 27%)	An expanded belief in the importance and benefits of evaluation.	*"I think it helps me have a better perspective and appreciation of the variety of uses of evaluation within an organization."* -Internal Evaluator
Asking Better Questions (*n* =1; 10%)	Posing inquiries that examine a more holistic view of a situation. Thinking critically and openly.	*"But you do notice that, after a while, staff begin to think slightly differently. There's the concept of evaluative thinking, and you notice that, you begin to see that creep into conversations with program staff. You begin to see it creep into some of their conversations that they're having with their peers or that they're having with grantees. You know, one of my favourite things is when I'm in a meeting with program staff, and unprompted, a program officer will ask*

		the question, "Well, what would success look like?" -Evaluation Officer
Instrumental Use (*n* =1; 10%)	Incidences of evaluation findings are directly used to alter a program, project, or initiative.	*"I would say there are two programs where the leadership has been the same as long as I've been here, and they've completely reorganized the way in which they grant and the way in which they manage their programs. So yeah, I would say there's two very real-life cases of people just doing business completely different now because of this process. Introducing this way of thinking about evidence and incorporating that into your everyday business has really changed how they operate the program."* -Evaluation Director

Summary. The interviews conducted during Study Three provide clarity on how individuals decide to undergo a strategic evaluation effort, what engagement in the strategic evaluation planning process entails, and how implementation of a strategic evaluation initiative unfolds. Accordingly, Figure 14 leverages these new insights to expand the visual presented after Study One and Study Two; providing further details about how the various aspects of strategic evaluation initiatives may piece together. Two aspects of the model, organizational alignment and increases in the perceived value of evaluation, are shown as 'realized benefits' and as 'added values.' These two themes were perceived to be both prevalent benefits as well as aspects that provided overarching added value.

RESOURCES & INPUTS

Desire for any of the following:
- Organizational Alignment
- Decision-Making
- Prioritization & Resource Efficiency
- Budget Constraints

- Stakeholder Buy-in
- Basic Evaluation Capacity & Education
- Sufficient Time & Resources
- Openness to Adopting a Collaborative Culture

STRATEGIC EVALUATION INITIATIVE ACTIVITIES

Planning Process
- Gather a Team
- Identify and Set Objectives
- Prioritize the Initiatives
- Determine Roles and Responsibilities
- Design the Evaluations
- Sequence the Evaluations
- Plan How to Use the Findings

Implementation of the Strategic Evaluation Initiative

REALIZED BENEFITS OF STRATEGIC EVALUATION INITIATIVES

- Overall Organizational Alignment
- Strengthened Relationships

Shared Understanding

Changes in Thinking & Behavior
- Evaluation Use
- Evaluation Knowledge & Skills
- Increased the Perceived Value of Evaluation

- Accountability to an Institutionalized Plan
- Increased Funding
- Higher Quality Evaluation Work

ADDED VALUE OF STRATEGIC EVALUATION INITIATIVES

- Alignment within Organizations
- Address Complex Systems and Bodies of Programming
- More Effective Resource Allocation for Evaluation

Changes in Thinking & Behavior
- Integration of Evaluation
- Increased the Perceived Value of Evaluation
- Asking Better Questions
- Instrumental Use

Figure 14. Visual model of Study One, Study Two, and Study Three findings related to the relationship between activities involved in strategic evaluation initiatives, realized benefits, and added value of the initiatives. Please note, the vertical components of the figure (e.g., stakeholder buy-in), grouped under each heading, are not displayed in terms of thematic importance or prevalence.

This chapter presents results of the Case Study that was conducted for Phase II. This phase explored how individuals within an organization experience the three stages of strategic evaluation through a one-site embedded case study. As previously outlined, the Asthma and Community Health Branch (ACHB) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) served as the case study's sample frame[8], and the study honed in on the Strategic Evaluation Planning (SEP) framework within the "Learning and Growing Through Evaluation" materials.

Introduction to the Case

The ACHB, formerly known as the Air Pollution and Respiratory Health Branch, leads CDC's fight against environmental-related respiratory illnesses, including asthma, and studies indoor and outdoor air pollution as well as links between climate and health (CDC, 2018).

"Learning and Growing Through Evaluation" is an evaluation guide intended for use by state public health departments that are receiving CDC funding for state asthma programs. This guide was originally developed by ACHB personnel, with the intention of assisting state health departments in (1) ensuring the effective and efficient use of resources, (2) providing a means of demonstrating the value of their programs, and (3) developing a body of knowledge that illustrates "what works" (CDC, 2020). Their work focuses on three main activities: (1) surveillance surrounding when, where, and in whom asthma occurs, (2) implementation of scientifically proven interventions, (3) establishment and maintenance of partnerships necessary to develop, implement, and evaluate local asthma control programs.

To this end, the "Learning and Growing Through Evaluation" guide is a tool, developed by the ACHB, to promote evaluation of these three main programmatic activities. Specifically, the

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[8] This case study was in no way formally associated with the CDC

guide is leveraged extensively by the National Asthma Control Program (NACP) grantees. Created in 1999, the NACP strives to help millions of people with asthma in the United States gain control over their disease. The program's goals include "reducing the number of deaths, hospitalizations, emergency department visits, school days or workdays missed, and limitations on activity due to asthma" (CDC, 2020).

The NACP grantees are health departments in 24 states and Puerto Rico. The CDC funds their work aimed at increasing the availability of and access to guidelines-based medical management and pharmacotherapy for all people with asthma, as well as addressing the intersection of public health and health care (CDC, 2020).

The case study relied upon (1) evaluation team members and affiliates from the ACHB of the CDC and (2) CDC NACP grantees from six state health departments. These state health department personnel included epidemiologists, program managers, and evaluators.

Analysis Approach

As with the qualitative data components of the Phase I studies, analysis of the case study interview commentary utilized Conventional Content Analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In general, this analysis process leveraged five steps: (1) each interview transcript was read to obtain a sense of the entire data set, (2) each transcript was revisited and read line by line to inductively identify codes and initial impressions, (3) themes and subthemes were determined inductively from the data, (4) transcripts were read one final time, as specific quotes were coded/highlighted within the survey commentary, and (5) the highlighted quotes were pasted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet where they were organized based on theme.

Additionally, the analysis process for the case study interview data was conducted within a week of the Phase I interview data analysis. Codes and themes developed during the Phase I interview analysis process were referenced and expanded upon during the case analysis.

Results

Much like the results from the previous studies outlined within Phase I, analysis of the Phase II case study interview data corresponded with the research questions. As such, the findings are shared below in alignment with each section: (1) The Decision to Undergo a Strategic Evaluation Initiatives, (2) Engagement in the Strategic Evaluation Planning Process, (3) Implementation of the Strategic Evaluation Plan, and (4) Unique Contribution of Strategic Evaluation Initiatives.

Decision to undergo strategic evaluation. Case study interviewees offered commentary on the NACP's adoption of the Strategic Evaluation Planning (SEP) framework and provided insights on the (1) resources that inspired the creation of the SEP framework, (2) values that undergirded the SEP framework's formation, and (3) perceptions of why the SEP framework was created.

Of the 20 interviewees that were a part of the case study, six were involved with Stage 1, the decision to undergo a strategic evaluation process. These interviewees mentioned specific resources that guided their design of the SEP framework. These resources included evaluation theory and ideas from other organizations (see Table 28).

Table 28.

Qualitative quotes highlighting resources used to design the SEP framework

Evaluation Theory (*n* =4; 67%)	Ideas from Other Organizations (*n* =2; 33%)
"We also started looking a lot at organizational capacity building. So, we were working with Hallie Preskill and some of her work around 'How do you actually make changes in organizations,' 'how do they become learning organizations,' and 'how do you set up systems that work for that'. So, I think that was really instrumental in it."	*"We had this binder of resources. If we'd see something useful, we'd throw it in the binder. We had it all sorted by the CDC framework steps; it was bits and pieces. We'd come to conferences, we'd see somebody else doing something cool, we'd throw it in there. There's a bunch of stuff in there out of Harvard; their afterschool program used to do this fabulous newsletter. We got a lot of stuff from there. Lots of patchwork."*

Additionally, the relevant interviewees (*N*=6) spoke about the values that were pivotal in the formation of the SEP framework. In general, the values were all indicative of a strong evaluation use theoretical orientation. Interviewees who were part of the SEP design process noted the importance of making the SEP framework easy to understand, a learning tool, and a promoter of evaluation use (see Table 29).

Table 29.

Representative quotes regarding the values that were foundational for the SEP creation

Promote Use (*n* =6; 100%)	Learning Tool (*n* =3; 50%)	Easy to Understand (*n* =2; 33%)
"[We decided] that it should be, in the end, something that they [state grantees] could adapt to their own needs and their own program because they weren't doing the evaluations for us, they were doing it for their benefit."	*"It started off being very much sort of an indicator project and then we just sort of had a lot of conversations around whether that was really the best approach and whether we shouldn't be focusing more on building the capacity of grantees to be good evaluators."*	*"We tried to make it a super practical guide for the grantees and we engaged them in reviewing things. We did webinars to roll it out and we presented at AEA with some of the early states to work with it to talk about their experiences. We tried to be super practical, super engaged, answer lots of questions, and not be too technical. Yeah, really be an intro to how to do evaluation."*

Moreover, all 20 interviewees were invited to share their perspective on why the SEP framework was initially developed as a facet of the NACP. Across the responses, four major rationales for strategic evaluation materialized (see Table 30). SEPs were hoped to promote accountability, assist with prioritization and focusing efforts, foster systematic decision-making, and generate organizational alignment. Two of these rationales (prioritization and organizational alignment) are similar to the themes that emerged from Study Three interviewees[9] within Phase I of the overarching study.

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[9] To clarify, the 11 interviewees from Study 3 were distinct from the individuals interviewed as a part of the Study 4 Case Study

Table 30.

Representative quotes regarding the rationales for developing the SEP framework

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Accountability (*n* =11; 55%)	A desire to hold grantees responsible for certain outcomes.	*"I think that they're [CDC] hoping that we are thinking of planning for how you're going to show that the money that they gave you was effective and did what you thought it was gonna do. Being able to work through some of your own internal processes and then, if you have evaluation data, you're able to say, 'Yes, this is a good use of continued funds,' or, 'No, we need to go a different direction.' And so, doing a strategic plan then just gets you thinking about the whole next five years of how you're going to be able to show the worth of your program."*
Prioritization & Focus (*n* =3; 15%)	A desire to rank priorities and arrange evaluation work in a more coherent way, sharpening the collective sense on what needs attention.	*"Because you're not gonna ask them [state health depts] to do everything in the first year, you are not gonna ask them to repeat things. They have limited actual resources for doing evaluation, so how can you help them think about what are the right things to do to put their limited resources into evaluation that will actually not only report things to CDC, but to support their own practice?"*
Systematic Decision-Making (*n* =3; 15%)	A need to institute more widespread organization, rigor, and systematized processes when making decisions.	*"And I think helping people think like, 'Oh, this is just kind of what's on the top of my head. I think this is what we should evaluate. Let's do it.' And really thinking about, what's gonna be most useful to guide*

		decision-making? Or help identify gaps and priorities, and be able to make those adjustments to then actually, be able to implement the program a little bit better."
Organizational Alignment (*n* =2; 10%)	A desire to promote an alignment in values, goals, and missions across personnel and departments.	*"Yeah, and it was to push the concept of making people think about how their evaluations, not just a one-off but as a portfolio, and to force them to think about how they're going to use their information, force them to think about evaluation as part of their big-picture planning."*

Engagement in the strategic evaluation planning process. Throughout the interviews, participants were also asked to share their experiences with the creation of the strategic evaluation plans (SEP). Interviewees discussed four topics: (1) the teams involved with the planning process, (2) barriers encountered through the SEP process, (3) strategies and facilitators of this work, and (4) benefits associated with the process of creating a SEP.

Teams. Much like the interviewee commentary from Phase I, Study Three (interviews), all six state health departments included in the case study leveraged a diverse array of individuals to assist in the creation of their strategic planning documents. However, one unique caveat of the NACP strategic evaluation planning process is that diversity in team composition primarily manifested via community and statewide partnerships. This differs from many scenarios cited in the interviews for Phase I, Study Three, where the planning team was largely internal to the organization. Accordingly, state health departments are tasked with engaging the NACP program manager, an evaluator, an epidemiologist, and asthma-related partners from across the state (e.g.,

94

American Lung Association, community health workers). To illustrate this, one interviewee

provided an encompassing description of their strategic evaluation planning team:

> So, it was myself, as the manager, and our epidemiologist at the table. Obviously, our
> evaluator was at the table. So that's three, and then we had the coordinators of our
> statewide coalition, that was six....And then we had a representative from American Lung
> Association who was heavily involved with our coalition.

Barriers. Regarding the barriers faced during the strategic evaluation planning process,

interviewee commentary highlighted three stakeholder related main challenges, including:

accommodating stakeholders with limited time and evaluation ability, securing buy-in, and

building trusting relationships (see Table 31). Each of these challenges were also cited in Phase

I, Study Three (interviews).

Table 31.

Representative quotes regarding barriers associated with creating the SEP

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Accommodating Stakeholders with Limited Time & Evaluation Ability ($n =9$; 45%)	The strategic evaluation planning process required ample time from stakeholders, which was often cumbersome to obtain.	*"Previously we had a lot more provider involvement and healthcare has changed, and they can't allocate time anymore. So, it's hard to get them even on the phone for 30 minutes. So quick emails and 'can you take this quick look with your feedback here,' that's kind of where we're at."*
Securing the Necessary Stakeholder Buy-in ($n =4$; 20%)	Ability to secure commitment and support from stakeholders who engage in the strategic evaluation planning process. These stakeholders might include program staff, community partners, organizational leadership, and evaluators.	*"I think a barrier was getting people to buy into this long-term thinking about evaluation, when they may or may not have been bought into the idea of evaluation period."*

Building Trusting Relationships (*n* =2; 10%)	Difficulty in cultivating meaningful and trusting connections with stakeholders to overcome vulnerabilities and anxieties associated with evaluation.	*"If everybody felt confident and comfortable in what they were doing, and didn't feel so much like they had to protect their turf or feel insecure about what they were doing, if instead they saw it as somebody coming in and trying to help make these decisions, rather than as the person looking to catch them....and if they saw evaluators as, 'these are folks who can help us to maximize the money that we receive and be able to help more people with asthma,' then things would have been different."*

Strategies and facilitators. To meet these challenges, interviewees shared a myriad of strategies and facilitators that promoted the SEP process. In total, six ideas surfaced, including: (1) utilizing the CDC provided resources, (2) leveraging the expertise of someone who had engaged in the SEP process before, (3) maintaining an engaged team, (4) articulating the value of strategic evaluation, (5) viewing the SEP process as a CDC mandate, and (6) developing proficient people management skills (see Table 32). Of these, maintaining an engaged team, articulating the value, and developing proficient people management skills were also cited in Phase I.

Table 32.

Representative quotes concerning strategies and facilitators of the SEP process

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Utilizing the CDC Resources (*n* =9; 45%)	Drawing upon documents created and widely disseminated by the CDC.	*"So, I followed that 'Learning as You Grow' [Learning and Growing] booklet pretty closely, and I find it very helpful and straightforward and helps the areas that might get a little cloudy. It helps at least provide examples of what people think it should go like. So, I followed*

		that."
Leveraging Someone with Prior Experience (*n* =7; 35%)	Being able to call upon an individual with prior experience with the SEP process as a support.	*"Yeah, definitely people who have experienced this process. So, the program manager and the previous evaluator, who went over to the Diabetes program, definitely helped me to see what they're doing. Talking to their evaluator or the epidemiologists there, and looking at their documents, helped even though, their evaluation is completely different. So, I think having those key people that just can offer advice around you is really key."*
Maintaining an Engaged Team (*n* =6; 30%)	A motivated and invested team is critical for a successful planning process. Maintaining high levels of engagement throughout the process is helpful.	*"We know that there are certain people who will come to everything and we know we can count on them and their input is always useful and they're engaged. So, they see the value in coming to these meetings, and they really like the small size of the SEP team because they feel that they're... I mean, we use this group to be like, 'Hey, we wanna do this project and we're thinking about doing it like this. What do you think?' And then they tell us and we oftentimes change what we were going to do based on their feedback. So, I think with this particular group, they're so engaged because they feel like what they say matters."*
Articulating the Value (*n* =5; 25%)	Putting forth a compelling value proposition as to why a strategic evaluation is a fruitful expenditure of time and resources. When done successfully, this generates stakeholder buy-in.	*"...get them to understand the value of their work [with the SEP] and really what they're doing and why they're doing it, to kinda get them to drink the Kool Aid and be more engaged in this process and understand how important it is, and how important their input is."*

Viewing the Process as a CDC Mandate (*n* =4; 20%)	The perception that the SEP was a stringent requirement from the CDC, as a funding agency, was a motivator.	*"Quite honestly, the best thing for the strategic evaluation plan is the requirements of CDC, because it keeps us accountable. So they want us to develop a plan and they want us to answer these four evaluation questions at the end of the grant every year, and so, we try to make sure that we are doing what we are asked to do since it is a requirement."*
Developing People Management Skills (*n* =3; 15%)	Much of the planning process is about building relationships and brokering conversations. Sharp interpersonal skills (e.g., facilitation, organization, conflict resolution) aid in this work.	*"So, I think it's kind of knowing who your stakeholder group is and how much knowledge they need to be able to make an informed decision."*

Benefits. Lastly, interviewees spoke about numerous benefits that resulted from the process of creating the strategic evaluation plans or documentation. Five main benefits emerged: (1) strengthening of program design, (2) shared understanding, (3) evaluation process use, (4) fostering buy-in for future work, and (5) relationship building (see Table 33). Both shared understanding and relationship building were also benefits expressed in Phase I.

Table 33.

Representative quotes regarding benefits associated with the strategic evaluation planning process

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Strengthening Program Design (*n* =10; 50%)	The act of planning a sequence of evaluations contributed to an understanding of gaps and strengths in program design.	*"So, I think that is also helpful, and I think when developing the strategic evaluation plan and then having to think about like, 'Okay, what do we wanna have? How we wanna do it, who should help communicate it?' I think there's also helpful time to think where there's gaps in the program already,*

		and get it in a better shape to evaluate it."
Shared Understanding (*n* =7; 35%)	Creating a unified language of program elements, expectations, and vision for the work being done. A common understanding laid the foundation for the rest of the work.	*"The process of planning all this out is really helpful for getting people on the same page, about what's going on."*
Evaluation Process Use (*n* =5; 25%)	Occasions where stakeholders indicated changes to their work and decisions based on their engagement with the strategic evaluation planning process.	*"I think it really got the states much more engaged in thinking about how their work could have an impact. I think prior to this, the states really viewed us [the CDC] as a source of funds to pay staff to do things. And whatever they needed to have done, well then, the CDC grant gave them money that they could do something. But I think once we put in place our evaluation strategies, the states really began to see what they were doing, they began to think of it more as a program that could have impact and they wanted to see that it did have impact."*
Fostering Buy-in for Future Work (*n* =3; 15%)	Stakeholders who have their voice heard in the SEP process become committed to the work and future iterations.	*"And so, they love the strategic plan, which is why they're happy to be involved later on because they also know that they get a say in it."*
Relationship Building (*n* =3; 15%)	The proliferation of stronger relationships between individuals and teams, often across departments.	*"We continually are trying to engage various stakeholders in improving asthma outcomes in our state, and I think this is a nice tool to better engage with them. And so, I think being relatively new to the program, now this will be a nice way for us to build upon those relationships."*

Implementation of the strategic evaluation plan. Participants in the case study were presented with a line of questioning regarding the implementation of the strategic evaluation

plan. Survey respondents were asked questions about barriers, strategies and facilitators of this

work, and benefits associated with implementing strategic evaluation plans.

   Barriers. Beyond the common issues encountered when conducting program evaluation

(e.g., small budgets, tight timelines, data collection issues, unpredictable stakeholders),

interviewees cited three unique challenges associated with implementing the SEP. Interviewees

confronted large amounts of staff turnover within their state health departments, stakeholders

with limited time and few resources, and a lack of evaluation skill on the part of those involved

in the implementation of the SEP (see Table 34). One of these themes, accommodating

stakeholders with limited time, aligned with results from Phase I.

Table 34.

Representative quotes regarding barriers associated with the strategic evaluation plan

implementation process

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Staff Turnover (*n* =12; 60%)	High fluctuation in personnel and staffing.	*"I think probably the number one barrier was, the staff turnover that a lot of them complained about, so they would have to start over again, some of them lost their, the directors and evaluators, some of... With some of our grantees it was a revolving door."*
Accommodating Stakeholders with Little Time & Few Resources (*n* =4; 20%)	The strategic evaluation planning process required ample time from stakeholders, which was often cumbersome to obtain. An array of resources, including money, were also seen as necessary, yet hard to obtain.	*"For the [SEP] work, the amount of funding that we do and amount of staffing that we have, we do a lot with that money. And so, it [implementing the SEP] is a big lift for this program.*
Lack of Evaluation Skill	Implementation was inhibited by stakeholders who lacked a basic	*"Looking at just an easier construct of an IEP [individual evaluation plan] versus*

(*n* =2; 10%)	understanding or ability to conduct evaluation tasks.	*something that's more abstract [like an SEP], it's harder for somebody who's not an evaluator to be able to comprehend and understand the process of it...And then just the scale of the scale of what it is you're evaluating, can make it more cumbersome and more difficult for a lay professional to understand or be able to assist it with."*

Strategies and facilitators. To attempt to mitigate these challenges, interviewees disclosed an array of strategies and facilitators that promote effective strategic evaluation planning processes (see Table 35). Incentives for participants involved in implementing the evaluation, building in time to periodically revise the documents during the implementation phase, and reframing for learning were all strategies mentioned during the interviews. These were all unique themes that did not emerge during Phase I.

Table 35.

Representative quotes highlighting strategies and facilitators to promote implementation

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Providing Incentives (*n* =3; 15%)	Offering stakeholders, especially community partner, incentives, especially small stipends, for their participation.	*"And then, you don't realize that at the time, you're just in it and you think these people are here because they wanna be here... Because the funds that we provided to local coalitions, by no means was a large amount, but it was something. And so just seeing that difference take shape, you realize money does really draw people. You wanna think that it was because they were passionate about it, but I think money does drive things for sure."*
Creating Time to Revise the Documents (*n* =2; 10%)	Reserved time to reflect and modify the planning documents throughout the project as a way to address and overcome	*"And adding that extra page for revisions throughout the year, I think will help and then it'll be something that now at every SEP, we're gonna look at this instead of just*

101

	implementation challenges in real time.	*saying, 'We did it at the beginning of the year, and then we're gonna submit it at the end of the year to CDC and say, We did it.' So now, that they'll be included in every meeting, a time to review the SEP, our progress on that and see where we are."*
Reframing for Learning (*n* =2; 10%)	Emphasizing the learning potential of SEPs, rather than solely the punitive or accountability-based aspects of evaluation.	*"When it was framed in terms of 'This is what we need to know' rather than, 'This is what you must do." ... When it was framed as, 'What do you need to know' rather than, here's 'What you must do,' it was the funder requirement was much less the focus and their information needs were."*

Benefits. Interviewees also shared benefits associated with having a SEP during the evaluation implementation efforts. Interviewees largely asserted that the main value of having the plan was so that it served as a guide to hold them accountable (*n* =7; 25%). As one interviewee noted:

> It definitely adds some accountability. Having that overall plan laid out, especially by having a good timeline laid out by year or month, it has helped us in the past just not scramble and try to do asthma evaluation, but to really know which ones we're gonna attack each year going into the process.

Unique contribution of the SEP framework. Lastly, interviewees were asked about their perceptions of the unique value of the SEP framework. Across the responses, four major themes emerged. The SEP was seen as useful in (1) addressing complex systems and the bigger picture of programming, (2) fostering alignment across the programming, (3) assisting with more effective resource allocation for evaluation, and (4) supporting the institutionalization of knowledge (see Table 36). During Phase I, addressing complex systems, fostering alignment, and assisting with more effective resource allocation for evaluation also emerged as themes.

Table 36.

Representative quotes regarding the unique added value associated with strategic evaluation

initiatives

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Address Complex Systems and the Bigger Picture of Programming ($n =7$, 35%)	Helping stakeholders view the work as a part of a large, complex, and interconnected system.	*"But having a strategic evaluation process gets people to think much more systematically about the work that they are doing and how all the pieces fit together. Perhaps helping them identify that they may be doing some things that aren't useful and should not be doing. And then essentially, really be looking at all of their work in systems-thinking approach."*
Foster Alignment Across Programming ($n =7$; 35%)	Assisting individuals and organizations in unpacking the intricacies of a body of programming and thus promoting an alignment, across departments, in values, goals, and missions.	*"Okay, well, how does this project align with your logic model? How does it align with CDC's project goals, and your project goals, and how does it align with everything? And then, what specific metrics are you gonna use to say that you were successful in doing this, and that you've achieved the goal that you set to achieve? And I think being able to lay that all out in a way is very, very useful for people who are particularly beginning public health, or if they have a lot of projects that they're lifting to try to make sure that they're all hitting particular areas and we're kind of staying on top of those things."*
More Effective Resource Allocation for Evaluation ($n =7$; 35%)	Collectively planning, prioritizing, and sequencing evaluations over a period of time helps determine when and where resources will be most needed.	*"Okay, I'm gonna be getting this data from somebody at this point." So how... I need to... I'm gonna need this data from these people at two different points. How do I only get it once?"*

| Institutionalization of Knowledge (*n* =4; 20%) | Serving as a historical and informational document that can be utilized within the organization. | *"I think we've found that the strategic evaluation plan and all of our individual evaluation plans or reports are really great historical documents for the programs. So, making sure that we have enough information in there so that somebody new can pick up the old one and say, 'Oh yeah, that's what that activity is,' and it describe it."* |

Additionally, interviewees highlighted how their work with strategic evaluation initiatives changed the way evaluation was thought about and acted upon. Overall, interviewee commentary coalesced around six changes: (1) an increased understanding of evaluation, (2) an increase in the perceived value of evaluation, (3) asking better questions, (4) the perception that evaluation is a learning function and not strictly for accountability, (5) a desire to more thoroughly integrate evaluation, and (6) using SEP in other projects (see Table 37). Three of these themes, an increase in the perceived value of evaluation, asking better questions, and a desire to more thoroughly integrate evaluation, also emerged in Phase I.

Table 37.

Representative quotes showcasing the changes in how participants think about evaluation

Theme	Definition of Theme	Qualitative Quote
Increased Understanding of Evaluation (*n* =10; 50%)	Helping stakeholders who are involved in the process further their understanding of evaluation and its uses, as well as, build knowledge and refine their evaluative skills.	*"The CDC was directing states to focus a lot of attention on evaluation; they had created these evaluation documents that states could use to become more informed about what evaluation is and to appreciate what you could do with it...So I think the CDC developing those documents was helpful as a good refresher of what evaluation entails and try to hone in on making use of it so you can get*

Increase in the Perceived Value of Evaluation (n =5; 25%)	An expanded belief in the importance and benefits of evaluation.	*“I expected people to go running and screaming when the evaluator came, and I was really surprised by people lining up seven or eight projects that they wanted evaluated. I thought they would be sort of pulling teeth to get people to line up just three.”*
Asking Better Questions (n =5; 25%)	Posing inquiries that examine a more holistic view of a situation. Thinking critically and openly.	*“So, it's changed how I'm thinking about things and how I'm asking questions even within the asthma program and my other programs I'm evaluating.”*
Evaluation for Learning (n =5; 30%)	Reframing the SEP process as a learning tool, rather than solely punitive or accountability driven.	*“I think measurement and evaluation as something that isn't just for accountability but is for learning and capacity building. I mean, I think maybe I already had an orientation towards...but it made me understand it more deeply. It made me all the more committed to it.”*
Desire to More Thoroughly Integrate Evaluation (n =5; 25%)	A desire to embed evaluation into routine practices, across the duration of a project or program's lifecycle.	*“I think just starting your efforts from the get-go, from the beginning of a project is really where efforts should be focused. Previous to the first SEP, I don't know that I would have started evaluating a program right away. I would have probably started implementing it and then thought, "Oh, I should probably evaluate this." Whereas now I realize that evaluation should be something that you start from the beginning of a project.”*

Using SEP in Other Work Allocation (*n* =4; 20%)	Transferring the SEP principles, framework, and structures to other work, external to the current project or program.	*"I went into the process, because there's is so structured and prescriptive, kicking and screaming. And now I insist that we use it for every project. So, you know, if you look at any of our strategic plans, they look almost identical to the asthma one."*

Summary. The interviews conducted during the Phase II case study provide a deeper understanding of how individuals within a specific organization experience the three stages of strategic evaluation, both corroborating Phase I findings and offering fresh insights. Figure 15 offers a final visual depiction of how the various aspects of strategic evaluation initiatives related to one another, weaving in the detailed insights from this case study. This model includes several specific modifications (shaded in grey), including two additional 'realized benefits' (i.e., buy-in for future work and strengthened program design) and two additional 'added values' (i.e., evaluation for learning and increased understanding of evaluation). This final iteration of the visual illustrates how the activities involved in strategic evaluation initiatives correspond with the realized benefits and added value of the initiatives.
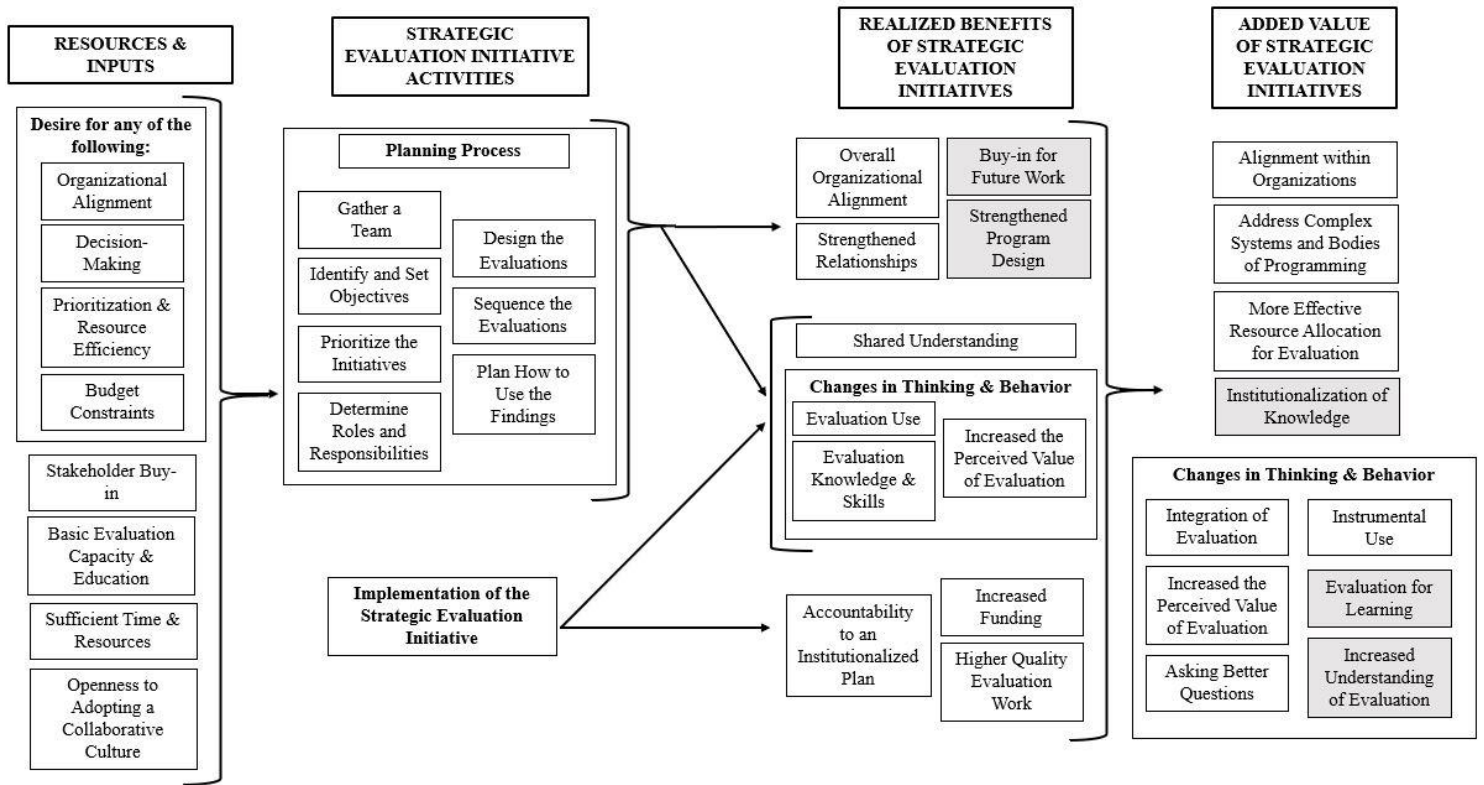
Figure 15. Visual model of Phase I and Phase II study findings related to the relationship between activities involved in strategic evaluation initiatives, realized benefits, and added value of the initiatives. New additions have been shaded in grey. Please note, the vertical components of the figure (e.g., stakeholder buy-in), grouped under each heading, are not displayed in terms of thematic importance or prevalence.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study used an exploratory concurrent multi-phase mixed-methods design to systematically explore the practice of strategic evaluation planning. The study leveraged two phases, both of which were designed to (1) systematically investigate the current landscape of strategic evaluation frameworks, (2) examine what factors contribute to the decision for an organization to undergo a strategic planning initiative, (3) explore the components involved in the process of creating a strategic evaluation plan, (4) understand how strategic evaluation initiatives are implemented, and (5) investigate the unique contributions the process and implementation of strategic evaluation plans may offer the field of evaluation.

The following chapter first triangulates the findings from the studies nested within Phase I and Phase II of the overall research project to answer each of the originally posed research questions. The findings are also contextualized within the relevant evaluation scholarship, connecting the overall study findings back to the literature discussed in Chapter 1. Additionally, practical implications and future research considerations are highlighted. Finally, strengths and limitations of the study are discussed.

Research Question 1: Current Landscape of Strategic Evaluation Initiatives

What evidence of strategic evaluation planning or similar practices currently exist in the field (e.g., strategic evaluation plans, learning agendas)? Furthermore, what are similarities and differences across adopted strategic evaluation initiatives, formal guiding frameworks, or other practices that overlap with critical features of strategic evaluation planning?

Results from all three sub-studies (i.e., document review, survey, and interviews) within Phase I provide a partial illustration of the current use of strategic evaluation initiatives in the

field. A discussion of the findings related to the first research question is offered below and is broken into two main topic areas: (1) evidence of use and (2) similarities and differences across adopted initiatives.

Evidence of use. The systematic document review conducted during Study One and the survey disseminated during Study Two of Phase I both elicit insights on the current use of strategic evaluation initiatives in the field. The document review offered an understanding of what terminology surrounding strategic evaluation initiatives currently exists, while the survey shed light on the domains in which these types of initiatives are carried out. As revealed from the document review, 16 unique terms were found that aligned with the working definition of strategic evaluation[10] used in this study, suggesting the use of strategic evaluation initiatives is diffuse and potentially cumbersome to fully account for due to the large variations in terminology.

However, feedback from survey respondents regarding terminology for strategic evaluation initiatives indicated the majority of respondents had been exposed to the concepts of "monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks," "learning agendas," and "strategic evaluation plans." This finding, highlighting the most commonly used terms for the practice, provides some semblance of standardization from which to approach research on this concept in the future.

Furthermore, survey findings also offered evidence of the domains in which strategic evaluation initiatives are most likely to be used. Survey respondents who indicated engagement in a strategic evaluation initiative were asked to share the setting in which their experience with

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[10] A comprehensive planning process that guides and coordinates how evaluations are prioritized and sequenced across the many projects/programs/initiatives within an organization, over a determined period of time (e.g., 5 years).

strategic evaluation occurred. Based on survey responses, strategic initiatives were mostly reported as being used in nonprofit organizations, the federal government, local government, and foundations. Again, this finding offers a frame of reference for where to conduct future research on strategic evaluation initiatives.

Overall, evidence on the pervasiveness of the use of strategic evaluation initiatives is inconclusive. This study was exploratory in nature, and thus unable to offer a representative sense of how prevalent these initiatives may be. However, this study does offer preliminary data indicating that strategic evaluation initiatives are indeed occurring at a notable frequency, considering 45% of the survey respondents had heard of the concept.

Similarities and differences. Differences between various strategic evaluation initiatives were mostly in relation to the terminology used to label the initiatives. As explained above, document review, survey, and interview findings all highlighted the lack of consistency in terminology. This was cited as potentially resulting in confusion, especially for stakeholders who work outside of the evaluation profession. As such, these sentiments indicate that the obtuse and varied terminology presents a major challenge for those seeking to engage in, or who are already engaged in, strategic evaluation initiatives. In the future, it would behoove proponents of this approach to make concerted efforts to standardize the terminology related to strategic evaluation initiatives, differentiate the practice from traditional evaluation planning, and articulate the value of strategic evaluation initiatives. In essence, more education on strategic evaluation initiatives is needed.

These differences were an exception to a broader rule that was seen through this study – the vast similarities between strategic evaluation initiatives. The similarities across various strategic evaluation initiatives are expansive. In fact, these similarities are so numerous that the

110

remainder of the discussion offered here is positioned in terms of themes that were shared across strategic evaluation initiatives.

Research Question 2: Decision to Undergo Strategic Evaluation (Stage 1)

What factors contribute to the decision to undergo a strategic evaluation initiative (e.g., motivations, desired outcomes, values)?

Data gleaned from the survey and interviews conducted during Phase I, as well as the Phase II case study converge to provide the field with its first comprehensive understanding of how strategic evaluation initiatives originate. Across the data sources, study participants shared similar insights on the main factors driving the use of strategic evaluation initiatives. These factors were clustered into three topic areas: (1) originators of the idea for strategic evaluation initiatives, (2) rationale for use, and (3) resources utilized to create the strategic evaluation initiative framework.

Originators of the idea. Both survey and case study data indicate that the impetus to engage in strategic evaluation tends to derive from organizational leaders and funders. Especially in the case study example, findings reveal that individuals with decision-making power are the individuals who are likely to build momentum around an initiative of this magnitude.

Rationale for use. Across the survey, interview, and case study data, the same rationales for undergoing strategic evaluation initiatives were provided by study participants. Individuals and organizations adopted strategic evaluation initiatives to (1) build alignment and cross-sector learning across their organization, (2) inform decision making in a systematic way, and (3) assist with determining what priorities an organization should focus on. This finding illustrates that the concept of strategic evaluation initiatives is uniformly viewed as a mechanism to promote

organizational alignment, systematic decision making, and refine foci across wide portfolios of evaluation work.

These rationales for adopting a strategic evaluation initiative give credence to the five deficiencies Preskill and Mack (2013) speculate could be remedied through strategic evaluation planning. The authors assert that organizations with an interest in strategic evaluation may seek answers to questions within and across programs (i.e., organizational alignment), to coordinating data collection initiatives and decisions-making (i.e., systematic decision making), and avoiding engagement in sporadic, ad hoc evaluation work (i.e., selecting evaluations to focus on and prioritize across a programming portfolio). Furthermore, the notion that strategic evaluation initiatives are adopted to assist with decision making corresponds with the very definitions of strategic planning, from the private and public sectors, discussed in Chapter 1 (Wolf & Floyd, 2017; Bryson, 2010).

Resources utilized. Interview and case study participants shared that during the early stages of developing strategic evaluation initiatives, they leveraged resources from an array of sources, such as (1) external organizations, (2) other disciplines, and (3) evaluation theory. Although there was no single resource that was mentioned with a high rate of frequency, the use of Michael Quinn Patton's *Utilization Focused Evaluation* book was mentioned on three occasions. This source was cited across the survey, interviews, and case study, highlighting a potential linkage between the desire to adopt a strategic approach to evaluation and the importance of generating processes and documents that foster evaluation use for target audiences (i.e., Utilization Focused Evaluation).

This finding makes sense considering one of the first places in the evaluation literature that strategic evaluation initiatives appeared was in Preskill and Boyle (2008)'s Multidisciplinary

Model of Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB). Much like Patton's Utilization-Focused

Evaluation (UFE) approach, the body of literature surrounding ECB and its facilitators resides on

the "use" branch of the Evaluation Theory Tree (Christie & Alkin, 2008). As such, the linkage

between UFE and strategic evaluation planning is logical considering both are tied to the

movement for evaluation use.

Moreover, the influence of UFE on the strategic evaluation initiatives designed by

participants of this study is evident. For example, many of the prescribed steps in the strategic

evaluation planning process (e.g., gather a team, prioritize the evaluations) directly align with

steps in the UFE Framework (e.g., identify and engage primary intended users and focus

prioritize evaluation questions; Patton, 2008). Accordingly, this linkage between UFE and

strategic evaluation initiatives offers a potential expansion of use-oriented evaluation theories,

framing strategic evaluation initiatives as tangible mechanisms to promote process use and ECB

in a UFE inspired fashion.

Research Question 3: Engagement in the Strategic Evaluation Planning Process

(Stage 2) *How does the strategic evaluation process occur and what are the main components*

associated with engaging in the strategic evaluation planning process (e.g., personnel involved,

timing)? Furthermore, what barriers, facilitators, and benefits, if any, exist as a part of the

process?

Information gathered from the Study One document review, the Study Two survey, the

Study Three interviews, and the Phase II case study all support a cohesive understanding of how

strategic evaluation planning processes unfold. Additionally, the data converge to highlight

barriers, facilitators, and benefits associated with designing a plan to carry out evaluations

strategically. These items are featured in the visual below (Figure 16) and further described in the text.

Stage 2: Engagement in the Strategic Evaluation Planning Process

- Gather a diverse team to engage in planning
- Facilitate prioritization dialogues
- Demonstrate the value of the process & product to the team
- Leverage strong interpersonal and people management skills
- Maintain high team engagement

- Issues related to gaining buy-in from leadership and team members
- Limitations related to time and resource scarcity
- Intensive efforts needed to gain trust and build relationships

Facilitators & Strategies

Barriers & Challenges

Most salient benefits of the process: (1) organizational alignment across programs, evaluations, and the mission. **(2)** increases in the perceptions of the value of evaluation, **(3)** shared understanding among stakeholders.

Figure 16. Facilitators, barriers, and benefits involved with the process of creating a strategic evaluation plan

Process. Although no single data source or participant fully articulated every step utilized to create a strategic evaluation plan, two components of the process were frequently identified as the most important in the planning of evaluations across numerous initiatives within an organization, over a determined period of time. Both the efforts to (1) gather a diverse team to engage in the planning process and (2) facilitate prioritization dialogues with the planning team were salient across all sources of data.

These two steps align heavily with insights previously gleaned from the private and public sectors regarding effective strategic planning processes. For one, both bodies of literature

indicate that it is not advantageous for strategic thinking to strictly be conducted by top

management, rather a diverse array of personnel should be engaged in the process (Poister, 2010;

Wolf & Floyd, 2017). Additionally, the robust participant commentary on assembling a diverse

team and facilitating prioritization dialogues aligns with the six strategic evaluation planning

steps outlined by the CDC (CDC, 2010). Specifically, these findings reiterate the critical nature

of establishing an inclusive planning team and prioritizing the various activities to be evaluated.

   Barriers. Although there were numerous barriers to the creation of a strategic evaluation

plan cited, three challenges were most robust across the various data collection efforts (1)

securing the necessary stakeholder buy-in, (2) accommodating stakeholders with limited time

and low resources (which likely contributed to the challenge of securing buy-in), and (3)

building trusting relationships with wide arrays of stakeholders.

   These findings correspond with previous scholarship surrounding the challenging nature

of developing stakeholder commitment and support throughout evaluation initiatives, especially

those that are cross-site or cross-sectional. Lawrenz and Huffman (2003) note that a difficulty of

conducting cross-site evaluation activities, specifically strategic evaluation planning in this

context, is gaining buy-in from the numerous layers of diverse stakeholders who are often

unfamiliar with one another. However, the authors note that relationship and trust building was

one mechanism to secure this buy-in through the planning process. Furthermore, the evaluation

field is brimming with evidence on the importance of relationship building when cultivating

support for evaluation. Utilization-Focused Evaluation (Patton, 2008) and Interactive Evaluation

Practice (King & Stevahn, 2012) emphasize the significance of relationship quality in promoting

evaluation. Thus, the barriers faced in the strategic evaluation planning process are not

necessarily unique as they correspond with challenges faced across several activities performed within the evaluation field.

Facilitators and strategies. In contrast to the barriers cited, data from the Study Three interviews and the Phase II case study offer insights on potential ways to overcome some of the challenges associated with the process of creating strategic evaluation planning documents. Maintaining an engaged planning team was cited as key facilitator of the strategic evaluation planning process. The inclusion of stakeholders who were excited and invested in the process contributed to a more successful experience. This result echoes Patton (1997)'s emphasis on the importance of the personal factor, or the "presence of an identifiable individual or group of people who personally care about the evaluation and the findings it generates" (p. 44).

Another prominent facilitator was the act of articulating the value of strategic evaluation to the team. Making an intentional effort to demonstrate the value of the work, or generating a value proposition, was perceived to constitute a mechanism to cultivate support and commitment from the planning team. Once stakeholders and team members understood the work, and saw value in it, they were much more willing to contribute to the planning process.

In alignment with these two facilitators, the final strategy the interview and case study participants shared was the development of proficient people management skills. Maintaining team engagement, securing buy-in, and maintaining team engagement are all key elements of strategic evaluation initiatives that rely on strong people management and interpersonal skills. Therefore, it is essential to hone these skills when undertaking a strategic evaluation planning process.

These cited facilitators of strategic evaluation planning reinforce several findings from previous evaluation literature. Ample scholarship explores the importance of obtaining diverse

116

stakeholder commitment (Alkin, Daillak & White, 1979; Greene, 1988; Taut, 2008), highlighting strategies to secure this stakeholder support. Prior literature on securing stakeholder buy-in encourages the use of collaborative planning, facilitated peer exchanges, and relationship building as mechanisms to cultivate evaluation ownership (Rogers, Ahmed, Hamdallah, & Little, 2010). This literature aligns with the finding regarding the importance of conveying the value of strategic evaluation planning to stakeholders. Furthermore, this study's findings correspond with evaluation literature that underscores the need for evaluators to harbor strong interpersonal competence (Dewey, Montrosse, Sullins, & Mattox, 2008).

  Benefits. Finally, findings from across the sub-studies offer evidence of the positive outcomes associated with engaging in the strategic evaluation planning process. Overall, three benefits were most apparent in the data. For one, organizational alignment was conceptualized as a major benefit of engaging in the process. Creating space to engage in discussions, with team members from across the organization, allowed for the deconstruction of silos within the organizations. This finding supports extant literature from strategic planning in the private sector that posits strategic planning initiatives have an integrative effect that unites various organizational departments under a common understanding (Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009).

  Secondly, the strategic evaluation planning process contributed to a shared understanding of not only what the strategic evaluation initiative would entail, but also promoted a common language around goals and anticipated outcomes for evaluation itself. This finding reaffirmed Preskill and Boyle's (2008) assertion that a clear strategic evaluation plan has the potential to mitigate confusion and may promote a clearer vision of evaluation. Furthermore, this perceived benefit is supported by previous literature regarding what constitutes effective evaluation initiatives. Newman, Brown, and Braskamp (1980), state evaluation activities that make

117

"relevant audiences more aware of the program, its context, and the constraints under which it was funded, implemented, and amendable to alterations are regarded as important as end results" (p.viii). This sentiment helps position the outcomes of strategic evaluation (i.e., a shared understanding) as beneficial.

Last, study participants from the Study Three interviews and the Phase II case study noted that the process of creating a strategic evaluation plan altered their evaluation behaviors in a wide variety of ways. After participating in the creation of the strategic evaluation plan, stakeholders reported an expanded understanding of the value of evaluation. This finding provides systematically generated evidence for Preskill and Mack's (2013) idea that strategic evaluation planning may also reinforce stakeholders' understanding of why evaluation is important and how it will be used.

Not only did this study provide a cohesive understanding of how strategic evaluation planning processes unfold, exploring the barriers, facilitators, and benefits, it also offers a potential expansion of evaluation theory related to process use, ECB, and evaluative thinking. The findings from this study illustrate how participating in a strategic evaluation planning process may influence how stakeholders think and act on evaluation, potentially triggering increases in evaluative thinking and evaluation capacity.

Research Question 4: Implementation of the Strategic Evaluation Plan (Stage 3)

How do individuals implement the strategic evaluation plan within their organizations or programs? Moreover, what barriers, facilitators, and benefits, if any, exist as a part of the implementation process?

Data from across the Study Two survey, Study Three interviews, and Phase II case study illuminate the barriers, facilitators, and benefits associated with implementing a strategic

evaluation plan. These items are featured in the visual below (Figure 17) and then further described in the text.

Stage 3: Implementation of the Strategic Evaluation Plan

Facilitators & Strategies

- Create structured time and space for period revisions to the strategic evaluation plan during implementation

- Provide incentives to those carrying out the evaluations (if not contracting with external evaluators)

- Beware of staff turnover and the impact it may have in plan implementation

- Identify and address capacity issues related to time, resources, and evaluation skills

Barriers & Challenges

Main benefit of having a plan during implementation: provides structured accountability and guidance

Figure 17. Facilitators, barriers, and benefits involved with implementing a strategic evaluation plan

Barriers. Throughout Phase I and Phase II of the current research study, several challenges were highlighted regarding the implementation of strategic evaluation plans. However, two barriers were most commonly cited across the various forms of data collection. The first barrier of implementing strategic evaluation plans is large amounts of turnover within the programs being evaluated, partnering entities, the strategic evaluation team, or among the organization leadership. Participants stated that although strategic evaluation plans are useful institutional resources, staff turnover often disrupts the continuity between the strategic evaluation planning process and actual implementation. As such, momentum for the project dwindles in the face of high rates of staff turnover.

The second barrier most commonly discussed was in relation to addressing stakeholders with limited capacity. Among the respondents in Phase I, capacity primarily referred to time and resources needed to complete the planned evaluations. On the contrary, Phase II participants struggled to implement their strategic evaluation plans in the face of stakeholders who lacked robust evaluation skills. Nonetheless, capacity related issues presented a barrier for the majority of study participants. This finding corresponds with an abundance of previous evaluation scholarship that identified the act of engaging individuals with little or no training in program evaluation as a major challenge of any evaluation initiative (King & Volkov, 2005).

Facilitators and strategies. Despite these cited barriers, data from the Study Three interviews and the Phase II case study provide two strategies that participants viewed as helpful when carrying out strategic evaluation plans. For one, study participants suggest creating space for structured revisions to the strategic evaluation plans. This helps troubleshoot unexpected funding and data collection issues as they arise. This also provides new stakeholders, who may be introduced into the process mid-way as a result of turnover, a chance to contribute to the initiative.

The second most commonly cited facilitator relates to mechanisms that may foster motivation among those involved with evaluation implementation. Phase I participants spoke about the importance of reminding stakeholders that they contributed to, and previously agreed to, the current strategic evaluation plan. When stakeholder motivation or support decreases during the implementation stage, a simple reminder to the stakeholders that they helped shape the plan was believed to be useful for reigniting commitment. In addition, Phase II participants also spoke about ideas to foster motivation among stakeholders. Interviewees from state health departments bolstered stakeholder motivation by providing incentives for participants involved

with implementing the evaluation. The use of discretionary funds within the budget has tremendous effects on engagement and project commitment.

These espoused facilitators align with extant literature on strategic planning. For example, Long and Franklin (2004) stress the importance of ensuring strategic documents are customized to the needs of agencies. As such, a revision process promotes this continuation of customization efforts. Similarly, Roberts (2000) advises that strategic plans should be contextually flexible, allowing for modification based upon circumstance. This notion again corroborates the importance of allocating time for revising the strategic evaluation plan during implementation. The notion of creating space for revisions also harkens back to the definitions of strategic planning in the public and private sectors that was shared in Chapter 1. Both the private and public sectors position strategic planning as an endeavor that periodically necessitates formal review and adaption (Bryson, 2010; Wolf & Floyd, 2017).

Regarding incentivization, there is no specific literature exploring incentives as a strategy to boost motivation and participation in strategic planning. However, extant organizational psychology literature suggests reward and recognition programs can positively affect motivation, performance, and interest (Milne, 2007).

Benefits. Lastly, results from across the studies illuminate one major benefit associated with having a strategic evaluation plan during implementation. Participants from the Study Three interviews and the Phase II case study indicate that having a strategic evaluation plan during the implementation stage promotes structured accountability. In essence, the strategic evaluation plan serves as a guide that all stakeholders can anchor their work to, across programs and across years. This cited benefit corresponds with previous literature on the benefits of evaluation

planning at large, asserting evaluation plans clarify the direction evaluations should take based on priorities, resources, time, and skills needed to accomplish the evaluation (CDC, 2011).

Figure 18 provides a visual depiction of how the discussed facilitators and barriers interact with the overall model of strategic evaluation initiatives discussed previously.
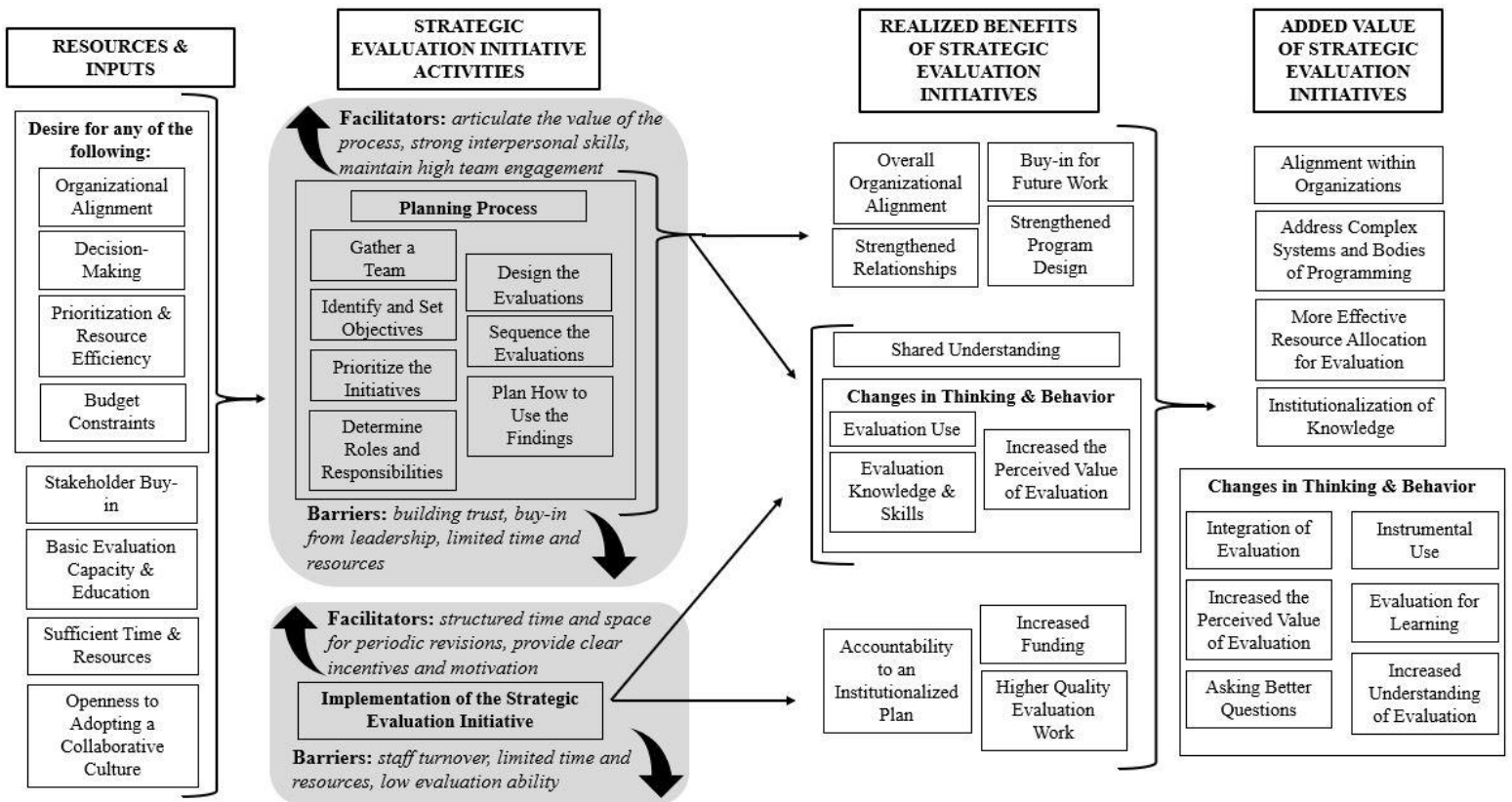
Figure 18. Visual model of the overarching study findings, including the relationship between activities, realized benefits, added value, facilitators, and barriers of strategic evaluation initiatives

Research Question 5: Unique Contribution

What unique added-value, if any, does the process or implementation of strategic evaluation planning offer the field of evaluation?

The results shared above are promising, and ultimately suggest that the rationales for

engaging in strategic evaluation initiatives highly align with the realized benefits. However, this

study also sought to explore how strategic evaluation initiatives result in outcomes that transcend

other practices already employed in the field of evaluation. Accordingly, interview protocols

utilized in Phase I and Phase II asked participants to reflect on the unique contribution of

strategic evaluation initiatives. These cited contributions offer systematically gathered evidence

to support the potential benefits of strategic evaluation that were cited at the beginning of this

study. Across the interview commentary, three major contributions emerged (1) addressing

complex systems, (2) fostering alignment within organizations, and (3) assisting with resource

allocation for evaluation.

Moreover, interview participants from both Phase I and Phase II highlighted how their

experience with strategic evaluation initiatives altered how they thought and acted upon

evaluation within their organizations. Overall, interviewee commentary highlighted that

engagement in strategic evaluation initiatives enable participants to (1) increase their

understanding of evaluation, (2) increase their perceived value of evaluation, (3) ask better

questions, (4) adopt the perception of evaluation as a learning function, rather than strictly for

accountability, and (5) integrate evaluation widely across their work.

To be sure, strategic evaluation initiatives share numerous similarities with the general

evaluation planning that is typically conducted within individual programs. For example,

creating individual program evaluation plans is also believed to create a shared understanding,

assist with evaluation resource allocation, create institutionalized knowledge, and facilitate

evaluation capacity building (CDC, 2011). However, this study demonstrates that the benefits of

strategic evaluation initiatives encompass and extend beyond these already asserted outcomes of

general evaluation planning. Specifically, strategic evaluation initiatives are a tool to address complex systems, foster alignment across organizations, and change the way individuals, across an organization, think and act on evaluation. Each of these benefits would not be as readily attained in situations where evaluation planning is limited to one discrete program, as is the case with general evaluation planning.

When examining these categories of changes in thinking and behavior alongside the extant evaluation scholarship, some striking similarities between these findings and the evaluation capacity building (ECB) and evaluative thinking literature bases emerge. Regarding ECB, the study theme of "Increased Understanding of Evaluation" aligns with indicators of evaluation capacity as consolidated by Fierro and Christie (2017). Specifically, the increase in evaluation understanding, knowledge, and skills observed in this study correspond with the ECB indicator related to "collective knowledge and skills" (p. 379). This study demonstrated that through strategic evaluation initiatives, the number of individuals within a program who have the ability to actively contribute to performing an evaluation increased.

Furthermore, several of the evaluative behavior change themes align with the indicators of evaluative thinking put forth by Fierro and colleagues (2018). These aligned indicators include: valuing of evaluation, reflecting via thoughtful questions, and using evaluation by integrating it into routine practices. As such, both the indicators of evaluation capacity and evaluative thinking are present in the findings from this study.

Overall, these unique contributions of strategic evaluation initiatives reveal avenues for potential evaluation theory expansion related to process use, evaluative thinking, and ECB. The unique benefits that were observed in this study suggest that strategic evaluation initiatives may serve as an intervention to promote process use, foster evaluative thinking, and build evaluation

capacity. Each of these three topics often seem abstract in the current evaluation literature, however the findings from this study offer evaluation practitioners tangible actions that can be adopted when advancing these important concepts.

Implications and Future Directions

This study, the first of its kind to systematically explore the process, barriers, facilitators, and benefits of strategic evaluation initiatives, harbors several important implications for the promotion of evaluation process use, evaluation capacity building (ECB), evaluative thinking, interpersonal evaluator competency training, and the overall practice of evaluation in organizations.

Evaluation process use. The beginning of this investigation presented literature on evaluation process use, proposing that strategic evaluation initiatives were well-suited to manifest process use. Results from this study verified that strategic evaluation initiatives do indeed support many outcomes linked with evaluation process use. Specifically, findings related to the benefits of the strategic evaluation planning and implementation processes demonstrate the power of strategic evaluation initiatives to develop cultures that value evaluation, create shared realities among stakeholders, and change how stakeholders think about and act toward evaluation.

Future research is needed to expand upon these exploratory findings. Additional studies may seek to leverage quantitative methodologies to begin to measure changes in organization-wide and individual-level perceptions toward evaluation, willingness to engage in evaluation, and evaluation behaviors from before and after a strategic evaluation initiative. The integration of pre-existing survey instruments might provide a fruitful starting point for the continuation of this work.

Evaluation capacity building. Results from this exploration also provide preliminary evidence that strategic evaluation initiatives may serve as a mechanism for ECB. In the past, strategic evaluation plans have indeed been positioned within the ECB literature and featured as a "sustainable evaluation practice" within the Multidisciplinary Model of Evaluation Capacity Building (Preskill & Boyle, 2008). However, findings from this study indicate that strategic evaluation initiatives may serve as much more than merely a "sustainable evaluation practice," instead constituting an intentional tool to actively develop key ECB structures within an organization. In this study, strategic evaluation initiatives were shown to provide infrastructure to support evaluation processes, facilitate purposeful socialization into the evaluation process, and drive peer learning; all of which are essential elements of the Evaluation Capacity Building framework put forth by King and Volkov (2005).

Future research may consider approaching the study of strategic evaluation initiatives from a more refined ECB lens. Studies could utilize a single-site case study methodology to gain more nuanced empirical data on the connection between introducing a strategic evaluation initiative and the development of indicators of ECB. One instrument to include in such a study might be the *Public Health Program Evaluation Capacity & Practice Questionnaire* (Fierro, 2012) or the Organizational Evaluation Capacity Assessment Instrument (Bourgeois, Whynot, & Thériault, 2015).

Evaluative Thinking. As previously discussed, the thematic findings from this study heavily align with indicators of evaluative thinking, as found in the extant literature. Specifically, this study demonstrates a linkage between activities involved in strategic evaluation initiatives and numerous indicators of evaluative thinking (i.e., reflecting, valuing evaluation, and use). As such, the process of engaging in a strategic evaluation initiative may serve as a potential

126

intervention for fostering evaluative thinking among participating stakeholders. Future research might empirically explore the relationship between undergoing strategic evaluation initiatives and evaluative thinking. Such a study would provide more tangible insights on how to cultivate evaluative thinking.

Interpersonal training. Numerous findings from this study highlight the importance of building trusting relationships, maintaining high levels of team engagement, fostering buy-in, and possessing strong people management skills to successfully carry out strategic evaluation initiatives. As such, these results reinforce the importance of devising training methods to instill interpersonal skills in evaluation professionals. Future research should continue to develop trainings to assist evaluators in sharpening interpersonal competencies via the use of scaffolded practice, video feedback, expertise-based training, and behavioral modeling (Mason, 2016).

Evaluation practice within organizations. Lastly, this investigation provides individuals who are interested in engaging in a strategic evaluation initiative with tips on how to facilitate this process within their organization, as well as insight on what challenges may arise. More than anything, it is hoped that this study offers insights that can be actionable and useful for evaluation practitioners who seek to integrate this process, or parts of it, in their work. Appendix L presents an infographic with practical guidance on how to engage in strategic evaluation initiatives.

However, future scholarship should consider exploring the attributes of organizations or programs that might benefit most from a strategic evaluation initiative. As discussed in Chapter 1, not all initiatives are suitable for strategic evaluation planning (Preskill & Boyle, 2008). Organizational maturity, decision making needs, and program frequency are several

considerations that future studies should explore in relation to the efficacy of a strategic evaluation initiative.

Study Strengths and Study Limitations

As with any study, this exploration possessed several strengths and areas for improvement. For one, this study constitutes the first attempt to synthesis the disparate literatures on strategic evaluation initiatives, and the many terms associated with the practice. Using a range of methodologies, this study provided insights on strategic evaluation practices within an array of organizations, such as nonprofits, foundations, and government agencies. This study serves as a critical launchpad for future work on this potentially promising practice. On the contrary, this study also harbors some limitations. These limitations can be grouped into two categories: methodological and analytical.

Methodological. For one, the vast majority of data collected in this study are susceptible to inaccuracies due to poor recall. Inherent in the design of the methodology, several of the study's participants, across the survey, interviews, and the case study, were asked to reflect on experiences that occurred over a decade ago. Although the researcher offered to share the interview protocols with respondents in advance, issues associated with memory recall are still a limitation of this study.

Additionally, this investigation relied heavily on qualitative methodologies, which like all methodologies, are limited. In qualitative methodologies, the researcher is positioned as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Therefore, this study is susceptible to the researcher's biases, paradigms, and world views. Efforts to reduce this limitation included the integration of mixed methodologies. Particularly the systematic document review and survey strived to triangulate findings across the multiple data sources.

Secondly, there were limitations with the samples leveraged in several of the Phase I data collection efforts. For one, the sample size in Study 2 (survey) was particularly low. Although the survey results were not intended to be generalizable, a more robust sample size would have provided a better selection of individuals to source for Study 3 (interviews). The low sample size may be due to logistical issues encountered during survey dissemination. Specifically, there was some evidence to believe that email spam blockers may have interfered with the Qualtrics survey dissemination features.

Similarly, the sample size in Study 3 (interviews; *N*=11) was also low, not allowing for robust saturation in the interviewee commentary. However, this portion of the study was not intended to be generalizable, rather Study 3 (interviews) sought to offer a broad glimpse of how strategic evaluation initiatives are occurring in a variety of organizations. Accordingly, the added value of Phase II (case study) was its affirmation of Study 3 (interview) themes. The case study corroborated many Study 3 (interview) findings, helping to mitigate many of the limitations associated with a small sample size.

Lastly, the Phase II case study sample was purely convenience based. Although the initial intent was to sample state health departments, ranging on key attributes (e.g., perceived engagement with the SEP, size), the researcher resorted to a convenience sample due to issues with the availability of state health department personnel. Additionally, many of the state health department personnel who were interviewed (7 of the 14; 50%) had limited experience with Strategic Evaluation Planning since they were newly hired (a result of the high turnover previously discussed) and this was their first experience with creating a Strategic Evaluation Plan as conceptualized by the NACP. As such, some topics related to the implementation of strategic evaluation plans were not applicable to these interviewees.

Analytical. Once again, the utilization of a substantial amount of qualitative data

resulted in several analytical limitations. Again, since the researcher is the primary instrument of

analysis in qualitative work, the coding and interpretation of the data were once again reflective

of the researcher's biases and world views. However, the literature sourced from the document

review served as key reference points to guide the qualitative analysis, helping to decrease some

bias.

 Additionally, the researcher was external to the organizations and institutions referenced

throughout this study. This includes the organizations referenced in the Phase I interviewee

commentary, as well as the state health departments featured in the Phase II case study. As such,

the researcher's ability to draw inferences that accurately represent the organizations'

experiences is limited. However, the intent of the study was to explore general trends

surrounding strategic evaluation initiatives, rather than generalize specific accounts to other

organizations. Therefore, this limitation hopefully poses less of a challenge to the study at large.

Conclusion

 Using an exploratory concurrent multi-phase mixed-methods design, this study was the

first of its kind to investigate how strategic planning, a popular concept in the private and public

sectors, may be extrapolated to the field of evaluation, and therefore (1) systematically explore

the current landscape of strategic evaluation initiatives, and (2) examine strategic evaluation

initiatives in practice. More importantly, this investigation furthered the field of evaluation's

collective understanding of the process, barriers, facilitators, and benefits of strategic evaluation

initiatives. Through this study, strategic evaluation initiatives are positioned as a promising tool

to promote evaluation process use, drive evaluation capacity building, and cultivate evaluative

thinking. In other words, engaging in a strategic evaluation initiative may serve as an

intervention to boost stakeholders' evaluation knowledge and skills, increase the perceived value of evaluation, and change the way individuals think about and act on evaluation.

At the end of the day, most evaluation work seeks to assist organizations that are on the front-line of championing equity and positive social change. As evaluators, one of the most important way to assist these change-makers is by giving them the skills to do and use evaluation on their own (i.e., evaluation capacity). It is through practices, such as strategic evaluation initiatives, that individuals in these organizations have the opportunity to build their capacity to do and use evaluation. It is hoped that this study inspires evaluators, organizational leaders, funders, and program staff to engage in a strategic evaluation initiative and provides them with a foundation to begin the process. It is through practices such as strategic evaluation initiatives, that organizations may systematically amplify their missions, in turn contributing to the creation of sustainable social betterment for all.

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    Publications, Inc.

Appendix A: Complete List of Relevant Documents Reviewed

Document Name	Document Type	Year	Source	Search Term Used	Original Purpose/Audience of Document
The Application of Logic Modeling to Strategic Evaluation Planning	Conference Presentation Abstract	2008	AEA Conference Program	"Strategic evaluation planning"	Conference attendees
Integrating Strategic Evaluation Planning and Evaluation Capacity Building: A Discussion Based on a Public Health Program's Experiences	Conference Presentation Abstract	2009	AEA Conference Program	"strategic evaluation planning"	Conference attendees
Deepa Valvi on the Strategic Evaluation Planning Process	Blog	2010	AEA365	"strategic planning"	AEA members
From Deliverables to Strategies: Experience of Implementing a National Evaluation Policy via Statewide Asthma Programs	Conference Presentation Abstract	2010	AEA Conference Program	"Strategic evaluation planning"	Conference attendees
A Theory Driven Multi-year Strategic Evaluation Plan for a Multi-program Government Agency	Conference Presentation Abstract	2010	AEA Conference Program	"strategic evaluation"	Conference attendees

Strategy as the Focus for Evaluation Michael Quinn Patton, Patricia A. Patrizi	Chapter	2010	*New Directions for Evaluation*	"strategic evaluation"	Publishable paper
Strategy Evaluation: Emerging Processes and Methods	Chapter	2010	*New Directions for Evaluation*	"strategic evaluation"	Publishable paper
Strategy Evaluation: Experience at the International Development Research Centre Tricia Wind, Fred Carden	Chapter	2010	*New Directions for Evaluation*	"strategic evaluation"	Publishable paper
Judy Savageau and Terri Anderson on Strategies for Strategic Planning to Improve Evaluation	Blog	2011	AEA365	"strategic planning"	AEA members
SCEA Week: Leslie Fierro & Deanna Rossi on Evaluating State Asthma Programs	Blog	2011	AEA365	"strategic planning"	AEA members
Stephanie Shipman on Developing an Effective Evaluation Agenda	Blog	2011	AEA365	"strategic planning"	AEA members
Comprehensive Perspectives for State Partnerships	Conference Presentation Abstract	2012	AEA Conference Program	"strategic evaluation"	Conference attendees
Navigating Complex Organizational Ecologies: Reflections on Building	Conference Presentation Abstract	2012	AEA Conference Program	"strategic evaluation"	Conference attendees

Lutheran World Relief's M&E Capacity					
Planning Evaluation Through the Program Life Cycle	Article	2012	*American Journal of Evaluation*	evaluation planning	Publishable paper
BLP TIG Week: Michelle Baron on The Importance of Strategic Planning in Building a Culture of Evaluation	Blog	2013	AEA365	"strategic planning" on AEA365 Blog website	AEA members
Building a Strategic Learning & Evaluation System for Your Organization	Guide for building a strategic evaluation initiative	2013	Better Evaluation	"evaluating strategically"	Evaluators at large
What's Strategic About Strategy Evaluation?	Conference Presentation Abstract	2013	AEA Conference Program	"strategic evaluation"	Conference attendees
USAID's Global Climate Change Impact Evaluation Agenda and You: Your Chance to Provide Feedback on USAID's Learning Agenda	Conference Presentation Abstract	2013	AEA Conference Program	"evaluation agendas"	Conference attendees
Portfolio Evaluation Strategy: A Framework From the Social Innovation Fund	Conference Presentation Abstract	2013	AEA Conference Program	"evaluating strategically"	Conference attendees

Fred Nickols on Simplified Strategic Planning	Blog	2014	AEA365	"strategic planning" on AEA365 Blog website	AEA members
CLEAR Week: Claudia Maldonado and Alicia López on Creating "Enabling Environments" for Monitoring & Evaluation	Blog	2014	AEA365	"learning agendas"	AEA members
UN Women: 2014-2017 Evaluation Strategic Plan	Strategic Evaluation Plan	2014	Better Evaluation	"evaluating strategically"	Evaluators at large
It starts with threading the needle: Weaving measurement and strategic learning into the heart of the organizational fabric	Conference Presentation Abstract	2014	AEA Conference Program	N/A	Conference attendees
Priority setting for evaluation: Developing a strategic evaluation portfolio	Article	2014	*Evaluation and Program Planning*	"strategic evaluation"	Publishable paper
Designing Measurement, Learning and Evaluation Plans for Advocacy and Policy Change Strategies	Conference Presentation Abstract	2015	AEA Conference Program	"strategic evaluation"	Conference attendees
Integrating Evaluation & Learning in Foundations Amidst Organizational Changes	Conference Presentation Abstract	2015	AEA Conference Program	"strategic evaluation"	Conference attendees

A holistic, learning-centred approach to building evaluation capacity in development organizations	Article	2015	*Evaluation*	"strategic evaluation planning"	Publishable paper
Designing a Learning Compass for Systems Change	Conference Presentation Abstract	2016	AEA Conference Program	"strategic evaluation"	Conference attendees
Forging a Strategic and Comprehensive Approach to Evaluation Within Public and Nonprofit Organizations: Integrating Measurement and Analytics Within Evaluation	Article	2016	*American Journal of Evaluation*	"strategic evaluation"	Publishable paper
How to develop a strategic evaluation plan: what it is and what it is not	Conference Presentation Abstract	2017	AEA Conference Program	"strategic evaluation"	Conference attendees
EPTF Week: Implementing the Evaluation Recommendations from the U.S. Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking by Nick Hart	Blog	2018	AEA365	"learning agendas" on AEA365 Blog website	AEA members
Ready, set, go: Accelerating evaluation use through action plans	Conference Presentation Abstract	2018	AEA Conference Program	"strategically planning evaluations"	Conference attendees
Five Not-So-Easy Pieces: From Strategic Planning to Performance Measurement	Conference Presentation Abstract	2018	AEA Conference Program	"strategically planning evaluations"	Conference attendees

Building an Interagency Monitoring and Evaluation System for the Global Food Security Strategy: Opportunities and Challenges	Conference Presentation Abstract	2018	AEA Conference Program	"strategic evaluation"	Conference attendees
Building an evaluation and learning system: Three case examples from foundations	Conference Presentation Abstract	2018	AEA Conference Program	"strategic evaluation"	Conference attendees
Using Team-Based Strategic Program Planning and Evaluation as a Catalyst for Capacity Building and Organizational Change	Conference Presentation Abstract	2018	AEA Conference Program	"strategically planning evaluations"	Conference attendees
Updating AEA's "Evaluation Roadmap for a More Effective Government"	Conference Presentation Abstract	2018	AEA Conference Program	"learning agendas"	Conference attendees
Discovering Truth with Power: Supporting Organizational Learning and Continuous Improvement with Learning Agendas	Conference Presentation Abstract	2018	AEA Conference Program	"learning agendas"	Conference attendees
Why do programs benefit from developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks?	Blog	2018	Better Evaluation	"strategic evaluation"	Evaluators at large

[Post-Eval Action Plan Week: Promoting the Use of Action Plans Through Technical Assistance to Grantees by Robin Kuwahara and Maureen Wilce](#)	Blog	2019	AEA365	"evaluation strategic plans"	AEA members
[Post-Eval Action Plan Week: Incorporating the Use of Post-evaluation Action Planning Into Program Planning by Judi Magaldi](#)	Blog	2019	AEA365	"evaluation strategic plans"	AEA members
[Achieving Sustainability Through Sustainable Organizational Evaluation Systems](#)	Chapter	2019	*New Directions For Evaluation*	"strategically planning evaluations"	Publishable paper
[Lessons from Innovating in the Public Sector: Using Your Strategic Plan as a Guide to Build Organization-Wide Evaluation & Learning Capacity](#)	Conference Presentation Abstract	2019	AEA Conference Program	"strategically planning evaluations"	Conference attendees
[Develop planning documents for the evaluation or M&E system](#)	Blog	No date	Better Evaluation	"evaluating strategically"	Evaluators at large
[C4D Hud: Developing Planning Documents](#)	Blog	No date	Better Evaluation	"strategically planning evaluations"	Evaluators at large

Deciding to Evaluate	Blog	No date	Better Evaluation	"strategically planning evaluations"	Evaluators at large
Program Evaluation: Strategic Planning	Website		www.energy.gov Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy	"strategic evaluation planning"	Unknown

Subject: Brief Survey on Strategic Evaluation

Greetings!

My name is Kathleen Doll and I am a doctoral student at Claremont Graduate University researching the use of strategic evaluation initiatives/frameworks as a part of my dissertation.

What is strategic evaluation, you ask? Well, that is truly the heart of my current research. I encourage you to participate in this 20-minute study to:
(1) get acquainted with a working definition of "strategic evaluation",
(2) reflect on whether this is practice you already engage in, and
(3) help the field begin to conceptualize the prevalence of "strategic evaluation."

By taking this survey, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your practice and learn about the tenets of, and potential benefits associated with, strategic evaluation. The survey is completely confidential, and it is voluntary, so you can opt out at any time. To access the survey, please click on or copy and paste the link below into your browser.

https://cgu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eyw5QvFfXFVOPc1

I truly hope you will take the time to help the field of evaluation understand the largely uncharted frontier of strategic evaluation!

Thank you for your time.

All the best,
Kathleen Doll, MA
Evaluation Associate, Claremont Evaluation Center
PhD Student, Claremont Graduate University
Kathleen.doll@cgu.edu

Agreement to Participate in Study on Strategic Evaluation Study

STUDY LEADERSHIP
You are invited to take part in a dissertation research project that is led by Kathleen Doll, a PhD student in Evaluation at Claremont Graduate University (CGU). This study is being supervised by Dr. Leslie Fierro, a faculty member in the Division of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences (DBOS) at CGU.

PURPOSE
This survey is a part of an on-going, exploratory study about strategic evaluation. This survey serves as a preliminary exploration of the prevalence of "strategic evaluation" within the evaluation field. Specifically, through this survey we aim to learn about your familiarity and experiences with strategic evaluation practices.

PARTICIPATION
During the study, you will complete a brief, 20-minute survey. The survey will be about your familiarity and potential experiences with strategic evaluation initiatives or frameworks. You will also be asked a few questions regarding your professional background. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION
The risks you run by taking part in this study are minimal, and not higher than those faced in everyday life.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION
It is not expected that this study will have any personal benefit for participants. However, this study will benefit the evaluation community by providing additional empirical research on the intersection of strategy, evaluation, and learning.

COMPENSATION
There is no direct compensation for participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY
No identifying information about you is being collected, unless you choose to provide contact information for follow-up conversations. Survey data will be stored only on a password protected computer for five years, before being destroyed. Your individual answers, in an anonymous or aggregated form, may be presented in papers, books, talks, posts, or stories resulting from this study, but your identity will not be known.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact Kathleen Doll at kathleen.doll@cgu.edu. You may also contact the faculty advisor at leslie.fierro@cgu.edu.

The CGU Institutional Review Board has certified this project as exempt. If you have any ethical concerns about this project or about your rights as a human subject in research, you may contact the CGU IRB at (909) 607-9406 or at irb@cgu.edu.

CONSENT

I understand the above information and have had all my questions about participation on this research project answered. I voluntarily consent to participate in this research.

- o Yes, I consent
- o No, I do not consent (end survey)

Appendix D:
Strategic Evaluation Initiative Survey

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey on strategic evaluation initiatives; your responses are highly appreciated and will inform the practice of high quality evaluation.

FOCUS 1: FAMILIARITY
The first part of the survey explores the prevalence of "strategic evaluation" within the evaluation field, hoping to identify variations in terminology for similar concepts and practices.

PAGE BREAK

The current survey will use the following working definition of "strategic evaluation":

"A comprehensive planning process that guides and coordinates how evaluations are prioritized and sequenced across the many projects/programs/initiatives within an organization, over a determined period of time (e.g., 5 years)."

1. To what extent are you unfamiliar or familiar with the <u>overall concept</u> or idea of "strategic evaluation" that is presented in the working definition above?
__Very unfamiliar
__Unfamiliar
__Neither
__Familiar
__Very familiar

Many terms for the concept of "strategic evaluation," exist.

2. Please indicate which of the following terms, that may be viewed as similar to the above definition of a "strategic evaluation," you have heard of. Please check all that apply.

__Strategic evaluation plans

__Strategic Evaluation and Learning Systems

__Learning Agendas

__Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Framework

__I have not heard of any of these terms

__Learning Compass

__Other: _____

FOCUS 2: ENGAGEMENT IN STRATEGIC EVALUATION

Thank you for your continued participation. In the next part of the survey we will look more closely at your experiences with strategic evaluation.

Based on a document review, it appeared that there are three main stages of strategic evaluation, as depicted in the visual and textual description below.

Stage 1: The decision to pursue a strategic evaluation approach. This entails the actual design of a "strategic evaluation framework," or the adoption of a pre-existing framework or system. A framework is a formal guide that offers guidance on how to create a strategic evaluation plan, laying out the steps (e.g., forming a working group/team, prioritizing the evaluations, planning a budget) that may take place in Stage 2: Engagement in the Strategic Evaluation.

Stage 1. Decision to Adopt or Create a Strategic Evaluation Framework or System

Stage 2. Engagement in the Strategic Evaluation planning process

Stage 2: Creating an actual plan to strategically evaluate initiatives within an organization or program. This tangible document highlights how the evaluations will be carried out over time.

Stage 3. Implementation of the devised Strategic Evaluation Plan

Stage 3: The actual implementation, and carrying out, of a strategic evaluation plan. This will likely entail conducting the evaluation activities, across

initiatives and over several years.

1.Have you engaged in <u>any</u> of these three stages of strategic evaluation, in any capacity?
__Yes
__No IF SELECTED, END SURVEY.

PAGE BREAK

In the remainder of the [   ] *f these 3 stages of strategic*
evaluation and ask abo [   ] *applicable).*

*When answering these questions, please reflect on the **one strategic evaluation experience** in which you were **<u>most significantly involved</u>** across the three stages (when applicable). This can be a past or present experience. To be clear, **<u>please answer the rest of the survey about one experience/project/initiative.</u>***

2. What timeframe did the strategic evaluation initiative take place? Please provide the year(s) in the box.

3. In what type of organization/program did this strategic evaluation initiative take place? Please check all that apply.
__Foundation
__Federal government agency
__State government agency
__Local government agency
__Nonprofit
__Other (please describe): _____

4.What was your role in the strategic evaluation initiative? Please check all that apply.
__External evaluator (one who is contracted externally by one or more programs or organizations to conduct evaluations)
__Internal evaluator (one who is hired by a program or organization internally to conduct evaluations)
__Evaluation Officer (one who works internally at an organization to coordinate evaluations, but does not necessarily conduct them)
__Organizational leader (e.g., CEO, Executive Director)
__Program staff
__Other (please describe): _____

5. To the best of your knowledge, where did the idea for a strategic evaluation initiative come from (e.g., organizational leader, funder, organically arose, seminar)?

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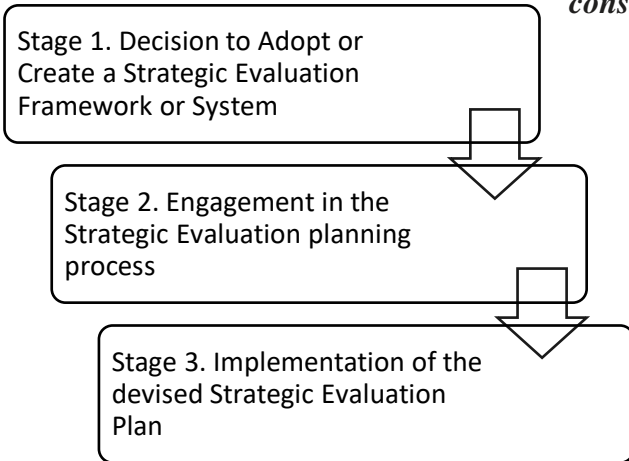
6. To the best of your knowledge, why was strategic evaluation pursued? What specific problem(s) or outcome(s), if any, was the strategic evaluation initiative to address?

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~STAGE ONE: DECISION TO UNDERGO A STRATEGIC EVALUATION INITIATIVE
Thank you for your continued participation! Please read the description of Stage 1 below and answer the questions that follow.

*As a reminder, please reflect on the **one experience** in which you were **most involved** with a strategic evaluation initiative. This will be the **same experience/project/initiative that you consider for the rest of the survey.***

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┌──────────────────────────────┐
│ Stage 1. Decision to Adopt or│
│ Create a Strategic Evaluation│
│ Framework or System          │
└──────────────────────────────┘
        │
        ▼
   ┌──────────────────────────────┐
   │ Stage 2. Engagement in the   │
   │ Strategic Evaluation planning│
   │ process                      │
   └──────────────────────────────┘
           │
           ▼
      ┌──────────────────────────────┐
      │ Stage 3. Implementation of the│
      │ devised Strategic Evaluation │
      │ Plan                         │
      └──────────────────────────────┘
```

What is Stage One?
The first stage is concerned with *why* a strategic evaluation initiative was adopted and *what purpose* it was designed to serve. This stage is comprised of the motivation, rationale, and decision to use strategic evaluation. Sometimes this stage **involves the actual design of a formal "strategic evaluation framework/system."** Other times it involves the **adoption of a pre-existing framework or system**, such as one developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or a consulting firm. A framework offers guidance on how to create a strategic evaluation plan, laying out the steps that take place in Stage 2: Engagement in the Strategic Evaluation Initiative.

Who Might be Involved?
This stage takes place at a macro-level, involving stakeholders who make organization-wide decisions or have specific informational needs, across programs and time. This might include entities such as funders, organizational leadership, or external evaluators.

1. Were you involved, or are you currently involved, in Stage 1: the decision to engage in a Strategic Evaluation initiative, or the development of a Strategic Evaluation

framework/system?
__Yes
__No *IF NO, SKIP TO STAGE 2.*

2. To what extent were you actively involved in either the decision to engage in a Strategic Evaluation initiative, or the development of a Strategic Evaluation framework/system?

1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
Not Involved				*Highly Involved*

3. Was a formal framework or system for creating strategic evaluation plans used?
__A pre-existing strategic evaluation framework was selected (e.g., CDC's *Learning and Growing Through Evaluation's* Strategic Evaluation Plan)
__A strategic evaluation framework was developed
__A combination of a pre-existing resource and a newly created framework was used
__Other: _____

PAGE BREAK

~STAGE TWO: ENGAGEMENT IN THE STRATEGIC EVALUATION PLANNING PROCESS
Thank you for your continued participation! Please read the description of Stage 2 below and answer the questions that follow.

*As a reminder, please reflect on **one experience** in which you were **most involved** with strategic evaluation initiative. This will be the **same experience/project/initiative that you consider for the entire survey.***

Stage 1. Decision to Adopt or Create a Strategic Evaluation Framework

Stage 2. Engagement in the Strategic Evaluation planning process

Stage 3. Implementation of the devised Strategic Evaluation Plan

What is Stage Two?
This stage involves **creating an actual plan to strategically evaluate** the initiatives within an organization/program. This is a process-oriented stage, resulting in the creation of a document that **highlights how the evaluation strategy will be carried out** over a determined time frame. Sometimes this step is based upon a formal framework/system or guidelines.

Who Might be Involved?
Presumably, this effort will entail a collaboration between whomever initiated the process, those actively involved in the programs needing evaluation, those tasked with implementing the strategic evaluation, and those who will use the strategic evaluation findings.

__Yes
__No *IF NO, SKIP TO STAGE 3.*

2. To what extent have you actively taken part in creating a strategic evaluation plan, with the purpose of organizing evaluation activities across time?

1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
Not Involved				*Highly Involved*

3. Who else was involved in the creation of this strategic evaluation plan (e.g., program staff, evaluators, organizational leaders)?

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4. What barriers or challenges, if any, did you encounter during this strategic planning process?

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5. In your opinion, what benefits, if any, were associated with the <u>process</u> of creating this strategic evaluation plan?

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<u>~STAGE THREE: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DEVISED STRATEGIC EVALUATION PLAN</u>
Thank you for your continued participation! Please read the description of Stage 3 below and answer the questions that follow.
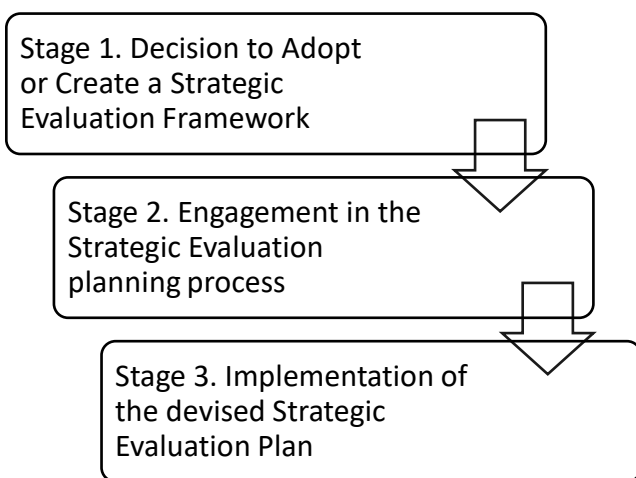
*As a reminder, please reflect on **one experience** in which you were **<u>most involved</u>** with strategic*

*evaluation initiative. This will be the **same experience/project/initiative that you consider for the entire survey.***
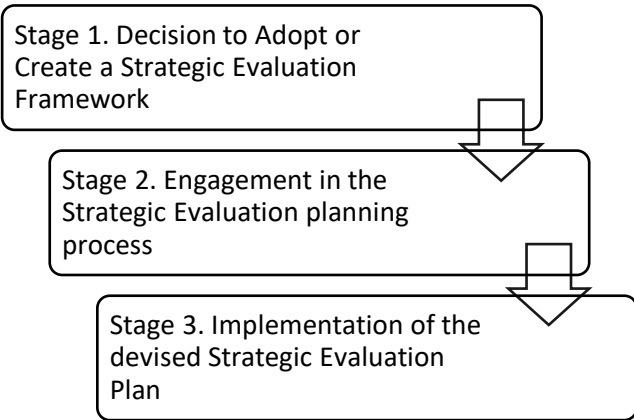
Stage 1. Decision to Adopt or Create a Strategic Evaluation Framework

Stage 2. Engagement in the Strategic Evaluation planning process

Stage 3. Implementation of the devised Strategic Evaluation Plan

What is Stage Three?
In the third stage, the organization and/or **program(s) implements the devised strategic evaluation plan.** This will likely entail conducting the evaluation activities across initiatives and over several years.

Who Might be Involved?
Internal organizational staff, program directors, internal/external evaluators, partner organizations, etc.

1. Were you involved, or are you currently involved, in Stage 3: Implementation of the Strategic Evaluation Plan?
__Yes, I was/am involved in implementing all of the plan
__Yes, I was/am involved in implementing part of the plan
__No *IF NO, SKIP TO DEMOGRAPHICS.*

2. To what extent have you been involved with carrying out this strategic evaluation plan?

1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
Not Involved				*Highly Involved*

3. What barriers or challenges, if any, did you encounter when implementing this strategic evaluation plan?

4. In your opinion, what benefits, if any, were associated with having this strategic

evaluation plan to reference when conducting the evaluation activities?

FOCUS 3: ABOUT YOU!

This is the final set of questions! These questions ask about your background and general evaluation experience.

1.What is your current professional role?
__External evaluator
__Internal evaluator
__Evaluation Officer
__Organizational leader (e.g., CEO, Executive Director)
__Program staff
__Other (please describe): _____

2. How many years have you been conducting evaluations?
__Less than 1 year
__1 to 5 years
__6 to 10 years
__11 to 15 years
__16-20 years
__ 21 years or more

PAGE BREAK

Based on the responses to this survey, we will also be selecting several individuals to conduct follow-up phone interviews. We are interested in interviewing individuals by phone so we can learn more about their experiences with strategic evaluation.

This conversation will last no longer than an hour and will take place at your convenience during the month of XXXXX.

Would you be willing to briefly speak with us about your strategic evaluation experiences?
-Yes (please share your name and email address with us): _____
-No thank you

END OF SURVEY

Thank you for completing the survey! If you have any comments on this survey, please leave them here.

If you have additional comments you would like to discuss, feel free to email:
Primary Investigator: Kathleen Doll
kathleen.doll@cgu.edu
Dissertation Committee Chair: Leslie Fierro
leslie.fierro@cgu.edu

Appendix E:
Email Invitation to Participate in Interview (Study 3)

Subject: Strategic Evaluation Interview Invitation

Hello, [*insert name*]!

My name is Kathleen Doll and I am a doctoral student at Claremont Graduate University researching the use of strategic evaluation initiatives/frameworks as a part of my dissertation.

Thank you again for engaging in my survey last month regarding strategic evaluation. Based on your responses to the survey, it seems you may have some fruitful experiences with strategic evaluation initiatives that the world of evaluation is longing to hear!

As such, I would like to invite you to participate in a 30-minute interview about experiences with strategic evaluation. Ideally, I would love to interview you, via phone or video-call, sometime in the next two weeks. I want to be respectful of your time, so I can work around you schedule (weekdays, evening, weekends, or whatever is easiest for you)!

The interview is completely confidential, and it is voluntary. I am also happy to provide the interview questions ahead of time.

I truly hope you will take the time to chat with me and help the field of evaluation continue to understand the largely uncharted frontier of strategic evaluation!

Thank you for your time.

All the best,
Kathleen Doll, MA
Evaluation Associate, Claremont Evaluation Center
PhD Student, Claremont Graduate University

Kathleen.doll@cgu.edu

Appendix F:
Informed Consent for Study 3 (Interview)

Agreement to Participate in Interview

STUDY LEADERSHIP
You are invited to take part in a dissertation research project that is led by Kathleen Doll, a PhD student in Evaluation at Claremont Graduate University (CGU). This study is being supervised by Dr. Leslie Fierro, a faculty member in the Division of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences (DBOS) at CGU.

PURPOSE
This survey is a part of an on-going, exploratory study about strategic evaluation. This interview will explore your experiences with "strategic evaluation" within the evaluation field, hoping critical elements, barriers, facilitators, and outcomes of the process.

ELIGIBILITY
To participate in this study, you must have completed a brief survey on strategic evaluation during the month of XXXXX and have engaged in some aspect of strategic evaluation.

PARTICIPATION
You will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded 30-minute telephone interview. During this interview, you will be asked about your experiences with strategic evaluation planning.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION
The risks that you run by taking part in this study are minimal, beyond the possible inconvenience of the time spent completing the interview.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION
Potential benefits of participation include the opportunity to reflect on your past experiences! In

139

addition, this study will benefit the evaluation community by providing additional empirical research on the intersection of strategy, evaluation, and learning.

COMPENSATION
There is no direct compensation for participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Participation is strictly confidential. Only the researcher will have access to your responses, which will be stored on a secure server. No identified individual responses will be shared, and your individual privacy will be protected in all reports and documents resulting from this study.

FURTHER INFORMATION
If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact Kathleen Doll at kathleen.doll@cgu.edu. You may also contact the faculty advisor at leslie.fierro@cgu.edu

VERBAL STATEMENT OF CONSENT
I understand the above information and have had all my questions about participation on this research project answered. I voluntarily consent to participate in this research.

Appendix G
Interview Protocol for Study 3

Introduction
Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. *{Review Informed Consent and ensure consent has been received}.* The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding of your experiences with strategic evaluation and dive deeper into your responses from the survey. So, thank you again for participating in the initial survey!

As stated in the consent form, I will be audio recording this interview, is that ok with you? *(Pause for response and then start recorder).*

(D) DESCRIBE
First, I would like to ask about your history of engaging in strategic evaluation work. This first set of questions focuses on your background with strategic evaluation initiative/projects.

1. How long have you been engaging in strategic evaluation initiatives? What was your first exposure?

2. How many instances have you engaged with strategic evaluation initiatives?

3. What has been your primary role during your work with strategic evaluation initiatives?

Now I want to follow up and expand upon the <u>specific experience you shared in the survey</u>. I read in your responses that you engaged in a strategic evaluation initiative/project in [INSERT YEARS] that [BRIEFLY SUMMARIZE THEIR EXPERIENCE FROM THE SURVEY].

4. I'd love to hear more about this project/initiative. Before I asked some specific follow-up questions, can you briefly describe the project/initiative for me? For example,.....
   a. *What domain was the work in?*
   b. *What type of organization was it with?*
   c. *What are some additional pieces of background information that would be helpful for me to know?*

5. What has been/was your primary role during THIS strategic evaluation initiative?

6. *[Ask additional INDIVIDUALIZED questions, as needed, depending upon depth of answers from the survey.]*
   a. Intentions to pursue strategic evaluation.
   b. Problems to address/Outcomes to achieve?

(A) ANALYZE
Excellent! Thank you for all that description and context. That was super helpful! Now I want to zero in on the specific stages of the strategic evaluation project that you responded about on the survey.

STAGE ONE (if applicable):
Your survey responses indicate that you engaged in what I am referring to as Stage 1 of Strategic Evaluation, which is the decision to adopt or develop a strategic evaluation framework/system.

1. First off, I would like to hear more about your level of engagement in the decision to adopt or create a strategic evaluation framework/system. You rated your involvement as [INSERT ANSWER]. Briefly, what all did this entail?

2. On the survey you indicated that the formal framework/system for strategic evaluation was *[INSERT ONE: developed or adopted].*
   a. What informed the *[development or selection]* of the strategic evaluation framework/system?
      a. Who spearheaded the effort? Who else was involved in this effort?
      b. To what extent were there specific values that influenced the framework/system?
      c. To what extent did evaluation theory or other theoretical underpinnings inform these decisions?
      d. *Ask additional INDIVIDUALIZED questions, as needed, depending upon depth of answers from the survey.*

STAGE TWO (if applicable):
Your survey responses indicate that you engaged in what I am referring to as Stage 2 of

141

Strategic Evaluation, which is the process of planning the system of strategic evaluations.

1. First off, I would like to hear more about your level of engagement in the creation of the strategic evaluation plan. You rated your involvement as *[INSERT INDIVDUALIZED ANSWER].* Briefly, what all did this involvement entail?

2. *Depending on depth of survey answers, follow up on:*
       a. Who else was involved in the creation of this strategic evaluation plan?

3. What did the process of creating the strategic evaluation plan consist of?
       a.   Who all was involved in this planning process?
       b.   How frequently did meetings occur?
       c.   What types of communication were used?

4. What were conditions that helped facilitate the strategic planning process?

5. *Depending on depth of survey answers, follow up with INDIVIDUALIZED questions about*
       a. Specific cited barriers?
       b. Specific cited benefits of the PROCESS?

6. What were some unintended consequences, if any, that were associated with creation of the strategic evaluation plan?

STAGE THREE(if applicable):
Your survey responses indicate that you engaged in what I am referring to as Stage 3 of Strategic Evaluation, which is the act of implementing the strategic evaluations.

1. First off, I would like to hear more about your level of engagement in the implementation of the strategic evaluations. You rated your involvement as *[INSERT ANSWER].* Briefly, what all did this involvement entail?

2. What did the process of implementing the SEP consist of?
       a. Who all was involved in the implementation process?
       b. How frequently did meetings occur?
       c. What types of communication were used?
       d. What types of products (e.g., reports) were created?

3. What were conditions that helped facilitate the implementing the strategic evaluation plan?

4. *Depending on depth of survey answers, follow up with INDIVIDUALIZED questions about:*
       a. Specific cited barriers?
       b. Specific cited benefits of the PROCESS?

5. What were some unintended consequences, if any, that were associated with the implementation of the strategic evaluation plan?

T(THEORIZE)
Awesome! Next, I am hoping to get more clarity on your overall perceptions of your entire experience with this strategic evaluation initiative.

1. What do you think were the intended outcomes of the strategic evaluation initiative? What was hoped to happen from these efforts?
      Potential Probes:
    a. DISTAL: strategy development, strategic awareness, organizational learning
    b. PROXIMATE: decision-making, improved communication, goal attainment/organizational performance, collaboration

2. Do you think the actual outcomes aligned with these intended outcomes? Why or why not?
    a. Do you think there is value in strategic evaluation initiative, beyond the benefits of what traditional program evaluation provides? If yes, what are the additional benefits?

3. Reflecting on your experiences with the strategic evaluation work, what surprised you the most?

4. To what extent did the strategic evaluation meet your expectations?

A (ACT)
Thanks for your continued engagement and responses! This is the final set of questions.

1. In what ways, if any, has your participation affected how you think about evaluation?

2. Can you think of any ways in which you do something differently because of your involvement in the strategic evaluation work?
    a. If so, what is one example of how you do something differently?

Closing
Those are all the questions I have for you today! Thank you for taking the time to speak with me; I really learned a lot!

Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share about strategic evaluation? Do you have any questions for me?

Thanks and have a splendid day!

Appendix H:
Consent Form for Phase II Case Study

Agreement to Participate in Interview

STUDY LEADERSHIP
You are invited to take part in a dissertation research project that is led by Kathleen Doll, a PhD student in Evaluation at Claremont Graduate University (CGU). This study is being supervised by Dr. Leslie Fierro, a faculty member in the Division of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences (DBOS) at CGU.

PURPOSE
This interview is a part of an on-going, exploratory study about strategic evaluation. This interview will explore your experiences with "strategic evaluation" at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hoping to explore critical elements, barriers, facilitators, and outcomes of the process.

ELIGIBILITY
To participate in this study, you must have engaged in the strategic evaluation process, have once been affiliated with the National Asthma Control Program (NACP), and over the age of 18.

PARTICIPATION
You will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded 45-60-minute telephone interview. During this interview, you will be asked about your experiences with strategic evaluation planning.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION
The risks that you run by taking part in this study are minimal, beyond the possible

inconvenience of the time spent completing the interview.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION
It is not expected that this study will have any personal benefit for participants. However, this study will benefit the evaluation community by providing additional empirical research on the intersection of strategy, evaluation, and learning.

COMPENSATION
There is no direct compensation for participating in this study. However, results from the study will be shared with respondents.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Participation is strictly confidential. Only the researcher and the faculty supervisor will have access to your responses, which will be stored on a secure server. No identified individual responses will be shared, and your individual privacy will be protected in all reports and documents resulting from this study. Audio recordings of the interview will strictly be used for transcription purposes and deleted after the transcription process is complete. Transcribed interview data will be stored on a password protected computer for five years, before being destroyed.

FURTHER INFORMATION
If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact Kathleen Doll at kathleen.doll@cgu.edu. You may also contact the faculty advisor at leslie.fierro@cgu.edu.

The CGU Institutional Review Board has certified this project as exempt. If you have any ethical concerns about this project or about your rights as a human subject in research, you may contact the CGU IRB at (909) 607-9406 or at irb@cgu.edu.

VERBAL STATEMENT OF CONSENT
I understand the above information and have had all my questions about participation on this research project answered. I voluntarily consent to participate in this research.

Appendix I:
Interview Protocol for Phase II Case Study (CDC personnel)

INTRODUCTION
Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. *{Review Informed Consent and ensure consent has been received}.* The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding of your experiences with strategic evaluation.

I will be audio recording this interview, is that ok with you? *(Pause for response and then start recorder).*

(D) DESCRIBE
First, I would like to hear more about the strategic evaluation work you have engaged in. This

first set of questions focuses on you describing how the CDC developed the strategic evaluation planning (SEP) framework that is described in the first module of the Learning and Growing Evaluation Guide.

STAGE ONE: DEVELOPING THE LEARNING & GROWING SEP FRAMEWORK

1. To the best of your memory, when did the idea for a strategic evaluation initiative (i.e., Learning and Growing SEP) originate?
   a. Who else was involved in these initial conversations?
      i. Were these same individuals who contributed to its eventual development?
   b. What was your role in the development of the SEP framework?

2. What were the driving forces behind <u>why</u> the CDC developed the Strategic Evaluation Planning framework depicted in Module 1 of Learning and Growing?
   a. What problem or issue did Strategic Evaluation Planning hope to address?
   b. What were the intended outcomes of mandating State Health Departments to create SEPs?
      i. *FOR EXAMPLE, DISTAL: strategy development, strategic awareness, organizational learning*
      ii. *FOR EXAMPLE, PROXIMATE: decision-making, improved communication, goal attainment/organizational performance, collaboration*

3. What factors informed the creation of the SEP framework described in Learning and Growing? For examples, what values, academic literature, resources, or theory influenced the framework?

4. Did you have any experiences with strategic evaluation planning, prior to the creation of the SEP framework at the CDC? If so, what did these experiences entail?

(A) ANALYZE
Excellent! Thank you for all that description and context. That really helped me understand the situation. Now I want to talk a little more about your perceptions of the process. This section will include questions that will focus on your analysis of the experience.

STAGE TWO: CREATING THE STRATEGIC EVALUATION PLANS
1. What has been your level of engagement in working with State Health Departments to create their SEP's?
   a. What is/was your role in this process?

2. From your perspective, what barriers or challenges exist, if any, during the process of creating the strategic evaluation plan?

3. From your perspective, what are conditions that help facilitate the strategic evaluation planning process for State Health Departments?

4. What benefits, if any, were associated with the process of creating a strategic evaluation plan?

5. What were some unintended consequences, if any, that were associated with creating strategic evaluation plans?

STAGE THREE: IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC EVALUATION PLANS
 1. What has been your level of engagement in working with State Health Departments to implement their SEP's?
      a.   What is/was your role in this process?

2. From your perspective, what barriers or challenges exist, if any, when implementing the strategic evaluation plan?

3. From your perspective, what are conditions that help facilitate the implementation of strategic evaluation plans for state health departments?

4. What benefits exist, if any, of having a formal SEP during the evaluation implementation phase?

5. In your opinion, what were some unintended consequences, if any, that were associated with implementing strategic evaluation plans?

T(THEORIZE)

1. Reflecting on the intended outcomes that we discussed earlier in the interviews *[INSERT THESE OUTCOMES]* and your experiences with State Health Departments that you just shared with me, do you think the actual outcomes aligned with these intended outcomes? Why or why not?

2. Reflecting back on your experiences with the strategic evaluation work, what surprised you the most?

3. To what extent has strategic evaluation met your expectations?

A (ACT)
Thanks for your continued engagement and responses! This is the final set of questions.

1. In what ways has your work with SEPs affected how you think about evaluation?

2. Can you think of any ways in which you do something differently because of your involvement in the strategic evaluation planning work?
      a.   If so, what is one example of how you do something differently?

Closing

Those are all the questions I have for you today! Thank you for taking the time to speak with me; I really learned a lot!

Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share about strategic evaluation? Do you have any questions for me?

Thanks and have a splendid day!

Appendix J:
Interview Protocol for Phase II Case Study (state health department personnel)

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. *{Review Informed Consent and ensure consent has been received}.* The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding of your experiences with strategic evaluation.

I will be audio recording this interview, is that ok with you? *(Pause for response and then start recorder).*

(D) DESCRIBE
First, I would like to learn a little about you and your experiences with strategic evaluation planning.

7. What is your current role at [INSERT NAME OF STATE HEALTH DEPT]?
   a. How long have you been in this position?

8. When was your first experience with strategic evaluation planning?
   a. What did this experience consist of?

9. How many SEPs have you developed through the National Asthma Control Program (NACP)?
   a. Have you engaged in SEP outside of these experiences?

STAGE TWO: CREATING THE STRATEGIC EVALUATION PLANS
Excellent! Thank you for all that description and context. Now I want to talk a little more about your perceptions of the SEP process. This section will include questions that will focus on your analysis of the experience.

1. What has been your level of engagement in <u>creating</u> strategic evaluation plans for your State Health Department, as a NACP grantee?
   b. What has been your role in this process?

2. What did the process of creating the SEP consist of?
   d. Who all was involved in this planning process?
   e. How frequently did meetings occur?
   f. What types of communication were used?

3. From your perspective, what barriers or challenges existed, if any, during the process of creating the strategic evaluation plan?
   a. If relevant, where there any "lessons learned" from your first experience with the NACP and SEP process?

4. From your perspective, what were conditions that helped facilitate the strategic evaluation planning process for your State Health Departments?
   a. If relevant, where there any "lessons learned" from your prior experiences with the NACP and SEP process?

5. What benefits, if any, were associated with the <u>process</u> of creating a strategic evaluation plan?

6. What were some unintended consequences, if any, that were associated with creating a strategic evaluation plan?

STAGE THREE: IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC EVALUATION PLANS

1. What has been your level of engagement in <u>implementing</u> strategic evaluation plans for your State Health Department, as a NACP grantee?
      a. What has been your role in this process?

2. What did the process of implementing the SEP consist of?
      a. Who all was involved in the implementation process?
      b. How frequently did meetings occur?
      c. What types of communication were used?
      d. What types of products (e.g., reports) were created?

3.From your perspective, what barriers or challenges existed, if any, during the implementation of the strategic evaluation plan?
      b. If relevant, where there any "lessons learned" from your prior experiences with the NACP and SEP process?

4. From your perspective, what were conditions that helped facilitate the implementation of the strategic evaluation for State Health Departments?
      b. If relevant, where there any "lessons learned" from your prior experiences with the NACP and SEP process?

T(THEORIZE)
Thank you! Now let's move on and talk a bit more about your reflections on your SEP experiences.

1. Reflecting back on your experiences with the SEP, why do you think the CDC mandated that State Health Departments engage in strategic evaluation planning? What do you think were the intended outcomes? In other words, what was hoped to happen from these efforts?
      a. Potential Probes:
            i. FOR EXAMPLE, DISTAL: strategy development, strategic awareness, organizational learning
            ii. FOR EXAMPLE, PROXIMATE: decision-making, improved communication, goal attainment/organizational performance, collaboration

2. Do you think the actual outcomes, experienced by your State Health Department, aligned with these intended outcomes? Why or why not?

3. What did you expect to get out of the SEP process?
      a. To what extent did the strategic evaluation planning meet your expectations?

4. Reflecting on your experiences with the strategic evaluation work, what surprised you the most?

A (ACT)

Thanks for your continued engagement and responses! This is the final set of questions.

1. In what ways has your work with SEPs affected how you think about evaluation?

2. Can you think of any ways in which you do something differently because of your involvement in the strategic evaluation planning?
      a.   If so, what is one example of how you do something differently?

Closing

Those are all the questions I have for you today! Thank you for taking the time to speak with me; I really learned a lot!

Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share about strategic evaluation? Do you have any questions for me?

Thanks and have a splendid day!

Appendix K:
Infographic for Individuals Interested in Integrating Strategic Evaluation Initiatives