

Project SPARK Landscape Analysis of Evaluation Technical Assistance to Build the Evaluation Capacity of Human Services and Related Programs

May 2022

OPRE Report 2022-87

Alexandra Stanczyk, Mary Anne Anderson, Armando Yañez, and Lauren Amos

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Evaluation TA Expert Group Members

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Contents

Overview	xi
I. Introduction.....	1
A. Key findings	2
1. Landscape of evaluation TA (Research Question 1).....	2
2. Effectiveness of evaluation TA (Research Question 2).....	3
3. Lessons from evaluation TA initiatives outside of human services and related programs or supported by non-federal funding (Research Question 3)	3
B. Report contents	3
II. Defining Evaluation TA.....	5
A. Definition of evaluation TA	6
B. Conceptual framework of evaluation TA	6
III. The Landscape of Evaluation TA in Human Services and Related Programs	9
A. Existing evaluation TA initiatives	9
1. Guiding principles of evaluation TA initiatives	9
2. Strategies used by evaluation TA initiatives.....	11
3. Topics covered by evaluation TA initiatives	14
B. Common challenges experienced by evaluation TA providers and participants and strategies used to address them	15
C. How evaluation TA initiatives vary based on focus population and program context.....	17
D. Considerations for interpreting findings.....	18
IV. What We Know About the Effectiveness of Evaluation TA.....	19
A. Summary of reviewed research and review approach.....	19
B. Evidence of promise or effectiveness and key features of evaluation TA initiatives.....	20
1. Evaluation TA participants' knowledge, skills, and abilities related to evaluation	20
2. The development and use of evaluation tools and use of rigorous evaluation design and methods	21
3. Intervention implementation fidelity	21
4. Improved outcomes for intervention participants.....	22
5. Increased organizational commitment to evaluation	22
6. Evaluation TA strategies that reflect adult learning principles might be related to increased evaluation capacity	22

C. Takeaways and remaining gaps.....	23
V. Key Lessons for Future Efforts to Build Evaluation Capacity.....	25
A. Key findings.....	25
B. Key lessons.....	25
1. Providers of evaluation TA at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels.....	25
2. Practitioners at the state, tribal, and local level who participate in evaluation TA.....	26
3. Researchers and evaluators of evaluation TA.....	27
4. Policymakers and evaluation TA funders.....	27
Works Consulted.....	29
Appendix A: Detailed Description of Methods.....	A.1
Appendix B: Profiles of Evaluation TA Initiatives Included in Telephone Discussions.....	B.1

Tables

III.1.	Strategies used by evaluation TA initiatives	11
III.2	Topics covered by evaluation TA initiatives ^a	14
III.3.	Challenges experienced by evaluation TA providers and participants	16
A.1.	Evaluation TA initiatives identified in environmental scan and included in telephone discussions.....	A.3
A.2.	Characteristics of evaluation TA initiatives described in reviewed resources for Section IV and V of main report ^a	A.8
B.1.	Building Evaluation Capacity Initiative and the Readiness, Implementation, Sustainability for Effectiveness Partnership	B.3
B.2.	Breakthrough Series Collaborative	B.5
B.3.	Children Youth and Families at Risk Professional Development and Technical Assistance Center Evaluation Institute	B.7
B.4.	Getting to Outcomes	B.9
B.5.	The Learning Lab	B.11
B.6.	Learn, Innovate, Improve	B.13
B.7.	Office of Evaluation Sciences	B.15
B.8.	Pew Fund Evaluation Capacity Building Initiative	B.17
B.9.	Promising Youth Programs	B.19
B.10.	Rapid Cycle Tech Evaluations (“the Coach”).....	B.21
B.11.	Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments	B.23
B.12.	Teen Pregnancy Prevention	B.25
B.13.	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Evaluation.....	B.27
B.14.	Youth/Young Adults with Child Welfare Involvement at Risk of Homelessness.....	B.29

Figures

O.1.	Conceptual framework of evaluation TA that aims to build evaluation capacity.....	xii
II.1.	Conceptual framework of evaluation TA that aims to build evaluation capacity.....	7

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Overview

Enhancing the capacity of human services organizations to conduct evaluations and apply findings can help those organizations improve service delivery and better meet the needs of the people they serve (James Bell Associates 2013). Supporting Partnerships to Advance Research and Knowledge (Project SPARK), sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), in consultation with the Office of Family Assistance, provides evaluation technical assistance (TA) to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and related programs.

As part of Project SPARK, ACF sought to understand the range of approaches to evaluation TA, including which initiatives are most promising for building evaluation capacity among evaluation TA participants. These insights can inform and improve future evaluation TA efforts. This report fulfills these goals by documenting approaches and evidence of promise or effectiveness of evaluation TA initiatives and drawing lessons for human services and related programs, with a focus on TANF and workforce development programs. In addition, this report proposes a definition of evaluation TA and a conceptual framework that specifies the common components of evaluation TA that aims to build participants' evaluation capacity. Finally, the report draws lessons from the findings relevant for each focal audience. Key lessons include: it is important to provide more support for programs that participate in evaluation TA, and more research on the effectiveness of different evaluation TA strategies is needed.

A. Primary research questions

- 1. What is the landscape of evaluation TA?** That is, what evaluation TA approaches exist, what are common issues and challenges associated with implementing evaluation TA, and how does evaluation TA vary based on focal population or context?
- 2. What do we know about the effectiveness of evaluation TA?**
- 3. What can we learn from evaluation TA initiatives outside of human services and related programs or supported by non-federal funding?** Do approaches or effectiveness vary by sector or funding source? Have other agencies examined these questions about the promise or effectiveness of evaluation TA initiatives?

B. Purpose

This report proposes a definition of evaluation TA and a conceptual framework for evaluation TA and documents approaches and evidence of promise or effectiveness of evaluation TA initiatives. Report findings can inform policy and practice for the following focal audiences: (1) providers of evaluation TA at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels; (2) practitioners at the state, tribal, and local level who might participate in evaluation TA; (3) researchers, including those studying federally funded evaluation TA initiatives; and (4) policymakers and evaluation TA funders.

Box O.1. Definition of evaluation TA that aims to build evaluation capacity developed for this landscape analysis

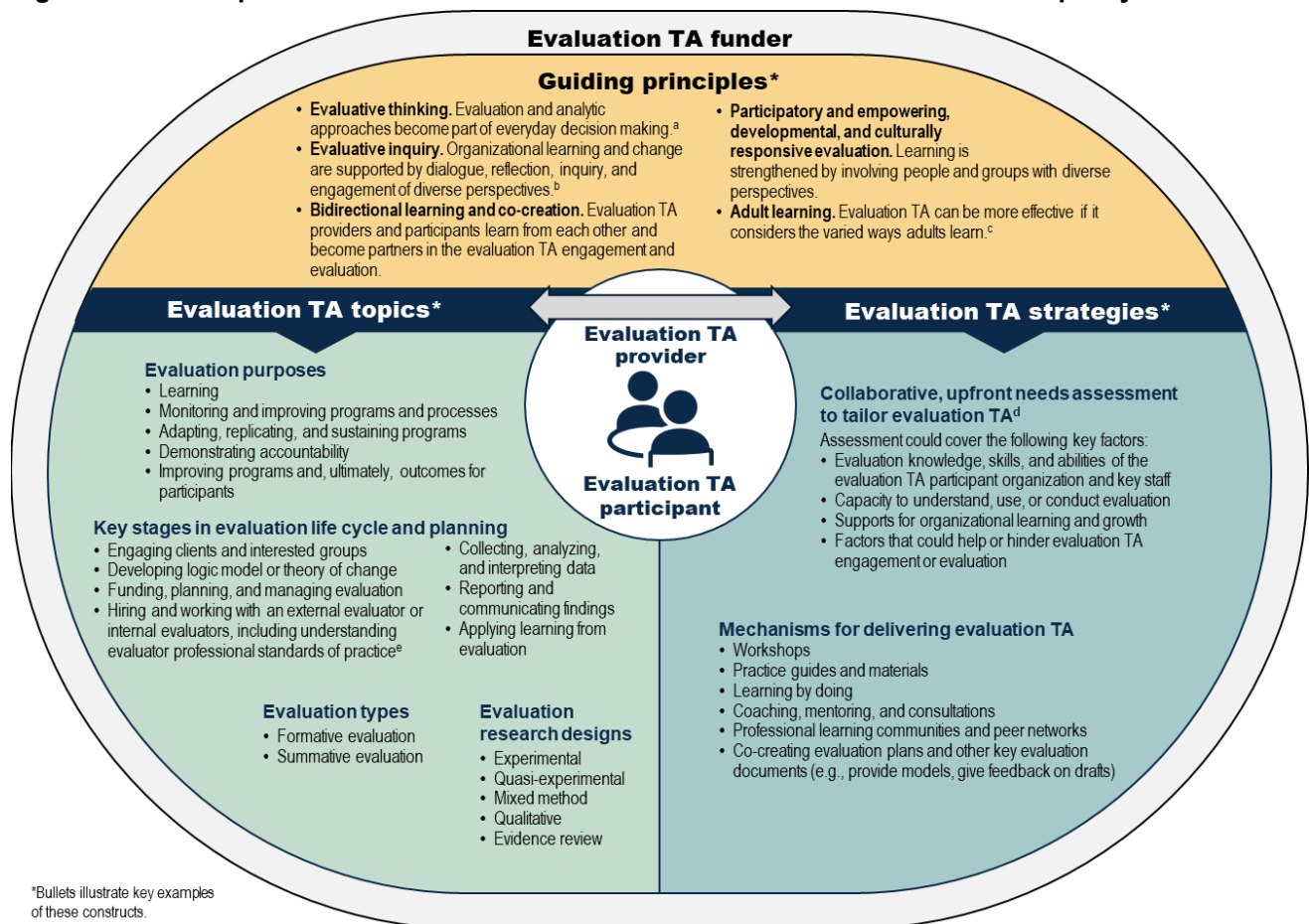
Evaluation TA is an intentional and collaborative learning process that aims to help human services and related agencies understand, use, and—when possible—conduct evaluation to guide and strengthen their programs. It is guided by a set of common principles and composed of strategies and learning topics tailored to each evaluation TA participant and jointly determined by the evaluation TA provider and participant.

C. Key findings and highlights

1. Landscape of evaluation TA (Research Question 1)

- **Defining evaluation TA.** Our preliminary review of relevant literature and consultations with experts suggested that the concept of evaluation TA was neither clearly nor consistently defined in the research or practice literature.¹ To fill this gap, we conducted a more extensive, systematic literature review and gathered additional input from experts to specify a definition (Box O.1) and conceptual framework (Figure O.1) of evaluation TA that aims to build staff and institutional evaluation capacity of human services and related programs.²

Figure O.1. Conceptual framework of evaluation TA that aims to build evaluation capacity



^a Preskill and Torres 2000.

^b Preskill and Torres 1999.

^c See <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/adult-learning-principles.pdf>.

¹ The related, but distinct concept of evaluation capacity building is clearly defined in existing research (see, for example, Cousins et al. 2014). Evaluation capacity building refers to activities that aim to increase participants' ability to understand, use, and—when possible—conduct evaluation. The focus of this report is on evaluation TA that aims to build evaluation capacity. See Box II.1 for further discussion of the distinction between evaluation capacity building and evaluation TA.

² Importantly, the components of the conceptual framework do not all have evidence of effectiveness or promise. Instead, components are those suggested by the literature review and experts as commonly used and important for evaluation TA.

^d Cousins et al. 2014.

^e Evaluator professional standards of practice include evaluator guiding principles such as systematic inquiry, competence, integrity, respect for people, and equity; evaluator competencies, such as professional practice methodology, planning and management, and interpersonal skills; and principles of cultural and linguistic responsiveness in evaluation. See American Evaluation Association 2018a, 2018b, 2011.

- **Guiding principles for designing and delivering evaluation TA.** Engaging diverse perspectives and incorporating evaluation and analytic thinking into everyday organizational decision making were commonly used as guiding principles by the evaluation TA initiatives examined for this report and were identified by experts as important for designing and delivering evaluation TA.
- **Evaluation TA strategies and topics.** A common upfront strategy used by the evaluation TA initiatives examined for this report was conducting a collaborative needs assessment and using results to tailor the evaluation TA initiative. Other common evaluation TA strategies included workshops, direct coaching, mentoring, and consultations between the evaluation TA provider and participant. Common evaluation TA topics covered key stages in the evaluation life cycle.
- **Common issues and challenges.** Evaluation TA providers and participants were commonly challenged by issues such as limited time for staff at the evaluation TA participant organization to engage with the evaluation TA, limited resources for evaluation TA participants to sustain practices developed through evaluation TA, and difficulty obtaining buy-in from leadership of the participant organization.

2. Effectiveness of evaluation TA (Research Question 2)

- **Limited rigorous research.** There are few rigorous studies of the effect of evaluation TA on key outcomes including building evaluation capacity of evaluation TA participants.
- **Some evidence of improvements in key outcomes for evaluation TA participants.** Existing research shows some associations between evaluation TA and improvements in key outcomes, such as evaluation TA participants' knowledge, skills, and abilities related to evaluation; development and use of evaluation tools and use of rigorous evaluation design and methods; intervention implementation fidelity; positive outcomes for intervention participants; and increased organizational commitment to evaluation.

3. Lessons from evaluation TA initiatives outside of human services and related programs or supported by non-federal funding (Research Question 3)

- **Evaluation TA guiding principles, topics, and strategies—as well as evidence of promise or effectiveness--do not seem to vary by sector or funding source.** This landscape analysis did not uncover systematic differences in evaluation TA approaches or evidence of promise or effectiveness by whether the initiative was within or outside the human services sector or supported by federal or non-federal funding.
- **A broader literature synthesis could help distinguish differences by sector and funding source.** To draw stronger conclusions on how evaluation TA approaches and evidence of promise or evidence of effectiveness of evaluation TA vary by sector or funding source would require review of additional literature, using a larger sample and a sampling strategy designed specifically to address these questions.

D. Methods

To document the landscape of evaluation TA initiatives and draw lessons for human services and related programs, we drew on the following: (1) telephone discussions with evaluation TA providers and developers representing 14 evaluation TA initiatives; (2) a series of three meetings and ongoing consultations with a diverse group of 10 evaluation TA experts, including federal staff overseeing evaluation TA initiatives, developers and providers of evaluation TA, researchers, and state and local practitioners who provide or participate in evaluation TA; and (3) a systematic literature review.

E. Key lessons

1. For providers of evaluation TA at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels

- **Adopt promising approaches.** Although rigorous evidence of evaluation TA effectiveness is limited, research reviewed in this report suggests certain components hold promise in improving key outcomes. Evaluation TA providers might prioritize these components.
- **Incorporate an upfront planning phase that includes a needs assessment to customize evaluation TA.** Providers can implement a collaborative, upfront needs assessment to tailor the evaluation TA. This type of upfront assessment was a common strategy among the evaluation TA initiatives examined in this report and recommended by the expert group.
- **Build the evidence base on evaluation TA.** Given limited evidence of the effectiveness of evaluation TA, evaluation TA providers could consider ways to integrate formative and summative evaluations of evaluation TA principles, strategies, or topics into each initiative.

2. For practitioners at the state, tribal, and local level who participate in evaluation TA

- **Seek and demand high-quality evaluation TA.** This report highlights key components of evaluation TA, including those with evidence of promise or effectiveness in improving important outcomes. Practitioners can use these findings to assess the evaluation TA they are participating in or when selecting an evaluation TA provider.
- **Anticipate and address common challenges or pitfalls.** Practitioners can use findings of this report to anticipate and plan to address common challenges or pitfalls around evaluation TA, such as making time for staff to participate in evaluation TA.
- **Lean into guiding principles.** This report suggests that incorporating evaluation and analytic thinking into everyday organizational decision making and engaging diverse perspectives are important guiding principles for evaluation TA. Practitioners who are currently or planning to participate in evaluation TA can keep these principles in mind as guideposts for the initiative and consider ways to apply them.

3. For researchers and evaluators of evaluation TA

- **Conduct rigorous research on what works in evaluation TA.** Researchers can play a key role in addressing gaps in knowledge on the effectiveness of evaluation TA found in this landscape analysis. This report underscores the importance of more research on evaluation TA effectiveness—particularly research using rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental designs—and can serve as a resource for planning future studies.
- **Build on what is known.** Building on the research that does exist—including using outcome measures from prior research to enable comparison across studies—will support a more robust

evidence base on what works in evaluation TA. The review of effectiveness research in this report can support researchers in this effort.

- **Align evaluation TA outcomes with evaluation TA participants’ goals.** Given the importance of tailored evaluation TA found in this landscape analysis, researchers should adopt or develop outcome measures that align with what success looks like for the evaluation TA participant.

4. For policymakers and evaluation TA funders

- **Require or incentivize robust evaluation TA efforts to improve program implementation and outcomes for participants.** Policymakers or evaluation TA funders could consider incentives or requirements for programmatic grant recipients to participate in evaluation TA. Report findings suggest this participation might help advance intervention implementation fidelity and improvements in outcomes of intervention participants.³
- **Provide funding for participation in evaluation TA.** Recognizing that evaluation TA participants commonly struggle with staff time to engage in evaluation TA and resources to sustain improvements in their evaluation capacity, policymakers and evaluation TA funders could provide funds to support dedicated staff time and other resources to participate in evaluation TA.
- **Consider changes to reduce burden of evaluation and evaluation TA.** Policymakers and evaluation TA providers could consider ways to reduce burden on evaluation TA participant staff and leadership associated with evaluation and evaluation TA. For example, improving alignment between required performance measures and evaluation design.
- **Encourage research on the effectiveness of evaluation TA.** Policymakers and evaluation TA funders could require or incentivize programmatic grant recipients to participate in research on the effectiveness of evaluation TA and provide funds to support participation in evaluation efforts. They could also provide funding for researchers to conduct evaluations that can help identify promising approaches.

F. Glossary

ACF: Administration for Children and Families

OPRE: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation

Project SPARK: Supporting Partnerships to Advance Research and Knowledge

TA: Technical Assistance

TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

³ When policymakers and evaluation TA funders consider requirements to participate in evaluation TA, they should consider that adult learning may be most successful when it is not compulsory. For this reason, policymakers and evaluation TA funders might consider incentives for evaluation TA participation, rather than requirements, or tying requirements closely with funding and other support for participation in evaluation TA.

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I. Introduction

A greater capacity to conduct evaluations and apply evaluation findings can benefit human services organizations in several ways. Organizations can use evaluation results to inform program planning and decision making, focus leaders and staff on key organizational goals, and identify ways to improve service delivery and better meet the needs of people served (James Bell Associates 2013). The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has long been committed to building and using rigorous evidence to inform policy and practice, a commitment echoed recently by the [Foundations for Evidence-Based Policy Making Act of 2018 \(Evidence Act\)](#).

Supporting Partnerships to Advance Research and Knowledge (Project SPARK), sponsored by ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), in consultation with the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), provides evaluation technical assistance (TA) to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and related programs, such as workforce development programs. This evaluation TA is intended to equip programs with tools and skills to produce and use evidence to improve decision making, programming quality, and, ultimately, outcomes for children and families. As part of Project SPARK, ACF sought to understand the range of approaches to evaluation TA, including which initiatives are most promising for building evaluation capacity among evaluation TA participants. These insights can inform and improve future evaluation TA efforts.

The goal of this report is to document the landscape of evaluation TA initiatives and draw lessons for human services and related programs, with a focus on TANF and workforce development programs. In addition, this report proposes a definition of evaluation TA and a conceptual framework that specifies the common components of evaluation TA. Because ACF is primarily interested in evaluation TA that aims to build the evaluation capacity of human services and related programs, we focus this report on evaluation TA that aims to build staff and institutional evaluation capacity among evaluation TA participants. Specifically, we address three research questions (see Box I.2), drawing on telephone discussions with respondents associated with specific evaluation TA efforts, three meetings with evaluation TA experts, and a systematic literature search and review.

Box I.1. Defining human services and related programs

Given the interests of Project SPARK, this report focuses on particular human services and related programs, including:

- TANF programs
- Programs—such as child welfare, early childhood, and child support programs—that might be supported or administered by ACF
- Workforce programs that might be supported by the U.S. Department of Labor or other sources

Given the interests of Project SPARK, this landscape analysis did not consider programs in the areas of health, international development, or K-12 education as human services or related programs.

Box I.2. Research questions

1. **What is the landscape of evaluation TA?** What do we know about evaluation TA as a mechanism for building evaluation capacity within state, tribal, and local human services and related programs?
 - **Existing initiatives.** What existing or previous evaluation TA initiatives have been implemented in these contexts?
 - **Issues and challenges.** What issues and challenges are associated with implementing evaluation TA? Have agencies been able to overcome them?
 - **Differentiation.** To what extent do or should initiatives vary based on focal population or program context?
 2. **What do we know about the effectiveness of evaluation TA?** Are some evaluation TA initiatives more promising or effective than others at building evaluation capacity within state, tribal, and local human services and related programs? Is there research to support this conclusion? Do certain initiatives work better for some programs than others?
 3. **What can we learn from evaluation TA initiatives outside of human services and related programs or supported by non-federal funding?** Do approaches or effectiveness vary for initiatives outside human services and related programs? Do they vary for initiatives supported by state or philanthropic entities? Have other agencies examined these questions about the promise or effectiveness of evaluation TA initiatives?
-

A. Key findings

1. Landscape of evaluation TA (Research Question 1)

- **Defining evaluation TA.** Our preliminary review of relevant literature and consultations with experts suggested that the concept of evaluation TA was neither clearly nor consistently defined in the research or practice literature. To fill this gap, we conducted a more extensive, systematic literature review and gathered input from experts to specify a definition and conceptual framework of evaluation TA that aims to build the evaluation capacity of human services and related programs. The definition and conceptual framework identify key components of evaluation TA that aims to build participants' evaluation capacity. Thus, the definition and framework can support planning and decision making among people and organizations that fund, develop, provide, or participate in evaluation TA.
- **Guiding principles.** Engaging diverse perspectives and incorporating evaluation and analytic thinking into everyday organizational decision making were commonly used by the evaluation TA initiatives examined for this report and were identified by experts as important guiding principles for designing and delivering evaluation TA.
- **Evaluation TA strategies and topics.** A common upfront strategy used by the evaluation TA initiatives examined for this report was conducting a collaborative needs assessment and using results to tailor the evaluation TA initiative to ensure it matches the context, goals, and evaluation capacity of the evaluation TA participant. Other common evaluation TA delivery strategies included workshops, as well as direct coaching, mentoring, and consultations between the evaluation TA provider and participant. Common evaluation TA topics covered key stages in the evaluation life cycle.
- **Common issues and challenges.** Evaluation TA providers and participants were commonly challenged by issues such as limited time for staff at the evaluation TA participant organization to engage with the evaluation TA, limited resources for evaluation TA participants to sustain practices developed through evaluation TA, and difficulty obtaining buy-in from leadership of the participant organization.

2. Effectiveness of evaluation TA (Research Question 2)

- **Limited rigorous research.** There are few rigorous studies of the effect of evaluation TA on key outcomes including building evaluation capacity of evaluation TA participants.
- **Some evidence of improvements in key outcomes for evaluation TA participants.** Existing research shows some associations between evaluation TA and improvements in key outcomes, such as evaluation TA participants' knowledge, skills, and abilities related to evaluation; development and use of evaluation tools and use of rigorous evaluation design and methods; intervention implementation fidelity; positive outcomes for intervention participants; and increased organizational commitment to evaluation. Research also suggests that evaluation TA strategies that incorporate adult learning principles might be related to increased evaluation capacity among participant organizations.

3. Lessons from evaluation TA initiatives outside of human services and related programs or supported by non-federal funding (Research Question 3)

- **Evaluation TA guiding principles, topics, and strategies—as well as evidence of effectiveness—do not seem to vary by sector or funding source.** This landscape analysis did not uncover systematic differences in evaluation TA approaches or evidence of promise of effectiveness by whether the initiative was within or outside the human services or supported by federal or non-federal funding.
- **A broader literature synthesis could help distinguish differences by sector and funding source.** To draw stronger conclusions on if or how evaluation TA approaches and effectiveness vary by sector or funding source would require review of additional literature, using a larger sample and sampling strategy designed specifically to address these questions would be needed.

These findings can inform policy and practice for the following focal audiences: (1) providers of evaluation TA at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels; (2) practitioners at the state, tribal, and local level who might participate in evaluation TA; (3) researchers, including those studying federally funded evaluation TA initiatives; and (4) policymakers and evaluation TA funders.

B. Report contents

Section II presents a definition and conceptual framework for evaluation TA that aims to build the evaluation capacity of human services and related programs. Section III addresses Research Questions 1 and 3 by describing the landscape of evaluation TA in human services and related programs. Section IV addresses Research Questions 2 and 3 by reviewing the evidence of effectiveness of evaluation TA. Section V summarizes key findings and draws lessons for each focal audience for this report. In Box I.3, we briefly describe the methods we used to collect and analyze information for this report.

Box I.3. Methods to Assess the Landscape of Evaluation TA

To document the landscape of evaluation TA initiatives and draw lessons for human services and related programs, we used the following sources that allowed us to identify and examine a range of evaluation TA initiatives, including some with evidence of effectiveness:

- **Telephone discussions** with respondents associated with 14 evaluation TA initiatives (listed below). Respondents included staff from 13 agencies and organizations that implemented the 14 initiatives (one agency/organization represented two initiatives), and all had experience either developing, overseeing the implementation of the initiative, or directly providing evaluation TA through the given initiative. To identify these respondents, we conducted a systematic environmental scan of evaluation TA funders, providers, and initiatives associated with federal and state human services programs and agencies, philanthropies, postsecondary institutions, and federal contractors. Through this scan, we identified 66 evaluation TA initiatives. From this pool of 66 initiatives, OPRE and the study team chose 14 initiatives to invite to participate in telephone discussions. The initiatives selected reflected an intentional mix of program and policy areas, funders, and geographic scales. We opted to include initiatives that appeared to provide relatively intensive evaluation TA support, as characterized by duration of the initiative and frequency of contact between evaluation TA providers and participants. We used this selection criteria with the aim of identifying evaluation TA initiatives that could reasonably be expected to have had an effect on the evaluation capacity of the participants, in contrast to lighter-touch or one-time collaborations. To help address Research Question 3, we included initiatives within and outside human services and related programs and supported by federal and non-federal sources. We did not explicitly select evaluation TA initiatives based on whether they aimed to increase evaluation capacity of evaluation TA participants. However, all the selected initiatives did have this aim.

Evaluation TA initiatives included in the telephone discussions

- Building Evaluation Capacity Initiative (BECI) and the Readiness, Implementation, Sustainability for Effectiveness (RISE) Partnership
 - Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC)
 - Children Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Professional Development and Technical Assistance (PDTA) Center Evaluation Institute
 - Getting to Outcomes (GTO)
 - The Learning Lab—Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) framework
 - Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI2)
 - Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES)
 - The Pew Fund Evaluation Capacity Building Initiative (ECBI)
 - Promising Youth Programs
 - Rapid Cycle Tech Evaluations (RCTEs)—Ed Tech RCE Coach (“the Coach”)
 - Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA) Grant Program Evaluation TA
 - Evaluation Training and Technical Assistance in Program Evaluation—Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP)
 - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Evaluation TA
 - Building Capacity to Evaluate Interventions for Youth /Young Adults with Child Welfare Involvement at Risk of Homelessness (YARH), Phases I, II, and III
- **A series of three expert meetings**, for which we identified and convened a diverse group of 10 evaluation TA experts to inform our understanding of the landscape of evaluation TA initiatives in human services and related programs. Appendix A, Box A.5 lists the 10 experts and their professional affiliations. During the meetings and through follow-up consultations, we co-developed and refined a definition and conceptual framework of evaluation TA (discussed in Section II). The experts included representatives from federal agencies, such as staff overseeing federally funded evaluation TA initiatives; developers and providers of evaluation TA; researchers; and state and local practitioners who provide or participate in evaluation TA.
 - **A systematic literature search and review** of prior landscape analyses (including meta-syntheses or meta-analyses) and peer-reviewed and gray (not peer-reviewed) publications focused on evaluation TA. We refer to these publications collectively as “resources.” The prior landscape analyses focused on evaluation capacity building initiatives, which further underlined the need for landscape analysis of evaluation TA, more specifically. We prioritized for detailed review 37 resources that we selected by systematically applying scoring criteria that ranked the relevance of each resource to the research questions and through recommendations from experts.

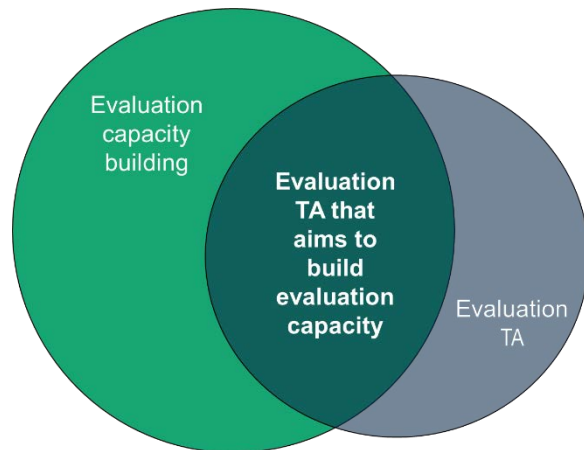
Gathering and analyzing information from these sources helped us build a broad, comprehensive picture of the nature of evaluation TA. We further detail the methods we used to identify, review, and analyze information from each source in Appendix A. Appendix B includes tables that describe each evaluation TA initiative included in our telephone discussions. The Works Consulted section lists all resources from the literature review.

II. Defining Evaluation TA

In this section, we propose a definition and conceptual framework for evaluation TA. This landscape analysis focused on evaluation TA broadly. A central aim was to identify those initiatives that showed promise to build the evaluation capacity of evaluation TA participants and to draw lessons for human services and related programs. Evaluation TA and evaluation capacity building are distinct but overlapping concepts (see Box II.1).

Box II.1. Evaluation TA and evaluation capacity building

Evaluation TA and evaluation capacity building are different but closely related concepts. Evaluation capacity building is clearly defined in existing research (see, for example, Cousins et al. 2014). Evaluation capacity building refers to activities that aim to increase participants' ability to understand, use, and—when possible—conduct evaluation. In general, experts consider evaluation capacity building to be broader than evaluation TA, but different fields define evaluation TA differently. Some fields consider only activities that could build participants' evaluation capacity to be evaluation TA. Others allow that some evaluation TA activities might not be aimed at building evaluation TA participants' evaluation capacity or include primarily activities that do not aim to build capacity within their conceptualizations of evaluation TA. The schematic depicts this overlap between evaluation capacity building and evaluation TA to indicate the focus of this report: evaluation TA that aims to build evaluation capacity.



Examples

- **Evaluation capacity building (but not evaluation TA):** Funding to expand the data collection infrastructure of an organization, such as data management or data analysis software; leadership retreat focused on fostering key components of organizational learning capacity such as building a culture of teamwork and group problem solving (Cousins et al. 2014).
- **Evaluation TA (but not evaluation capacity building):** Evaluation TA provider independently writing and implementing an evaluation plan for the evaluation TA participant; evaluation TA provider developing a new outcome measure on their own and passing the complete measure to the evaluation TA participant to implement.
- **Evaluation TA that aims to build evaluation capacity:** Evaluation TA provider training frontline staff to increase their understanding of approaches to collect high quality data; evaluation TA provider providing detailed feedback on evaluation plan drafted by the evaluation TA participant.

In this report, we focus on evaluation TA that aims to build the evaluation capacity of human services and related programs. We use “evaluation TA” as shorthand to refer to this focus. We use “evaluation capacity” to talk about the key outcome: improvements in programs’ capacity to understand, use, and—when possible—conduct evaluation to improve programs.

As we began to conduct this landscape analysis and the expert meetings, we discovered that the concept of evaluation TA was not clearly defined in the research or practice literature. We viewed having a shared definition of evaluation TA to be critical to assessing the landscape of evaluation TA. Thus, we worked with experts and used relevant resources from the literature review to co-create a definition of evaluation TA and a conceptual framework that specifies the common components of evaluation TA. Although not all evaluation TA aims to build participants' evaluation capacity, ACF is primarily interested in those

forms of evaluation TA that aim to do so. As a result, the definition and conceptual framework focus on evaluation TA that aims to build the evaluation capacity of human services and related programs. Evaluation capacity building includes imparting the knowledge and skills to understand, use, and—when possible—conduct evaluation to improve programs.

A. Definition of evaluation TA

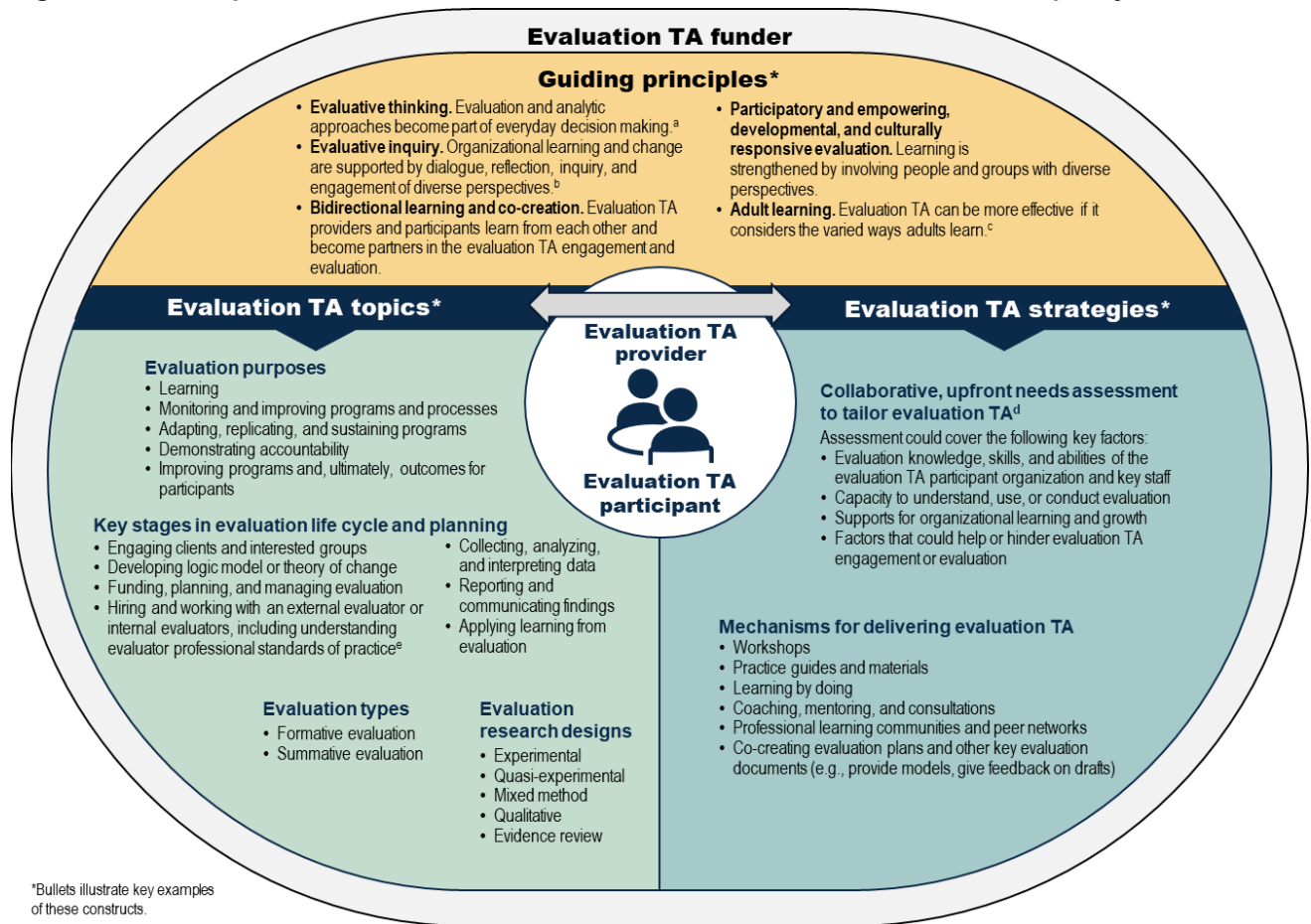
Based on our review of the literature and consultation with experts, we developed the following definition of evaluation TA that aims to build the evaluation capacity of human services and related programs:

Evaluation TA is an intentional and collaborative learning process that aims to help human services and related agencies understand, use, and—when possible—conduct evaluation to guide and strengthen their programs. It is guided by a set of common principles and composed of strategies and learning topics tailored to each evaluation TA participant and jointly determined by the evaluation TA provider and participant.

B. Conceptual framework of evaluation TA

Based on our review of the literature and consultation with experts, we developed a conceptual framework that specifies key components and actors of evaluation TA that aims to build the evaluation capacity of human services and related programs (Figure II.1). Importantly, the components of the conceptual framework do not all have evidence of effectiveness or promise. Instead, components are those suggested by the literature review and experts as commonly used and important for evaluation TA.

Figure II.1. Conceptual framework of evaluation TA that aims to build evaluation capacity



^a Preskill and Torres 2000.

^b Preskill and Torres 1999.

^c See <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/adult-learning-principles.pdf>.

^d Cousins et al. 2014.

^e Evaluator professional standards of practice include evaluator guiding principles such as systematic inquiry, competence, integrity, respect for people, and equity; evaluator competencies, such as professional practice methodology, planning and management, and interpersonal skills; and principles of cultural and linguistic responsiveness in evaluation. See American Evaluation Association 2018a, 2018b, 2011.

Key features of the conceptual framework include:

- **Guiding principles** for evaluation TA—in yellow at the top of the framework—are a mix of values, processes, and outcomes. They focus on both the evaluation TA initiative and the evaluation itself. The placement of the guiding principles in the framework indicates they are the foundation of evaluation TA and should inform all other components.
- **Evaluation TA topics and strategies**—in green and blue to the left and right of the framework—form the core of evaluation TA. The bidirectional arrow between topics and strategies indicates these components should inform each other in an iterative and ongoing way: evaluation TA strategies and topics necessarily change and adapt during the evaluation TA initiative as the team gathers diverse perspectives, evaluation findings emerge, and contexts shift.

- The **evaluation TA participant and provider** are actors at the center of the framework. Depending on the initiative, evaluation TA participants can include human services program leadership, program staff who might be involved in evaluation only tangentially (for example, through entering high-quality program data), and staff who conduct evaluations as a part of their job. The placement of the participant and provider in the framework indicates all components of the evaluation TA should be tailored to the evaluation TA participant and that the evaluation TA participant and evaluation TA provider co-design and are co-learners in the evaluation TA process.
- The oval outlining the framework indicates that the evaluation **TA funder** can be involved in all aspects of the initiative.

The evaluation TA definition and conceptual framework informed scoping and data analysis for this report. In addition, by defining and classifying key components of evaluation TA that aim to build participants' evaluation capacity, the definition and framework could support planning and decision making among people and organizations that fund, develop, provide, or participate in evaluation TA.

III. The Landscape of Evaluation TA in Human Services and Related Programs

In this section, we provide a look at the landscape of evaluation TA in practice. This section draws primarily on the telephone discussions with respondents from 13 organizations who represented 14 evaluation TA initiatives.^{4,5} Respondents primarily represented the perspectives of evaluation TA providers—all had experience either developing, overseeing, or providing evaluation TA. We supplement findings from the telephone discussions with insights from the series of expert meetings that included discussion of key components of evaluation TA, from 15 resources included in the literature review that provided details on a particular evaluation TA initiative or initiatives, and from three prior landscape analyses that summarized features of multiple evaluation TA initiatives.⁶ Across these data sources, we identified key characteristics of evaluation TA initiatives and organized our findings using the conceptual framework (Figure II.1).

A. Existing evaluation TA initiatives

1. Guiding principles of evaluation TA initiatives

Common guiding principles for the design and delivery of evaluation TA include evaluative thinking; evaluative inquiry; and participatory and empowering, developmental, and culturally responsive evaluation.⁷

Evaluation TA initiatives commonly use principles of evaluative thinking and evaluative inquiry together to guide the initiative. Evaluative thinking refers to the use of evaluation and analytic approaches in everyday decision making (Preskill and Torres 2000). Evaluative inquiry refers to the use of dialogue, reflection, inquiry, and engagement of diverse perspectives to support organizational learning and change (Preskill and

Box III.1. Using evaluative thinking and inquiry to improve health care

The Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) was developed to help participating healthcare organizations implement evidence-informed practices to improve care and reduce costs by continually testing changes and assessing data to determine whether the evaluation TA participant organization is meeting its objectives for implementing change through learning sessions and action periods. The learning sessions include engaging diverse perspectives, and participants in the BSC exchange ideas about the selected topic to inform the implementation of their proposed changes (evaluative inquiry). When changes are implemented, BSC participants use evaluation methods to continually test the implementation of the proposed change and to inform tweaks to the change being tested (evaluative thinking). Today, this initiative is also used to improve practices outside of the healthcare field.

⁴ During one telephone discussion, the study team spoke with staff from the U.S. Department of Labor about two of their active TA initiatives: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Evaluation TA and the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments Grants State Evaluation TA. Both TA initiatives provide support to state-level grant recipients, but they support separate programs and use distinct approaches to evaluation TA.

⁵ The detailed profiles of each evaluation TA initiative that participated in telephone discussions (Appendix B) provide examples of how each initiative implemented these strategies.

⁶ Appendix A, Table A.1 characterizes the evaluation TA initiatives that were the focus of the telephone discussions. Appendix A, Table A.2 characterizes the 15 resources from the literature review reviewed for this section.

⁷ Representatives from the evaluation TA initiatives did not always use the same terminology as we use in the conceptual framework when describing the principles that guided their evaluation TA initiatives. To provide insights into common guiding principles, the study team coded respondents' answers to questions about the theories of change, conceptual frameworks, and past research that guide their initiatives to determine whether they aligned with the guiding principles called out in the literature and by the experts and included in the conceptual framework (Figure II.1).

Torres 1999). About half of the respondents in our telephone discussions described their evaluation TA initiatives as guided by theories, conceptual frameworks, or prior research that the study team identified as aligned with the principles of both evaluative thinking and inquiry. Box III.1 provides an example of how respondents from the Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) described using these two principles.

Several of the evaluation TA initiatives examined in the literature were similarly guided by the principles of evaluative thinking and inquiry. For example, a study on one evaluation TA initiative, “Strengthening What Works: Preventing Intimate Partner Violence in Immigrant and Refugee Communities,” noted that the evaluation TA initiative was committed to helping organizations internalize new evaluation skills and actively engaging staff to ensure lessons became engrained in the “organization’s institutional memory” (LTG Associates 2014).

Respondents also described practices or core values aligned with the principals of participatory and empowering, developmental, and culturally responsive evaluation as central to their initiatives (see Box III.2 for definitions of these closely related concepts). Respondents from these initiatives described approaches to strengthen learning by involving diverse perspectives throughout the evaluation TA initiative and evaluation. By incorporating the different perspectives of those who interact with the evaluation TA participant organization, the initiatives are also able to develop a deeper understanding of the organization’s needs. For example, respondents from the Building Evaluation Capacity Initiative (BECI) and the Readiness, Implementation, Sustainability for Effectiveness (RISE) Partnership described tailoring the initiative to align with community needs by actively considering the racial, ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic factors of those who are served by the participating organization. Similarly, a respondent from the Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI²) evaluation TA initiative described gathering information from those who are implementing and participating in focal programs before co-developing solutions with the evaluation TA participant organization for the problems the participant organization is facing.

The resources and prior landscape analyses in the literature review echoed the centrality of participatory and empowering, developmental, and culturally responsive evaluation principles. For instance, one resource described that the extent to which the evaluation TA participant organizations strengthened their evaluation capacity was shaped by the degree to which multiple staff members were actively involved, which helped ensure lessons from the evaluation TA became part of the organization’s institutional memory (LTG Associates 2014). Two of the prior landscape analyses noted the wide use of principles of participatory and empowering, developmental, and culturally responsive evaluation to inform evaluation capacity-building interventions. For example, one landscape analysis found that 80 percent of the 61 initiatives they examined commonly used approaches aligned with participatory and empowering, developmental, and culturally responsive evaluation to structure their evaluation TA and associated evaluation activities (Labin et al. 2012). The other landscape analysis noted that the literature on

Box III.2. Defining participatory and empowering, developmental, and culturally responsive evaluation

These closely related concepts are common guiding principles for evaluation TA.

Participatory and empowering evaluation. Learning is strengthened by active involvement of people who are the focus of study in evaluation theory and practice.

Developmental evaluation. Evaluation can best support and test programs that are new or undergoing change when evaluation closely involves people developing and implementing programs.

Culturally responsive evaluation. Learning is strengthened by acknowledging the role of culture and power dynamics, efforts to name and reduce biases, and active involvement of the people or groups who are the focus of the evaluation.

evaluation capacity building discusses participatory approaches as an important component of interventions focused on this area (Ponce 2014).

2. Strategies used by evaluation TA initiatives

Coaching and consultation; workshops; and collaborative, upfront needs assessments to tailor evaluation TA were the strategies respondents most commonly described using to deliver evaluation TA. Table III.1 lists the number of initiatives from the telephone discussions and prior landscape analyses and the number of resources included in the literature review that mentioned the use of specific evaluation TA strategies included in the conceptual framework presented in the previous section.

Table III.1. Strategies used by evaluation TA initiatives

Strategy	Number of initiatives included in the telephone discussions citing use of this strategy (N = 14)	Number of resources from literature review citing the use of this strategy (N = 15)	Number of initiatives in the prior landscape analyses that use this strategy (N = 145)	Total ^a (N = 174)
Coaching, mentoring, and consultations	13	8	100	121
Workshops	10	7	20	37
Collaborative, upfront needs assessment to tailor evaluation TA	9	1	21	31
Practice guides and materials	7	3	24	34
Professional learning communities and peer networks	6	3	12	21
Co-create evaluation plans and other key evaluation documents (for example, provide models or feedback on drafts)	3	4	0	7

Note: Counts may be undercounts, as this table includes only strategies that were explicitly mentioned in the given data source.

^a The telephone discussions described a specific initiative, and the count provided in this table is the number of initiatives citing use of the given strategy. Several resources from the literature review described multiple evaluation TA initiatives, and the count in this table is the number of resources that included at least one initiative citing the use of the given strategy. The prior landscape analyses summarize information across many initiatives, and the count in this table is the number of initiatives citing the use of the given strategy. Thus, the total column is not a sum of unique evaluation TA initiatives.

Participants in the expert meetings shared that evaluation TA requires personalized support and one-on-one coaching between the evaluation TA provider and evaluation TA participant. In practice, the initiatives included in the telephone discussions provided personalized support through coaching, mentoring, and consultations—or, working meetings between the evaluation TA provider and evaluation TA participant. These meetings typically included individual consultations between the evaluation TA provider and the participating organization, conducted virtually or in person. For example, as part of the Children Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Professional Development and Technical Assistance (PDTA) initiative, evaluation specialists provided grant recipients with evaluation consultations, which

were one-on-one calls focused on the grant-specific requirements for the evaluation and offering evaluation guidance. For the BECI/RISE Partnership initiative, the evaluation TA providers offered coaching, mentoring, and consultations to participating organizations through three on-site meetings per year in addition to monthly virtual support.

The expert group also suggested the use of a needs assessment at the outset of evaluation TA and stressed it should be collaborative. The goals of this collaborative, upfront needs assessment, from the perspective of the experts, are to: 1) identify priority areas of growth, such as addressing problems a participating organization is experiencing in implementing or studying their program, and 2) determine the participating organization's ability to understand, use, or conduct an evaluation. Many of the respondents described using collaborative, upfront needs assessments (see Box III.3). Similarly, the authors of the three prior landscape analyses either suggested the use of an upfront needs assessment or noted that the evidence suggested the use of a needs assessment to tailor the evaluation TA support.

Box III.3. Examples of collaborative, upfront needs assessments to tailor evaluation TA

Using participatory research methods to learn directly from evaluation TA participant organizations.

LI² is a three-phase initiative that aims to improve program quality, efficiency, implementation, and effectiveness. The first phase of the LI² evaluation TA initiative is a needs assessment that uses participatory research methods. During this phase, evaluation TA participants engage in discussions with the evaluation TA provider to clarify their reasons for seeking change and the problems they are trying to solve. After the evaluation TA provider develops a better understanding of the program environment and problems faced by the evaluation TA participant, the two work together to identify opportunities for improvement and issues that could impede innovation before moving to the next phase.

Using a questionnaire to understand evaluation TA participant organizations' capacity for evaluation.

The Rapid Cycle Tech Evaluations (RCTEs) evaluation TA initiative aims to help school administrators execute quick-turnaround evaluations. To conduct the needs assessment, the initiative uses participating school administrators' answers to a series of upfront questions that assess ability to use educational technology applications (designed to improve student learning) and recommend a study design to evaluate that technology.

One of the prior landscape analyses noted the importance of using more than one evaluation TA strategy, based on their finding that initiatives that used a multifaceted approach appeared to be the most successful in building evaluation capacity (Norton et al. 2016). The use of multiple evaluation TA strategies was common among the evaluation TA initiatives profiled through the telephone discussions (see Appendix B for a description of the strategies used by each initiative) and was also described in the literature. For example, The Work@Health evaluation TA initiative offered evaluation TA participant organizations three versions of their initiative: (1) an online version including self-paced tutorials over a three-week period; (2) a blended version, including self-paced tutorials over a three-week period for the first six modules, then an instructor-led six-hour workshop to cover the last two modules; and (3) an in-person version that included on-site, instructor-led eight-hour workshop using lectures, skills lessons, practical demonstration, case studies, participant discussions, and group exercises. For all versions, after participating organizations completed the training, they received access to tools and resources, webinars, streaming videos, teleconferences, individualized coaching (over phone and Internet), and peer networks (Cluff et al. 2018).

Box III.4. Example evaluation TA resources

This landscape analysis identified several examples of evaluation TA resources that evaluation TA providers and evaluation TA participants can use to develop and strengthen their work.

Training manuals from Getting to Outcomes

Available at <https://www.rand.org/health-care/projects/getting-to-outcomes/documents.html>

Components. The Getting to Outcomes (GTO) manuals cover ten steps to help organizations implement interventions and obtain positive results. Steps 1–6 focus on planning activities (needs assessment, goal setting, program selection, appropriate capacity and fit, program implementation); Steps 7 and 8 cover process and outcome evaluation components; and Steps 9 and 10 focus on using findings to improve and sustain programs.

Focal audiences. Different GTO manuals target specific audiences, such as programs addressing community emergency preparedness, teen pregnancy prevention, home visiting, veterans experiencing homelessness, and underage drinking prevention, as well as U.S. Air Force Community Action Teams. GTO also has a manual on continuous quality improvement and assets for youth development.

Strengths of this resource. The manuals have been adapted to meet the needs of different audiences while maintaining the same key components.

USAID Learning Lab Monitoring; Evaluation; and Collaborating, Learning, Adapting (CLA) toolkits

Available at <https://usaidelearninglab.org/>

Components. The USAID Learning Lab website offers three distinct toolkits to help USAID staff and their partners plan, implement, and integrate monitoring, evaluating and CLA-related practices into USAID programming.

Focal audiences. USAID staff and implementing partners.

Strengths of this resource. The USAID website gives users access to the toolkits and step-by-step instructions on how to use them.

AmeriCorps Evidence Exchange and Impact Webinars

Available at <https://americorps.gov/about/our-impact/evidence-exchange> and <https://americorps.gov/about/our-impact/webinars>

Components. Evidence Exchange is a digital repository of publicly available research and evaluation reports. The reports are intended to help increase AmeriCorps' understanding of the most effective interventions it has funded and provide an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the National Service programs. The Impact Webinars page contains previous webinars on various evaluation topics, such as calculating statistical power for evaluation, using evidence for scaling community-based interventions that work, and disseminating findings from past evaluations.

Focal audiences. Those interested in national service, social innovation, civic initiative, and volunteering research.

Strengths of this resource. Evidence Exchange makes research findings easily accessible. Impact Webinars include an overview of each webinar; the webinar slides, recording, and transcript; and any handouts used during the live webinar.

The Tobacco Control Evaluation Center webinar archive and evaluation guide

Available at <https://tobaccoeval.ucdavis.edu/webinar-archive> and <https://tobaccoeval.ucdavis.edu/evaluation-guide>

Components. The webinar archive is a repository of webinars and trainings held by the Tobacco Control Evaluation Center on topics including evaluation planning, common pitfalls in evaluation (for example, limitations and transparency, bias, reporting unexpected challenges), and disseminating findings. The evaluation guide is an online collection of resources to support organizations through each phase of the evaluation life cycle, including getting started, conducting an evaluation, analyzing data, and reporting and using evaluation findings.

Focal audiences. Those interested in conducting evaluations of state or local public health programs.

Strengths of this resource. The resources were developed to cover each stage of the evaluation life cycle and are tailored to different audiences, such as those new to conducting evaluations and programs working with external evaluators.

3. Topics covered by evaluation TA initiatives

The content delivered to evaluation TA participants by the evaluation TA initiatives described by respondents and in the literature and prior landscape analyses covered a range of topics from designing and conducting evaluations to disseminating research findings. Table III.2 lists the number of initiatives from the telephone discussions and prior landscape analyses and the number of resources in the literature review that discussed each of the evaluation TA topics mentioned in the conceptual framework.

Table III.2 Topics covered by evaluation TA initiatives^a

Topic	Number of initiatives included in the telephone discussions that cover this topic (N = 14)	Number of literature review resources that cover this topic (N = 15)	Number of initiatives in the prior landscape analyses that cover this topic (N = 145)	Total (N = 174)
Evaluation purposes				
Learning	5	9	0	14
Monitoring and improving programs and processes	5	9	20	34
Adapting, replicating, and sustaining programs	3	1	20	24
Demonstrating accountability	1	1	0	2
Key stages in evaluation life cycle and planning				
Funding, planning, and managing evaluation	9	11	42	62
Collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data	8	9	37	54
Reporting and communicating findings	8	5	0	13
Applying learning from evaluation	6	8	13	27
Developing logic model or theory of change	5	6	51	62
Hiring and working with an external evaluator or internal evaluators	0	3	0	3
Engaging clients and interested groups	0	0	0	0
Evaluation types				
Formative evaluation	7	0	9	16
Summative evaluation	7	0	9	16

Topic	Number of initiatives included in the telephone discussions that cover this topic (N = 14)	Number of literature review resources that cover this topic (N = 15)	Number of initiatives in the prior landscape analyses that cover this topic (N = 145)	Total (N = 174)
Evaluation designs				
Experimental	7	2	9	18
Quasi-experimental	7	1	9	17
Mixed method	7	0	9	16
Qualitative	7	0	9	16
Review of existing evidence	7	1	9	17

Note: Counts may be undercounts as this table includes evaluation only evaluation TA topics that were explicitly mentioned in the given data source.

^a The telephone discussions described a specific initiative and the count provided in this table is the number of initiatives covering the given topic. Several resources from the literature review described multiple evaluation TA initiatives and the count in this table is the number of resources that include at least one initiative covering the given topic. The prior landscape analyses summarize information across many initiatives and the count in this table is the number of initiatives covering the given topic. Thus, the total column is not a sum of unique evaluation TA initiatives.

A key insight from experts who participated in the expert meetings was that evaluation TA could support a broad range of activities within the evaluation life cycle, such as designing and conducting an evaluation, communicating and disseminating research findings, and learning from or applying findings. However, the experts cautioned that although many evaluation TA initiatives attempt to help participants understand, use, and conduct research, mastering research methods—like one would through courses in research methodology that could be part of a Ph.D. program, for example—is generally outside the scope of evaluation TA.

The respondents described evaluation TA content focusing on similar topics mentioned by the experts, but they most commonly described their evaluation TA initiative as focusing on designing and conducting an evaluation. Most (7) of these initiatives focused on working with the evaluation TA participant organization to develop rigorous research studies, such as randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental designs. Respondents also discussed other evaluation TA topics covered by their initiatives, including communicating and disseminating research findings and learning. For 4 of the 14 initiatives, the evaluation TA focused more on monitoring program changes and did not extensively cover evaluation design and methods topics. For example, the learning conducted through the CLA framework implemented as part of the USAID Learning Lab evaluation TA initiative is typically geared toward program implementation and process improvement. However, USAID staff also work with implementing partners to develop evaluation questions or methods.

B. Common challenges experienced by evaluation TA providers and participants and strategies used to address them

Respondents most commonly described challenges related to limited capacity for participant organizations’ staff to engage in evaluation TA, limited resources among participant organizations to sustain practices developed through evaluation TA, ability of participant organizations to get buy-in from their leadership, and participating organizations’ understanding of evaluation. Resources from the literature review and the prior landscape analyses noted similar challenges related to participating organizations’ limited time to engage in evaluation TA and limited resources to sustain practices

developed through evaluation TA. One difference is that the literature noted communication between the evaluation TA provider and participant organization as a challenge more frequently than the respondents. This might be due to the literature capturing the perspectives of both the evaluation TA provider and participant, whereas respondents primarily offered the perspective of the evaluation TA provider. Table III.3 provides an overview of the challenges experienced by the evaluation TA initiatives.

Table III.3. Challenges experienced by evaluation TA providers and participants

Challenge	Number of initiatives that experienced challenge (N = 14)	Number of literature review resources that described an initiative that experienced this challenge (N = 12)	Number of engagements in the prior landscape analyses that experienced this challenge (N = 61)	Total (N = 87)
Limited time for evaluation TA participant staff to participate in evaluation TA	5	4	27	36
Limited resources for evaluation TA participant organization to sustain practices developed through evaluation TA	4	4	37	35
Obtaining buy-in from participating organization's leadership	4	0	0	4
Understanding of evaluation among evaluation TA participant staff	3	3	0	6
Selecting external evaluators	2	0	0	2
Communication between evaluation TA providers and participating organizations	2	5	0	7

Note: Counts may be undercounts as this table includes evaluation TA challenges that were explicitly mentioned in the given data source.

^a The telephone discussions described a specific initiative and the count provided in this table is the number of initiatives that experienced the given challenge. Several resources described multiple evaluation TA initiatives and the count in this table is the number of resources that include at least one initiative that experienced the given challenge. The prior landscape analyses summarize information across many initiatives and the count in this table is the number of initiatives experiencing the given challenge. Thus, the total column is not a sum of unique evaluation TA initiatives.

A respondent from an initiative that cited most of the six common challenges mentioned in Table III.3 noted that to overcome these challenges, evaluation TA providers sought to develop a strong understanding of evaluation TA participant organizations' needs and develop timely solutions to meet those needs. One of the ways the initiative implemented this strategy was by having their evaluation TA providers review participants' grant applications to identify strengths, challenges, and goals. Using this information, the evaluation TA providers can tailor the materials they use during an engagement to better meet the needs of the grant recipients and evaluation TA participants.

Respondents also described adapting their initiative or materials based on lessons learned from earlier evaluation TA efforts. For example, initially, GTO offered only training manuals (described in the “Example evaluation TA resources” box, Box III.4). But the GTO evaluation TA providers realized that some participant organizations needed additional support. Thus, GTO shifted to providing in-person and virtual evaluation TA to supplement the manuals. Similarly, an resource on a federally funded teen pregnancy prevention (TPP) evaluation TA initiative noted that evaluation designs from the first cohort of grant recipients and evaluation TA participants were generally not rigorous enough to meet evidence standards for inclusion in the [HHS TPP Evidence Review](#), a systematic review of TPP programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Knab et al. 2016a). Based on this finding, the evaluation TA provider supplied a road map for the second cohort to help grant recipients design and implement evaluations that were more likely to meet standards for the HHS TPP Evidence Review.

C. How evaluation TA initiatives vary based on focus population and program context

Respondents from nearly all evaluation TA initiatives described tailoring their evaluation TA based on the evaluation TA participants’ needs and goals, timelines for addressing those needs, and other organizational characteristics (Box III.5).

Box III.5. Factors considered when adapting evaluation TA initiatives

Needs-related factors

- Challenges faced by organization
- Specific challenge, program, or goal the evaluation TA participant identifies as the preferred focus of the evaluation TA engagement
- Project timelines
- Understanding of evaluation

Characteristics of participating organization

- Size
- Capacity
- Populations served by organization
- Urbanicity
- Language

For example, USAID’s Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting framework provides each implementing partner different supports and resources based on the country in which the project is located and the characteristics of the program being evaluated. Similarly, the Evaluation Capacity Building Initiative (ECBI) aims to provides equitable evaluation TA by using a number of approaches to tailor the initiative to the context of each participant organization (Box III.6).

Box III.6. Providing equitable evaluation TA in the Philadelphia region

The Evaluation Capacity Building Initiative (ECBI) is an 18-month program comprised of individual and group coaching sessions focused on building a culture of learning within each grant recipient. To bring an equitable approach to its grant recipients, ECBI does the following:

- Assigns coaches to grant recipients based on each coach’s understanding of the Philadelphia region, familiarity with the participating sites, and skill set
 - Places grant recipients into tiers based on their experience with evaluation
 - Provides learning sessions for grantees to gather and share lessons learned to solve common challenges
-

D. Considerations for interpreting findings

Most of the telephone discussions—which were the primary data source for this section—focused on evaluation TA initiatives implemented within human services or within both human services and non-human services contexts. In contrast, most of the resources from the literature review focused on evaluation TA initiatives implemented in fields other than human services. For both the telephone discussions and literature review resources, most focal evaluation TA initiatives were supported by federal funding, although both included a handful of initiatives with other funding sources such as foundations or states. We did not observe meaningful differences in guiding principles, evaluation TA topics and strategies, challenges, or approaches to adapting the initiative by whether the evaluation TA was implemented in human services and related programs or in other fields or was supported by federal as compared with non-federal funding (Research Question 3). However, this finding might be due to the number of initiatives we were able to consider within the scope of this landscape analysis. To draw stronger conclusions would require review of additional literature, covering a larger number of evaluation TA initiatives and using a sampling strategy specifically designed to examine differences by sector and source of funding. To shed additional light on Research Question 3, we profiled the adaptation of an established evaluation TA initiative for use in human services agencies (see Box III.7).

Box III.7. Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC): Using an established evaluation TA initiative in human services settings

Overview. In the BSC initiative, teams of experts work with representatives from practitioner organizations to test and implement evidence-informed practices through “learning sessions” and “action periods.” (Each individual effort is also called a BSC.) The BSC process is guided by a trained facilitator and supported by experts in the selected topic area and in supporting change processes. Initially, BSC was used to help participating healthcare organizations implement evidence-informed practices to improve care and reduce costs. However, the BSC initiative has since been implemented with practitioner organizations in other fields, including in human services settings like early childhood and child welfare. According to the literature, several features of the BSC initiative make it well-suited for use in human services programs (Daily et al. 2018). These features include:

- A focus on changing organizational cultures and beliefs
- A focus on promoting sustainability of change through building organizational capacity
- An emphasis on replication and sustainability
- Implementation in real-world settings

To implement a BSC in a human services setting, the literature suggests obtaining support and buy-in from all levels of the evaluation TA participant organization, developing strategies for building capacity to engage in the improvement process at all levels of an organization, examining incentives to support participation, and identifying strategies for solving common problems.

IV. What We Know About the Effectiveness of Evaluation TA

In addition to describing common components of evaluation TA initiatives, the evaluation TA literature sheds light on components of evaluation TA that may be effective or promising in improving participants' evaluation capacity and positively affecting other outcomes.

A. Summary of reviewed research and review approach

This section draws on 18 resources (out of 37 resources reviewed for this landscape analysis) that assessed the effectiveness or promise of evaluation TA. Additionally, this section reports information shared by respondents from three evaluation TA initiatives (BSC, GTO, and BECI/RISE) about evidence of promise or effectiveness of their initiatives.

While we did not systematically review the 18 resources for the strength of evidence presented, we did code the study design used in each (Box IV.1). Three resources used methods appropriate to assess the causal impact of the focal evaluation TA initiative, that is, an experimental or quasi-experimental design. Half of the resources used descriptive methods appropriate for identifying evidence of promise, or associations between the focal evaluation TA initiative and key outcomes.

The remaining resources used other methods appropriate to assess promise of the focal evaluation TA initiative such as a case study or implementation evaluation. The study designs used in the resources reviewed indicate there is little

causal evidence on the impacts of evaluation TA. This finding highlights the need for more research on the effectiveness of evaluation TA, especially research using experimental or quasi-experimental approaches to assess impact.

In this section, we use the term “evidence of promise or effectiveness” to refer to findings suggesting evaluation TA had a positive impact or association with a focal outcome, as demonstrated by these resources. We focus on the key outcome of interest for this landscape analysis—improving evaluation capacity of evaluation TA participants. We also discuss evidence focused on other outcomes, such as implementation fidelity of interventions and improvements of intervention participants' outcomes.

Most evaluation TA initiatives evaluated in the 18 reviewed resources were (1) focused on practitioners of health interventions (that is, outside of the human services),⁸ (2) federally funded, and (3) national in scale but focused on local practitioners, such as community-based organizations. Appendix A, Table A.2 characterizes the evaluation TA initiatives included in the reviewed resources for this section by whether

Box IV.1. Study design used in resources reviewed (N=18)

- Descriptive outcomes study – 9
- Mixed methods – 2
- Implementation or process study – 2
- Case study – 1
- Experimental or impact study* – 3
- Research protocol (no findings) – 1

See Appendix A, Table A.2 for more characteristics of the 18 resources reviewed for this section.

*Of the three resources that used mixed methods, two also used another design such as an implementation or process study and, thus, could also be classified as “mixed methods.”

⁸ Given the interests of ACF and the focus of Project SPARK, this report focuses on human services and related programs as TANF programs; workforce programs that might be supported by the U.S. Department of Labor or other sources; and other programs, including child welfare, early childhood, and child support programs that might be supported or administered by ACF. Given the interests of Project SPARK, this landscape analysis did not consider programs in the areas of health, international development, or K-12 education as human services or related programs.

the initiative was in the human services sector, policy area, funder, type of evidence, target audience, and geographic scale. We did not observe meaningful differences in effectiveness by type of program (a sub question of Research Question 2) or by whether the evaluation TA was implemented in human services and related programs as compared with other fields or was supported by federal as compared with non-federal funding (a sub question of Research Question 3). However, these findings might be due to the relatively small numbers of human services and non-federally funded evaluation TA initiatives considered in the resources reviewed.⁹

B. Evidence of promise or effectiveness and key features of evaluation TA initiatives

The 18 resources reviewed for this landscape analysis that assessed the effectiveness or promise of evaluation TA showed some evidence of changes in key target outcomes for evaluation TA participants that appear to be associated with provision of evaluation TA. The studies featured in these resources demonstrated improvements in the following areas (summarized in Box IV.2):

1. Evaluation TA participants' knowledge, skills, and abilities related to evaluation

All five of the studies that measured participants' evaluation knowledge, skills, and abilities after participating in an evaluation TA initiative found self-reported increases (Arasanz and Nylén 2020; Dancy-Scott et al. 2017; Kelly et al. 2014; Lindeman et al. 2018; Roseland et al. 2011). One additional study, which administered an evaluation skills assessment to participants before and after an evaluation TA initiative, showed a statistically significant increase in a measure of participants' evaluation knowledge from before to after their participation in the initiative (Cluff et al. 2018). Although all six of these studies used descriptive designs that do not allow the authors to conclude the focal evaluation TA initiative itself increased participants' knowledge, skills, or abilities, the improvements in these outcomes suggest the focal initiatives may have promise to improve these outcomes. Delivery of group workshops plus individualized and tailored coaching on evaluation characterized five out of six of the evaluation TA initiatives described in these studies (the sixth resource did not describe the evaluation TA strategies used by the initiative). In addition, respondents from BECI/RISE shared that internal evaluations of the initiative found increases in participants' evaluation knowledge, skills, positive beliefs about evaluation, and use of evaluation. BECI/RISE offers up to two years of individualized coaching along with group workshops (see Appendix B for more information on this initiative).

Box VI.2. Evidence is limited but suggests evaluation TA may matter for the following outcomes

- Evaluation TA participants' knowledge, skills, and abilities related to evaluation
 - The development and use of evaluation tools and use of rigorous evaluation design and methods
 - Intervention implementation fidelity
 - Improved outcomes for intervention participants
 - Increased organizational commitment to evaluation
 - Increased evaluation capacity
-

⁹ Specifically, only 4 of the 18 initiatives were exclusively in the human services field (11 were non-human services, and 3 were both). We did not detect any differences in components of the initiatives that were aligned with the human services initiatives and not aligned with the non-human services initiatives (or vice versa).

2. The development and use of evaluation tools and use of rigorous evaluation design and methods

Four of the five resources that examined this outcome found that evaluation TA participants had increased development or use of evaluation tools and rigorous methods after engaging in evaluation TA (Berkeley Policy Associates and American Institutes for Research, 2012; Satterlund et al. 2013; U.S. Government Accountability Office 2016; Zandniapour and Hyde 2020). For example, an evaluation of recipients of the federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant—who participated in evaluation TA as part of their grant—found that grant recipients were more likely to conduct rigorous evaluations of their programs than eligible nonprofits that had applied but not been selected as SIF grant recipients and a nationally-representative sample of similar nonprofits (Zandniapour and Hyde 2020). SIF grant recipients also increased their development of evaluation tools, resources, and processes, including data systems, after participating in evaluation TA (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2016). A study of an evaluation TA center that serves approximately 100 local tobacco control organizations in California found that the quality of evaluation TA participants’ evaluation reports improved after participants engaged in evaluation TA (Satterlund et al. 2013).¹⁰ Both of these evaluation TA initiatives included workshops, individualized coaching, and online resources; the SIF evaluation TA also included document review, communities of practice and workgroup meetings, conferences, and an interactive online platform. Just one of the five resources examined outcomes related to the development and use of evaluation tools and use of rigorous evaluation design and methods and did not find improvements. This resource reported that evaluation TA participants in an early round of the focal initiative produced evaluation designs that were not sufficiently rigorous to meet standards for the HHS TPP Evidence Review. The evaluation TA provided adjusted their approach, and the evaluation designs of later cohorts were more rigorous (Knab et al. 2016a).

3. Intervention implementation fidelity

Both studies that examined outcomes related to implementation fidelity found that participation in evaluation TA led to improvements in implementation fidelity or quality of interventions. These studies were focused on GTO and BSC, which are both structured evaluation TA initiatives focused on monitoring and improving programs and processes (see Evaluation Purposes in Figure II.1). Each initiative uses a multi-phase process to help evaluation TA participants identify a problem and a possible solution, test that solution, and sustain the solution if it proves successful. GTO is typically used to identify a program that can address a specific problem (for example, selecting a TPP intervention to help decrease risky behaviors among youth in a certain community) and then to implement that program with high quality and fidelity. In contrast, BSC is typically used to identify and address a challenge within the implementation of a program (for example, to test a strategy to increase low enrollment in an evidence-informed intervention). GTO and BSC reflect the guiding principles of evaluative thinking, evaluative inquiry, bidirectional learning, and co-creation.

A cluster randomized controlled trial of the use of GTO in the context of an evidence-informed, substance use prevention program for youth found that sites exposed to GTO demonstrated better implementation fidelity of the program than sites without GTO exposure, as well as higher ratings on several constructs associated with effective implementation (Cannon et al. 2019). Another cluster randomized controlled

¹⁰ This resource stated that evaluation TA providers scored evaluation reports on clarity of writing and use of qualitative and quantitative analytical methods but did not otherwise provide details on how the study team assessed the quality of evaluation reports.

trial of the use of GTO with an evidence-informed TPP program found that implementation fidelity of the program increased considerably for sites that used GTO compared with sites that did not (Chinman et al. 2018). Likewise, a review of primarily descriptive outcomes studies of BSC also found consistent evidence of an association between BSC use and an improved implementation practices in health care, child welfare, and mental health services (Daily et al. 2018).

4. Improved outcomes for intervention participants

One study and the telephone discussions also demonstrated some evidence of evaluation TA initiatives resulting in better outcomes for the people served by the programs that participated in evaluation TA. The cluster randomized controlled trial of the use of GTO with an evidence-informed TPP program found that program participants in sites that used GTO improved statistically significantly more on two outcomes (attitudes and intentions toward condom use) than program participants in control sites that implemented the same TPP program but without evaluation TA through GTO (Chinman et al. 2018). A BSC respondent shared that internal analyses of performance measures indicate that BSC might have helped improved health care outcomes. However, one other resource examined impacts of evaluation TA on outcomes of intervention participants and found little evidence of an effect. This randomized control trial examined effects of the use of GTO on outcomes of youth participating in an after-school substance use prevention program. The study found low rates of substance use and no evidence of differences in rates of use among youth served by programs that received evaluation TA through GTO and those served by programs that did not (Cannon et al. 2019).

5. Increased organizational commitment to evaluation

The telephone discussions with respondents from evaluation TA initiatives and the literature suggest there is some evidence that evaluation TA initiatives may hold promise to strengthen buy-in for evaluation among leaders and staff within organizations. Change in leadership commitment to evaluation at the organizational level aligns with the guiding principle of evaluative inquiry. Just one of the resources reviewed focused on this outcome, but that study found that evaluation TA participants said their organizational leaders provided stronger support related to evaluation after taking part in evaluation TA (Arasanz and Nysten 2020). Likewise, respondents from BECI/RISE shared that participating organizations reported their work with the evaluation TA initiative led to enhancements in their organization's ability to sustain evaluation activities—for example, through improvements in their evaluation infrastructure—and that staff were reallocated or dedicated to evaluation after involvement in the initiative. Both of these evaluation TA initiatives included group workshops and individualized coaching to help participants conduct an evaluation.

6. Evaluation TA strategies that reflect adult learning principles might be related to increased evaluation capacity

Reviewed resources suggested that two particular evaluation TA strategies might be related to increased evaluation capacity. Both strategies reflect adult learning principles, which emphasize active involvement of learners as well as experiential or hands-on learning.¹¹ First, in the study of SIF grant recipients, increased evaluation capacity was associated with features of the initiative that encouraged participants to be actively involved, such as through a community of practice, hands-on support from professional researchers, and accountability mechanisms such as intensive coaching and ongoing monitoring of

¹¹ For more information, see <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/adult-learning-principles.pdf>.

progress (Zandniapour and Hyde 2020). Second, three studies also pointed to hands-on learning, or learning by doing, as an evaluation TA method that might lead to increased evaluation capacity (Dancy-Scott et al. 2017; Lindeman et al. 2018; LTG Associates 2014). In one of these studies, participants implementing a new or homegrown intervention reported larger improvements in their evaluation knowledge and skills more than participants implementing an evidence-informed intervention (Lindeman et al. 2018). The authors attributed this difference to participants in the former group being more hands-on in their evaluation preparation than the latter group. For example, participants had to develop logic models rather than refer to existing ones. Labin et al. (2012) also found in its landscape analysis that a mix of experiential learning and structured training is associated with improvements in evaluation-related outcomes.

C. Takeaways and remaining gaps

Overall, our review of evidence of promise or effectiveness of evaluation TA initiatives found few rigorous studies. Most of the resources reviewed used descriptive methods to explore associations between the focal evaluation TA initiative and key outcomes. Three resources reviewed used experimental or quasi-experimental methods appropriate for assessing the causal impact of the focal evaluation TA initiative. Despite this need for more rigorous research on evaluation TA effectiveness, the resources reviewed did provide considerable suggestive evidence of associations between evaluation TA and important outcomes for evaluation TA participants and the people they serve.

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V. Key Lessons for Future Efforts to Build Evaluation Capacity

A. Key findings

Building the knowledge and skills to understand, use, and even conduct evaluations can benefit human services organizations in several ways, including supporting better decision making and improvements in service delivery (James Bell Associates 2013). This report reviewed the landscape of evaluation TA initiatives aimed at increasing the evaluation capacity of human services and related programs, as well as the evidence of effectiveness or promise of evaluation TA. Key findings include:

- **Common evaluation TA approaches and challenges.** This landscape analysis revealed several common components of evaluation TA initiatives, including engaging diverse perspectives; incorporating evaluation and analytic thinking into everyday organizational decision making; using upfront assessments to tailor the evaluation TA initiative; discussing the evaluation life cycle; and using coaching, mentoring, consultations, and workshops as evaluation TA strategies. The most common evaluation TA challenge was limited time of staff of participant organizations to engage in the evaluation TA.
- **Some evidence of improvements in key outcomes for evaluation TA participants.** Although we found few rigorous studies of evaluation TA, this landscape analysis did uncover evidence that certain evaluation TA initiatives may hold promise for improving in key outcomes, including measures of organizational evaluation capacity. Evaluation TA strategies used by evaluation TA initiatives with evidence of promise included workshops, coaching and consultation, learning by doing, and responsive evaluation TA support.
- **Little variation in evaluation TA guiding principles, topics, strategies or evidence of promise or effectiveness by sector or funding source.** Lessons from diverse evaluation TA initiatives contributed to report findings and lessons. Yet, we found little evidence of differences in evaluation TA approaches, challenges, or evidence of promise or effectiveness by whether the initiative was within or outside the human services sector or supported by federal or non-federal funding. Review of a larger body of research using a sampling strategy designed to uncover any existing differences across sector or funding source would be needed to probe these questions further.

B. Key lessons

Findings from this report have implications for the evaluation TA and evaluation capacity building efforts of evaluation TA providers, practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and evaluation TA funders. We describe lessons learned for each audience below.

1. Providers of evaluation TA at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels

- **Adopt promising approaches.** Although rigorous evidence of evaluation TA effectiveness is limited, research suggests certain components of evaluation TA—for example, incorporating adult learning principles like hands-on learning—hold promise in improving key outcomes including evaluation capacity. Providers might prioritize such components when designing an evaluation TA initiative.

- **Incorporate an upfront planning phase that includes a needs assessment to customize evaluation TA.** Using a collaborative, upfront needs assessment to tailor the evaluation TA initiative was a common strategy among the evaluation TA initiatives examined in this report and recommended by the expert group. Evaluation TA providers should consider allocating sufficient upfront time and resources to co-create an evaluation TA plan that is tailored to the context, goals, and existing evaluation capacity of the evaluation TA participant.
- **Build the evidence base on evaluation TA.** Given limited evidence of the effectiveness of evaluation TA, providers could consider ways to integrate formative and summative evaluations of evaluation TA principles, topics, and strategies into each initiative. For example, evaluation TA providers can integrate rapid-cycle or implementation evaluations of their evaluation TA initiatives to inform ongoing improvements and generate evidence of effective initiatives or components. The conceptual framework developed for this landscape analysis could serve as a tool for articulating and then evaluating key components of evaluation TA initiatives.

2. Practitioners at the state, tribal, and local level who participate in evaluation TA

- **Seek and demand high-quality evaluation TA.** This report highlights key components of evaluation TA, including those with evidence of promise in improving target outcomes—and underscores the importance of tailoring evaluation TA to participants’ goals, readiness, capacity, and local context. Practitioners who currently or might participate in evaluation TA can use these findings to assess the evaluation TA they are participating in or as selection criteria when seeking an evaluation TA provider. For example, research suggests that evaluation TA that combines structured workshops and trainings with opportunities for learning by doing might be especially likely to improve participants’ evaluation capacity. Practitioners could use this information to seek or request opportunities for hands-on learning from an evaluation TA provider.
- **Anticipate and address common challenges or pitfalls.** Practitioners can use findings of this report to anticipate and plan to address common challenges or pitfalls around evaluation TA including time for staff to participate in evaluation TA, resources to sustain practices developed through evaluation TA, and buy-in to evaluation TA among organization leadership. For example, a practitioner might plan for more effective work with an evaluation TA provider by engaging organization leadership early in the process and seeking dedicated staff time for participation in the evaluation TA. Evaluation TA participants should also be sure they have the resources and commitment to engage early and often with the evaluation TA provider.
- **Lean into guiding principles.** This report suggests that incorporating evaluation and analytic thinking into everyday organizational decision making and engaging diverse perspectives in evaluation TA and evaluation itself are important guiding principles for evaluation TA. Practitioners play a critical role in the extent to which they and their organizations embrace and fully realize these principals through the evaluation TA engagement. Practitioners who are currently or planning to participate in evaluation TA can keep these principles in mind as guideposts for the initiative and consider ways to apply them. For example, practitioners might consider approaches they can take to ensure diverse people and groups within and supporting their organization are engaged and buy in to the evaluation TA.

3. Researchers and evaluators of evaluation TA

- **Conduct rigorous research on what works in evaluation TA.** This landscape analysis found limited research on the effectiveness of evaluation TA, with a particular lack of research using rigorous designs. Researchers can help strengthen the field’s understanding of what works in evaluation TA by, for example, conducting experimental and quasi-experimental studies of evaluation TA strategies, topics, models, and model components. This report underscores the importance of more research in this area and can serve as a resource for planning future studies. For example, the conceptual framework developed for this landscape analysis can serve as an organizing framework for studies of evaluation TA.
- **Build on what is known.** The literature review describes a growing body of work that researchers can turn to for examples of how to design a study of evaluation TA effectiveness or of measures of key outcomes such as organizational evaluation capacity. Building on the research that does exist—including using outcome measures used in prior research to enable comparison across studies—will support a more robust evidence base on what works in evaluation TA.
- **Align evaluation TA outcomes with evaluation TA participants’ goals.** Our landscape analysis found that customizing the strategies and topics of evaluation TA to participants’ program and professional learning goals is a promising practice. Researchers who aim to test the effectiveness of evaluation TA should adopt or develop outcome measures that align with what success looks like for the evaluation TA participant.

4. Policymakers and evaluation TA funders

- **Require or incentivize robust evaluation TA efforts to improve program implementation and outcomes for participants.** Policymakers or evaluation TA funders could consider incentives or requirements for programmatic grant recipients to participate in evaluation TA. Report findings suggest this participation may advance intervention implementation fidelity and improvements in outcomes of intervention participants.¹²
- **Provide funding for participation in evaluation TA.** Recognizing that evaluation TA participants commonly struggle with staff time to engage in evaluation TA and resources to sustain improvements in their evaluation capacity given other priorities, policymakers and evaluation TA funders could provide funds to support participation in evaluation TA. Specifically, programmatic grants that require evaluation activities could include funds for grant recipients to support dedicated staff time for participation in evaluation TA and other evaluation activities. For example, for the TPP grant program, the Office of Population Affairs at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has in the past included funding for grant recipients to spend on evaluation along with a requirement in the funding opportunity announcement that grant recipients and local evaluators participate in evaluation TA.
- **Consider changes to reduce burden of participating in evaluation.** Obtaining buy-in from evaluation TA participant organization's leadership and staff time to participate in evaluation TA are common barriers to successful evaluation TA initiatives. Policymakers and evaluation TA funders could consider ways to reduce burden on evaluation TA participant staff and leadership associated

¹² When policymakers and evaluation TA funders consider requirements to participate in evaluation TA, they should consider that adult learning may be most successful when it is not compulsory. For this reason, policymakers and evaluation TA funders might consider incentives for evaluation TA participation, rather than requirements, or tying requirements closely with funding and other support for participation in evaluation TA.

with evaluation and evaluation TA. For example, aligning required reporting for discretionary grants to match outcomes of interest for an evaluation would make it easier for grant recipients to work with evaluation TA providers and evaluate their programs.

- **Encourage research on the effectiveness of evaluation TA.** This landscape analysis reviewed evidence that evaluation TA has promise to improve focal outcomes, but knowledge of what works is still limited. Policymakers and evaluation TA funders could require or incentivize programmatic grant recipients to participate in research on the effectiveness of evaluation TA and provide funds to support participation in evaluation efforts. They could also provide funding for researchers to conduct evaluations that can help identify promising approaches. For example, when authorizing a grant program for which awardees must participate in an evaluation, policymakers might explicitly require allocating a specific percentage of appropriated funds to (1) the provision of evaluation TA to grantees, and (2) an evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of the evaluation TA delivered to program grant recipients. Similarly, an evaluation TA funder might assemble a workgroup of evaluation TA providers and other interested groups to develop innovative designs to rigorously evaluate evaluation TA initiatives or components. Funders of evaluation TA might also consider requiring evaluation of each initiative.

These lessons can inform and strengthen efforts to use evaluation TA to build the evaluation capacity of human services and related programs, and—ultimately—strengthen programs and improve outcomes for people served.

Works Consulted

Note: This list contains a comprehensive accounting of the resources reviewed for this landscape analysis. Listed references with a “+” symbol were cited in this report; those with a “*” were included in the literature review component of this landscape analysis. Although this report reflects findings from all resources consulted, it does not directly cite all resources.

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APPENDIX A

Detailed Description of Methods

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APPENDIX A

Detailed Description of Methods

As we describe in Box I.3 of the main report, this landscape analysis of evaluation technical assistance (TA) drew from three sources. This appendix details the methods used to identify, review, and analyze information from each source.

A. Telephone discussions

We conducted tailored telephone discussions with respondents associated with 14 evaluation TA initiatives. Respondents included staff from 13 agencies and organizations that implemented the 14 initiatives (one agency/organization represented two initiatives), and all had experience either developing, overseeing, or directly providing evaluation TA through the given initiative. We selected these initiatives by first conducting an environmental scan that identified and catalogued 66 evaluation TA programs or initiatives (referred to collectively as “initiatives”). Table A.1 characterizes these 66 initiatives, including the 14 that participated in the telephone discussions.

Table A.1. Evaluation TA initiatives identified in environmental scan and included in telephone discussions

Category	Number of initiatives identified in the scan	Number of initiatives included in telephone discussions
Funding agency	Federal (ACF): 7 ^b Federal (DOL): 2 Federal (other): 35 ^a State: 3 Foundation/nonprofit: 17 Corporate: 1 Public-private: 1	Federal (ACF): 3 Federal (DOL): 2 Federal (other): 6 State: 0 Foundation/nonprofit: 2 Corporate: 0 Public-private: 1
Policy area ^b	Child welfare: 2 Early childhood: 6 Health: 7 International development: 2 K-12 education: 13 TANF/child support: 1 Workforce development: 1 Other: 18 ^b Various: 16 ^b	Child welfare: 1 Early childhood: 0 Health: 0 International development: 1 K-12 education: 2 TANF/child support: 0 Workforce development: 2 Other: 2 ^b Various: 6 ⁿ
Geographic scale	Local: 2 State: 6 Regional: 4 National: 52 International: 2	Local: 0 State: 0 Regional: 1 National: 12 International: 1

Category	Number of initiatives identified in the scan	Number of initiatives included in telephone discussions
Level of implementation	Small scale (e.g., single site): 0 Moderate scale (e.g., fewer than 10 sites): 7 Large scale (e.g., more than 10 sites): 35 Scale not reported: 24	Small scale (e.g., single site): 0 Moderate scale (e.g., fewer than 10 sites): 0 Large scale (e.g., more than 10 sites): 14 Scale not reported: 0
Total number of initiatives	66	14

^a Evaluation TA initiatives identified in this scan were associated with various federal agencies and departments other than ACF and DOL, such as the Office of Evaluation Sciences, the U.S. Department of Education, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

^b “Various” refers to more than one of the areas listed in the box plus other policy areas. “Other” covers wide-ranging policy areas not listed in the box; examples include food insecurity, fiscal responsibility and cross-sector coordination (for local governments), domestic violence prevention, nutrition, and public library services.

ACF = Administration for Children and Families; DOL = U.S. Department of Labor; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

We identified the 66 initiatives by using a list of keywords and the Google search engine to search the Internet. In addition to searching broadly, we searched federal agency websites, including agencies within the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Labor; the U.S. Agency for International Development; and the National Science Foundation. We then reviewed each initiative’s website and any other online resources that summarized the initiative (such as reports on the initiative) and listed basic information on each in a spreadsheet. From the initial list of 66 initiatives and with input from the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), the study team ultimately selected 14 initiatives (associated with 13 organizations) to recruit for telephone discussions.¹³ Initiatives reflected a mix of policy areas, funders, and geographic scales; we also included initiatives that

appeared to provide relatively intensive evaluation TA support, as characterized by duration of the initiative and frequency of contact between evaluation TA providers and participants. We did not explicitly select evaluation TA initiatives based on whether they aimed to increase evaluation capacity of evaluation TA participants. However, all the selected initiatives did have this aim.

Mathematica then identified respondents for each initiative and emailed them an invitation to participate in telephone discussions. The study team developed and piloted a semi-structured interview protocol for the telephone discussions.¹⁴ We scheduled and conducted discussions with respondents from all selected initiatives. One to three respondents associated with each initiative participated in each discussion. All

Box A.1. Environmental scan search terms

We used the following terms to search for and find the 66 evaluation TA initiatives we included in the environmental scan:

- Evaluation capacity building (ECB)
- Evidence-based policy/implementation
- Implementation science
- Evaluation utilization
- Evaluation consumer
- Evaluation stakeholder
- Evaluative thinking (ET)
- Evaluation theory of change (TOC)
- ET/ECB/TOC
- Developmental evaluation
- Evaluation support/program

¹³ One organization was associated with two of the evaluation TA initiatives.

¹⁴ In consultation with OPRE, the study team determined that Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Paperwork Reduction Act clearance was not required for this information collection effort because the study team did not ask more than nine non-federal staff the same question, in compliance with OMB standards.

had experience either developing, overseeing, or directly providing evaluation TA through the given initiative. We interviewed 21 total respondents across the 14 initiatives.

Two Mathematica study team members conducted each telephone discussion, with one leading the discussion and the other taking notes. Each discussion was also audio-recorded and transcribed. To analyze interview notes, we developed a standardized template to summarize information on each initiative. Using that template, interview recordings, and notes, a study team member completed a summary of each initiative. The team then sent each summary to the appropriate respondents for that initiative to verify accuracy and to add new information if the study team had outstanding questions. Respondents from 12 of the 14 initiatives completed this request. Mathematica then updated the tables with the new information or corrections. The final tables summarizing each initiative are in Appendix B. After completing the summary tables, we analyzed information across the standardized fields in the summaries to identify themes, commonalities, and differences among the initiatives.

B. Systematic literature search, scoring, and review

We took several steps to search for prior landscape analyses (including meta-syntheses or meta-analyses) and other publications (called “resources”) of evaluation TA to review and analyze.

1. Literature search

A Mathematica librarian developed and followed a search protocol employing methods used for large systematic reviews, including the Employment Strategies Evidence Review and the [Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse](#). To identify peer-reviewed research, we used a list of search terms and parameters, including dates of publications, geographic limits, and databases (see Box A.1). This search resulted in 121 resources.

To identify gray (not peer-reviewed) literature, we (1) created a Google custom search engine of relevant organizations’ websites (see Box A.2), and (2) conducted a search using Think Tank Search, a custom Google search engine developed by Harvard University.¹⁵ We conducted both searches using a limited set of the keywords used in the peer-reviewed search. These searches identified 34 resources.

¹⁵ Think Tank Search is a custom Google search of more than 690 think tank websites. For this search, “think tanks” were defined as institutions affiliated with universities, governments, advocacy groups, foundations, nongovernmental organizations, and businesses that generate public policy research, analysis, and activity. Inclusion is based on the relevance of the subject area to Harvard Kennedy School of Government coursework and scholarship, the availability of the think tank’s research in full text on its website, and the think tank’s reputation and influence on policymaking. The list represents a mix of partisan and nonpartisan think tanks. (Source: https://guides.library.harvard.edu/hks/think_tank_search.)

Box A.2. Websites included in gray literature custom search

- Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab
- Abt Associates
- Administration for Children and Families
- American Enterprise Institute
- American Institutes for Research
- Association for Public Policy and Management
- Booz Allen
- Brookings Institution
- Cato Institute
- Center for Economic Policy and Research
- Center for Law and Social Policy
- Center for Poverty, Work, and Opportunity
- Center for Public Policy and Administration
- Center for Science and Engineering Partnerships
- Center for Study of Urban Poverty
- Congressional Research Service
- Heritage Foundation
- IMPAQ
- Institute for Policy Studies
- Institute for Research on Poverty
- Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University
- IZA Institute of Labor Economics
- Joblessness and Urban Poverty Research Program
- Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
- Joint Center for Poverty Research
- Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center
- Mathematica
- Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation
- Multidisciplinary Program in Inequality and Social Policy
- National Bureau of Economic Research
- National Center for Children in Poverty
- National Center for Health Research
- National Center for Policy Analysis
- National Poverty Center
- National Opinion Research Center
- Pacific Research Institutes
- Public Policy Associates
- RAND Corporation
- Ray Marshall Center
- Resources for the Future
- RTI International
- Social Policy Research Associates
- SRI International
- The Center on Poverty and Inequality at Georgetown University
- The Center on Poverty and Inequality at Stanford University
- University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research
- Urban Institute
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
- U.S. Department of Labor
- U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration Research Database
- U.S. Government Accountability Office

Protocol for peer-reviewed literature search

Databases: Academic Search Premier, Business Source Complete, Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, E-Journals, EconLit, Education Research Complete, Education Resources Information Center, SocIndex, PsycINFO, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Scopus

Parameters (also used for gray literature search): Published in 1999–2020, in English; excluded commentaries, editorials, letters, and newspaper or periodical articles

Search terms: Technical assistance evaluation, technical assistance lessons, effective technical assistance, technical assistance best practices, technical assistance efforts, technical assistance approaches, program support, program improvement, capacity building, evaluation capacity building, evidence based policy/implementation, implementation science, evaluation utilization, evaluation consumer, evaluation stakeholder, evaluative thinking, evaluation theory of change, ET/ECB/TOC, community development, development programs, developmental evaluation, evaluation support/program, learning agenda, knowledge broker, social service, human service, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), child welfare, teen pregnancy prevention, early childhood, education

To identify the prior landscape analyses on related topics, we also conducted Google Scholar searches using a subset of the keywords and snowballed citations. We identified nine prior landscape analyses. Early review of these prior analyses informed later stages of the data collection and analysis. For

example, the prior landscape analyses primarily focused on evaluation capacity building initiatives, which further underlined the need for this landscape analysis focused on evaluation TA, more specifically. The study team summarized the contents of each prior landscape analysis in a memo and used this summary in consultation with OPRE to ultimately prioritize three prior landscape analyses for full review.

2. Literature scoring

After completing the literature search, study team members then screened all resulting resources to include only those that were published within the last 10 years on evaluation TA pilots, demonstrations, and programs implemented with federal, state, or philanthropic funding within the last 20 years (that is, defunded programs were not necessarily excluded). We also screened out resources that appeared to be irrelevant to our research questions. We ultimately narrowed the pool to 53 resources.

We then scored the 53 resources to identify the ones most relevant to our research questions for the landscape analysis. We worked with OPRE to develop a spreadsheet scoring tool to guide selection of a subset of resources for inclusion in the analysis and full review (see Box A.3 for the fields included in the scoring tool). Study team members scored each abstract or executive summary of the 53 identified resources. A senior study team member provided quality assurance on all scoring results, checking and validating all scoring results. The scoring tool resulted in a numerical score for each resource, thus ranking resources for inclusion in the analysis. The study team, with input from OPRE and the experts consulted for this landscape analysis, and guided by the results of the scoring tool, selected 37 resources for a full literature review based on the score rankings and the priorities for this landscape analysis. Eleven of these resources were not scored but included in the review at the discretion of OPRE and the study team. These resources were primarily those recommended by participants in the expert meetings. Fifteen of the resources provided details on a particular evaluation TA initiative or initiatives and were included in the analysis that informed Section III of the main report. Eighteen of the resources focused on effectiveness or promise of evaluation TA initiatives and were included in the analysis that informed Section IV of the main report. Table A.2 characterizes the initiatives in the resources reviewed for Section III and IV of the main report.

Box A.3. Dimensions included in scoring tool

The points associated with each dimension are indicated in parentheses.

- Whether the priority policy area or population that the program receiving evaluation TA is focused on aligned with ACF funding priorities (1)
 - Whether an evaluation of the initiative was planned (1), underway (2), or complete (3)
 - Type of evidence available (impact/effectiveness (3), implementation/process (2), case study (1), and/or fidelity (1))
 - Whether the initiative's approach was informed by empirical research (2) or relevant theory or theories or a conceptual framework (1)
 - Whether the resource specified the following: TA activities (2), length (1), dosage (1), format (1), audience (1), performance metrics (2), implementation support materials (3), successes (1), challenges or lessons learned (3), cultural competence or equity focus (2), and differentiation of initiative by audience, agency, community, and/or population served (3)
-

Table A.2. Characteristics of evaluation TA initiatives described in reviewed resources for Section III and IV of main report^a

Characteristic	Types	Number of resources of those reviewed for Section III	Number of resources of those reviewed for Section IV
Sector	Human services ^b	2	4
	Other (not human services)	11	11
	Both (human services and other)	2	3
Policy area	Early childhood	1	1
	K–12 education	2	2
	International development	1	2
	Intimate partner/domestic violence	0	1
	Health	7	7
	Teen pregnancy prevention	1	2
	Various	2	2
	Other	1	0
Funding agency ^c	Federal	9	10
	State	1	1
	Foundation/nonprofit	1	1
	Other/unknown	4	5
Type of evidence	Case study	1	1
	Implementation	2	2
	Descriptive	9	9
	Impact ^d	2	3
	Mixed methods	1	2
	Research protocol (no findings)	0	1
Type of evaluation TA participant agency	State agencies	1	1
	Local organizations (including community-based organizations)	9	11
	Multiple types of agencies	4	1
	Other (e.g., international nongovernmental organizations)	1	4
Geographic scale	Local	2	2
	State	2	3
	National	9	9
	International	2	2
	Unknown (e.g., research protocol)	0	1
Total		15	18

Sources: Reviewed resources that provided details on a particular evaluation TA initiative or initiatives (Section III); reviewed resources on effectiveness or promise of evaluation TA initiatives (Section IV).

^a This table does not include the prior landscape analysis resources or the 9 resources recommended by the experts consulted for this landscape analysis, because these resources were either theoretical or summarized multiple types of initiatives.

^b Given the interests of ACF and the focus of Project SPARK, this report focuses on human services and related programs as TANF programs; workforce programs that might be supported by the U.S. Department of Labor or other sources; and other programs, including child welfare, early childhood, and child support programs that might be supported or administered by ACF. Given the

interests of Project SPARK, this landscape analysis did not consider programs in the areas of health, international development, or K-12 education as human services or related programs.

^c None of the resources represented in the table focused on the priority policy areas of TANF, child support, or workforce development.

^d Two of the resources reviewed that used experimental or quasi-experimental methods to assess impact also used another design such as an implementation or process study and, thus, could also be classified as “mixed methods.”

ACF = Administration for Children and Families; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

3. Literature review

To review the selected resources in full, we developed a spreadsheet tool that enabled us to extract information from the selected resources (see Box A.4 for the fields included in this tool). Mathematica study team members read each resource and summarized it using the literature review tool. A team of three study members completed these reviews, with resources divided between the three reviewers. One reviewer read each resource and extracted information; however, other team members spot checked extracted information. After summarizing the resources, we used the tool to identify key findings, themes, commonalities, and differences across the resources.

Box A.4. Fields included in literature review tool

We extracted the following information from each of the resources included in the literature review:

- Sector, policy area, funder, audience
 - Geographic scale, level of implementation (small, moderate, or large scale)
 - Whether evidence of effectiveness or promise of evaluation TA discussed, type of evidence, summary of research methods, findings from research
 - Name of evaluation TA initiative, name of funder, name of provider, sites
 - Guiding principles of initiative
 - Description of needs assessment, delivery methods, topics covered
 - Description of audience and differentiation by audience types
 - Issues/challenges, solutions, lessons learned
-

C. Series of expert meetings

Based on recommendations from internal Mathematica experts on evaluation TA, authors of the included literature resources, and Internet searches, Mathematica developed and proposed a list of 22 recommended experts to participate in expert meetings for OPRE’s consideration. OPRE and Mathematica discussed these recommendations and ultimately identified 11 experts, representing a range of sectors and roles, to invite to participate in a series of expert meetings. Ten of these experts agreed to participate. Box A.5 lists the 10 experts and their affiliations. We convened this group to inform our understanding of the landscape of evaluation TA initiatives in human services and related programs and to help us develop and refine a definition and conceptual framework of evaluation TA (described in Section III of the main report). The group included representatives of federal agencies, such as staff overseeing federally funded evaluation TA initiatives; developers and providers of evaluation TA; researchers; and state and local practitioners who provide or participate in evaluation TA.

With OPRE’s feedback and input, Mathematica developed detailed agendas and activities for each of the three meetings, which were held on January 14, March 26, and April 22, 2021. OPRE and Mathematica study team members also participated in these meetings. The meetings included a series of human-centered design activities conducted in MURAL, a web-based collaboration platform, to facilitate

discussion about the landscape of evaluation TA and to co-create a definition and conceptual framework of evaluation TA. To further refine the definition and conceptual framework of evaluation TA, we synthesized notes and summaries from the three expert meetings. We also reviewed additional literature (9 resources, discussed above) recommended by the experts pertinent to developing a definition and framework.

Box A.5. Evaluation TA expert

Thomas Archibald

Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and
Community Education Virginia Tech

Beth Boulay

Social and Economic Policy Division, Abt Associates

Clemencia Cosentino

National Science Foundation

Catherine Z. Dizon

Tobacco Control Evaluation Center, University of
California-Davis

Leslie Goodyear

Education Development Center

Mary Alice Heuschel

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Mary Hyde

AmeriCorps

Amy Kershaw

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

Amy R. Mack

Youth Services Division

District of Columbia Department of Human Services

Julie R. Morales

James Bell Associates

After making these refinements and incorporating feedback from OPRE, we sought further written feedback from four of the experts on the draft definition and conceptual framework. We incorporated that feedback to develop the final definition and conceptual framework we present in Section II of the main report.

APPENDIX B
Profiles of Evaluation TA Initiatives Included
in Telephone Discussions

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APPENDIX B

Profiles of Evaluation TA Initiatives Included in Telephone Discussions

This appendix provides details about each evaluation TA initiative included in telephone discussions with the study team.

Table B.1. Building Evaluation Capacity Initiative and the Readiness, Implementation, Sustainability for Effectiveness Partnership

Evaluation TA initiative	Building Evaluation Capacity Initiative (BECI) and the Readiness, Implementation, Sustainability for Effectiveness (RISE) Partnership
Funding agency	BECI: the Scattergood Foundation, the Barra Foundation, the Philadelphia Foundation, United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey RISE Partnership: the Scattergood Foundation, PropelNext of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, the Barra Foundation, the Philadelphia Foundation, the Campbell Soup Foundation, the Horner Foundation, the Nelson Foundation
Sector ^a	Human services and sectors other than human services
Policy area	Various
Developer	BECI: Jacob Tebes, Cindy Crusto; Amy Griffin, Joy Kaufman, and Samantha Matlin, Yale School of Medicine RISE Partnership: the Scattergood Foundation, PropelNext of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, and the Consultation Center at Yale of the Yale School of Medicine
Implementing organizations	BECI/RISE Partnership: the Consultation Center at Yale, Yale School of Medicine, and the Scattergood Foundation.
When and where implemented	2009–present; BECI and RISE have been implemented with more than 150 organizations in Greater Philadelphia and southern New Jersey.
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Help participating organizations build evaluation capacity to enhance program and organizational effectiveness through program evaluation, quality improvement, and data-driven decision making
Overview of initiative	Interested organizations must complete an application to assess organizational needs and readiness to take advantage of the BECI/RISE learning experience. Selected organizations participate in a two-year program that includes evaluation training and consultation. During the first year, organizations work with a consultant to identify how to use organizational strengths to build evaluation capacity for a single program. In the second year, organizations work to sustain their evaluation capacity for that single program and extend it to other programs, to build an organizational culture of evaluation. Organizations that complete the two-year program become part of an alumni learning community to sustain evaluation capacity and organizational effectiveness. Building on the original BECI program, the RISE Partnership extended the impact and goals of the BECI by (1) adding three readiness cohorts of organizations not yet able to take advantage of the two-year program; (2) incorporating opportunities for organizations in the two-year program to obtain technical support in data management and strengthening feedback loops with service recipients; (3) expanding ongoing training and peer-to-peer consultation through the alumni learning community; (4) establishing a co-investor community of funders that supports evaluation capacity building in the region; and (5) implementing a comprehensive mixed-methods evaluation of the overall BECI/RISE Partnership initiative.

Principles of initiative	This initiative draws on principles of community psychology and program evaluation capacity building. These principles are intended to be collaborative, comprehensive, culturally situated, data-driven, dynamic and adaptive, equitable, interdisciplinary, strengths-based, systems-oriented, and transparent.
Strategies of initiative	Most TA providers are faculty of the Yale School of Medicine or hold leadership or professional positions at the Scattergood Foundation. The BECI program included six half-day learning sessions across two years, supplemented with three on-site consultations per year and monthly virtual consultations or email support. The RISE Partnership program includes nine half-day learning sessions across two years (Implementation cohort), supplemented by three on-site consultations per year with monthly virtual or email support. RISE also includes four half-day Readiness learning sessions over six months for three cohorts of organizations not yet ready to take advantage of the two-year Implementation program. These Readiness cohorts also participate in two virtual consultations tailored to their needs. Both BECI and RISE conduct annual periodic learning sessions to support alumni organizations (Sustainability) that have completed either the Readiness or Implementation learning and consultation sessions. RISE also organizes peer-to-peer networking and learning opportunities for alumni organizations in the BECI/RISE learning community and focused consultations that provide ongoing technical support.
Evaluation TA topics and content	BECI/RISE gears learning toward building evaluation capacity, including developing a program logic model/theory of change; evaluation planning and design for data collection and data analysis; communicating findings to stakeholders using modalities including data visualization; and sustaining evaluation capacity through ongoing training and supports as well as peer learning.
Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative	Challenges have included staff turnover in participating organizations that make it difficult to sustain evaluation capacity; limited organizational resources dedicated to evaluation and quality improvement; and an underdeveloped organizational culture of evaluation to champion evaluation capacity and sustain gains.
Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences	The initiative is adaptable and can be tailored to each site. BECI/RISE uses a participatory approach to identify and consider the racial, ethnic, urban, rural, and socioeconomic factors that characterize each site, and how equity issues need to be addressed for the program to be most effective.
Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative	Previous internal annual evaluations of BECI found a 50 percent increase in evaluation knowledge, a 35 percent increase in evaluation skills, and a 25 percent increase in positive beliefs about evaluation among program participants. In addition, at the organizational level, based on a seven-year record review of BECI progress reports, 91 percent of organizations report enhanced organizational sustainability of evaluation; 88 percent report improved evaluation thinking, knowledge, and practice; and 55 percent report reallocated or dedicated staff for evaluation after involvement in BECI. An independent evaluator is currently completing a comprehensive mixed-methods evaluation of the RISE Partnership. Interim results for all three program components—Readiness, Implementation, and Sustainability—are promising; full results will be available in summer 2022.

^a Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

Table B.2. Breakthrough Series Collaborative

Evaluation TA initiative	Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC)
Funding agency	Various
Sector ^a	Human services and sectors other than human services
Policy area	Various
Developer	Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI)
Implementing organizations	IHI trains other entities to deliver BSC.
When and where implemented	1995–present; implemented with organizations throughout the United States and internationally
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Help participating health care organizations implement evidence-informed practices to improve care and reduce costs. Since its creation, the BSC initiative has been implemented with practitioner organizations in various settings to improve practices in fields such as early childhood and education.
Overview of initiative	<p>Under the BSC approach, teams of experts work with representatives from practitioner organizations to test and implement evidence-informed practices through “learning sessions” and “action periods.” (Each initiative is also called a BSC.)</p> <p>The BSC process is guided by a trained facilitator and supported by experts in the selected topic area and in supporting change processes. The BSC initiative is based on five key elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic selection and development of a change framework • Selection of experts to guide the teams • Selection of teams that are part of the BSC • Learning sessions that consist of exchanging ideas and deciding what change or improvement to test, and training in quality improvement methods • Action periods using Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles to test and analyze the selected change or improvement^b
Principles of initiative	Five elements of the BSC initiative are theorized to support effective improvement processes: (1) the change framework that includes the principle theoretical drivers of improvement; (2) multilevel inclusive teams from participating organizations; (3) leadership from experts; (4) a shared learning environment for team members and experts; and (5) the PDSA cycles.

<p>Strategies of initiative</p>	<p>BSCs typically last 9 to 18 months and are led by an improvement advisor trained in the BSC methodology. The number of teams that participate in a BSC varies widely (from about 10 to more than 200). Each team has about three to five representatives that attend learning sessions; additional team members focus on testing improvements within their organization. Entities such as professional associations or networks, nonprofit organizations, or public agencies typically organize, convene, host, and support implementation of BSCs.</p> <p>The BSC initiative comprises the following parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic selection. Hosting entities identify an area or issue that needs improvement. • Expert selection. Hosting entities identify as many as 15 experts in the selected topic. One expert chairs the BSC and is responsible for coaching the participating teams. The chair is supported by the other experts, who develop content presented during the BSC. • Team selection. The entity organizing the BSC solicits applications and selects organizations to participate. • Learning sessions. The experts and participating teams exchange ideas about the selected topic. Typically, during the first learning session, the experts present a theoretical framework (“Driver Diagram”) and a set of change ideas that support those drivers of change (“Change Package”) for making an improvement related to the topic at hand. Two or more learning sessions are held between action periods so that team members can share ideas and lessons learned as they implement their changes. • Action periods. During action periods, teams continually test ideas for change and assess data to decide whether they are meeting their objectives for implementing the change. If needed, they tweak to the change being tested. <p>When changes are deemed successful, teams must formalize them by establishing new standard practices within their organizations—for example, by updating a procedures or policy manual with the change.</p>
<p>Evaluation TA topics and content</p>	<p>Typically, BSCs are geared toward achieving a significant shift in performance in a program. BSCs are an implementation mechanism that have been applied to a range of clinical topics.</p>
<p>Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative</p>	<p>Participating organizations typically face challenges related to the quality of data collected during the action periods. IHI or organizing entities have encouraged organizations to invest resources in improving data quality. Another challenge has been getting managers at participating organizations to buy into the change being tested.</p>
<p>Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences</p>	<p>The initiative is adaptable and tailored for each site in terms of the number of teams, type of experts, topics being addressed, and changes being tested. More recently, BSCs have been used to develop and spread change ideas.</p>
<p>Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative</p>	<p>All teams are required to track performance measures, and the hosting entity reviews monthly reports from each team to assess their progress and the overall progress of the BSC. These reports have provided evidence that the BSC initiative has contributed to improved health care outcomes, according to IHI.^c</p>

^a Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

^b The PDSA cycle is a method used to test a change by planning it, trying it, observing the results, and acting on what is learned.

^c <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/documents/Breakthrough%20Series%20WhitePaper%202003.pdf>.

Table B.3. Children Youth and Families at Risk Professional Development and Technical Assistance Center Evaluation Institute

Evaluation TA initiative	Children Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Professional Development and Technical Assistance (PDTA) Center Evaluation Institute
Funding agency	United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)
Sector ^a	Sectors other than human services
Policy area	K–12 education
Developer	USDA
Implementing organizations	University of Minnesota, the Pennsylvania State University, and eight coaches affiliated with land-grant universities and Cooperative Extension
When and where implemented	2013–present; implemented with land-grant universities and grant recipients conducting Sustainable Communities Projects (SCPs) developed to meet locally identified needs, informed by research, and providing services for vulnerable, at-risk, and low-income children, youth, and families to promote positive life outcomes. Grant recipients have included universities from all states.
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Help increase the capacity of SCPs to effectively evaluate their programs by identifying ways to improve the quality of their CYFAR program evaluation process
Overview of initiative	The CYFAR PDTA Center provides webinars, trainings, professional development, and individual evaluation TA to help grant recipients understand the basics and value of conducting an evaluation.
Principles of initiative	The CYFAR PDTA Center uses common measures to support program outcomes; provide aggregate-level data; promote sustainability; demonstrate performance accountability; and report findings to grant recipients, stakeholders, funders, and policymakers. The common measures that grant recipients are required to collect are all informed by research. For example, to develop the common life skills measure approved by USDA NIFA, the PDTA Center staff drew on examples of life skills measures in different contexts, including those used with at-risk populations.
Strategies of initiative	<p>TA providers are evaluation specialists who work to ensure that grant recipients have access to the common measures, and answer grant recipients' evaluation-related questions. Grant recipients also work with coaches from land-grant universities. Coaches are typically current and former CYFAR grant recipients or local evaluators for CYFAR grant recipients.</p> <p>The Evaluation Institute provides grant recipients with several evaluation activities through CYFAR.org, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance and training • Evaluation webinars • Evaluation and data collection supports and resources • Logic model building • Data collection • Reporting outcomes <p>Through the Evaluation Institute, evaluation specialists also provide grant recipients with evaluation consultations, which are one-on-one calls that focus on the requirements for the evaluation (including the data that grant recipients will need to collect). Grant recipients can also receive guidance about their evaluations on an ad hoc basis.</p> <p>In addition, the PDTA Center hosts an annual, mandatory professional development event for all grant recipients on evaluation-specific topics.</p>

<p>Evaluation TA topics and content</p>	<p>Developing a logic model, identifying common outcome measures appropriate for grant recipients' CYFAR program, identifying and training data collectors, establishing an evaluation timeline, developing and administering surveys, and reporting findings</p>
<p>Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative</p>	<p>Some grant recipients have a limited understanding of evaluation and do not see the value of evaluation. To address this, the Evaluation Institute meets grant recipients where they are in clarifying the value of conducting an evaluation and helping to address their evaluation-related needs.</p>
<p>Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences</p>	<p>In addition to meeting grant recipients' where they are at in terms of their understanding of evaluation, the evaluation TA is tailored to align with SCP project timelines, which vary among grant recipients.</p>
<p>Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative</p>	<p>The PDTA Center administers surveys at the end of the annual professional development event and generally receives positive feedback about the topics and presenters included in the agenda. In 2021, most respondents mentioned evaluation content as a highlight of the event, and all evaluation-focused sessions were well rated (3.52–3.78 out of 4.00). Some grant recipients have suggested changes such as providing resources and information on common evaluation topics (e.g., collecting and using qualitative data, reliability and validity). The Evaluation Institute planned to include a Resource Review series on these topics beginning in fall 2021.</p>

^a Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

Table B.4. Getting to Outcomes

Evaluation TA initiative	Getting to Outcomes (GTO)
Funding agency	National Institute of Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Sector ^a	Human services and sectors other than human services
Policy area	Various
Developer	Matthew Chinman, Pam Imm, Abraham Wandersman, Sarah Hunter, Amy Shearer, Patricia Ebener, and Joie Acosta (co-creators)
Implementing organizations	RAND Corporation, the Wandersman Center, and the University of South Carolina
When and where implemented	2004–present; implemented with various organizations throughout the United States across numerous sectors including teen pregnancy, substance abuse, emergency preparedness, homeless veterans, sexual assault in the military, and underage drinking prevention
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Help organizations develop, implement, evaluate, and sustain their programs
Overview of initiative	<p>The GTO model has 10 steps intended to help organizations achieve positive results from any type of prevention program:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus. Identify a problem to focus on. 2. Target. Identify goals, focus population, and desired outcomes. 3. Adopt. Find existing programs and best practices worth adopting. 4. Adapt. Modify the adopted program or practice to align with organizational needs. 5. Resources. Determine the organization’s capacity to implement the adopted program or practice. 6. Plan. Plan to implement the adopted program or practice. 7. Monitor. Track planning and implementation activities. 8. Evaluate. Determine whether outcomes were achieved. 9. Improve. Conduct continuous quality improvement. 10. Sustain. Work to sustain the program, if successful. <p>Steps 1–6 focus on planning activities (needs assessment, goal setting, program selection, appropriate capacity and fit, program implementation); Steps 7 and 8 cover process and outcome evaluation components; and Steps 9 and 10 focus on the using data to improve and sustain programs.</p>
Principles of initiative	GTO is based on empowerment evaluation, which is designed to help stakeholder groups monitor and evaluate their own performance. Consistent with social cognitive theories of behavioral change, exposure to GTO (e.g., training, TA) strengthens knowledge, attitudes, and skills performing GTO-related activities, such as planning and evaluation.

<p>Strategies of initiative</p>	<p>The evaluation TA provider offers virtual resources and in-person training on GTO. During in-person training, the evaluation TA provider covers topics such as writing a program goal or a desired outcome statement, using data, and sustaining programs. In addition to the in-person training, self-paced online tutorials, train-the-trainer, and in-person consultations are available to participating organizations. Participating organizations can use resources such as manuals with worksheets to guide them through the key steps of the approach.</p> <p>After completing the in-person training, organizations begin implementation and can access materials on RAND’s website for free. During implementation, evaluation TA providers from the implementing organization meet regularly with programs virtually to understand their progress and in person to observe implementation and give feedback. The implementing organization also provides organizations with analytic tools they can use to enter data and generate reports to inform continuous program improvement. Overall, GTO initiatives vary between 5 and 15 months.</p>
<p>Evaluation TA topics and content</p>	<p>GTO covers topics including hallmarks of effective prevention programs, evaluation standards, measurement practices, and evaluation design.</p>
<p>Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative</p>	<p>Initially, GTO offered only training manuals, but developers soon realized organizations needed more support and began offering live (both virtual and in-person) training and TA. In addition, lack of buy-in from organizational leaders can be a challenge. GTO tries to engage leaders in TA as much as possible.</p>
<p>Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences</p>	<p>Different GTO manuals address specific audiences, such as programs addressing community emergency preparedness, teen pregnancy prevention (TPP), home visiting, homeless veterans, and underage drinking prevention, as well as U.S. Air Force Community Action Teams. GTO also offers a manual on continuous quality improvement and assets for youth development. Recently, new, much shorter GTO manuals have been created for audiences with little extra time—for example, DoD service members and public school teachers.</p> <p>The length of a GTO initiative varies based on program needs, capacity, and preferences for initiative.</p>
<p>Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative</p>	<p>Several studies have demonstrated GTO’s effectiveness. For example, in a 2016 randomized controlled trial, sites that received GTO support to implement a TPP program demonstrated better <i>performance</i> than sites that did not receive GTO in areas such as setting goals, program planning and implementation, conducting evaluation, using data for program improvement, and planning for sustainability. GTO sites also had better observer-rated <i>fidelity</i> on their prevention program than non-GTO sites. Participating youth at GTO sites had improved knowledge of condoms and attitude <i>outcomes</i> than youth at non-GTO sites.^b A subsequent study with the same design but a different prevention program yielded the same performance and fidelity results.^c</p>

^a Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

^b <https://implementationscience.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13012-016-0446-y>.

^c Chinman, M., P. Ebener, P.S. Malone, J. Cannon, E. D’Amico, and J. Acosta. “Testing Implementation Support for Evidence-Based Programs in Community Settings: A Replication Cluster-Randomized Trial of Getting To Outcomes.” *Implementation Science*, vol. 13, no. 131, 2018.

Table B.5. The Learning Lab

Evaluation TA initiative	The Learning Lab—Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) framework
Funding agency	U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
Sector ^a	Sectors other than human services
Policy area	International development
Developer	USAID
Implementing organizations	Dexis Consulting Group
When and where implemented	Present; implemented with USAID staff and implementing partners, and other practitioners interested in maximizing international development outcomes
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Help USAID project implementers apply practical learning approaches for international development by sharing information, tips, tools, and resources and engaging in conversations on how to achieve better outcomes by collaborating, learning, and adapting.
Overview of initiative	<p>USAID’s Learning Lab is an interactive community in which members access and contribute to a growing collection of tools and resources on using the CLA framework throughout the USAID Program Cycle (see next row for more information). The framework includes the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating. Identifying key internal and external stakeholders and deciding how best to work with them to add value, fill gaps, and avoid duplication while working toward a shared goal. • Learning. Generating, capturing, sharing, and analyzing information and knowledge from a range of sources to inform decisions and adapt programs to be more effective. • Adapting. Reflecting on learning, and making decisions and iterative adjustments in response to new information and changes in context. • Culture. Incorporating the norms that influence how individuals work and what they expect of themselves and their colleagues. • Processes. Engaging management systems and practices in knowledge management, institutional memory, and decision making that can enable or hinder the ability to operationalize CLA. • Resources. Identifying and accessing inputs that support CLA, including staff time and skills, diplomatic mission funds, and integrating CLA approaches into implementing mechanisms.
Principles of initiative	Learning Lab is connected to the USAID Program Cycle, which is USAID’s operational model for planning, implementing, assessing, and adapting international development programming in a given region or country.
Strategies of initiative	In addition to an online community and resources, Learning Lab offers an evaluation toolkit that covers the basics of monitoring and evaluation in international development. It also offers yearly trainings, four-day in-person courses, and virtual peer-to-peer support to its members. Learning Lab also shares resources and events with members over an email listserv, and hosts hour-long brown bags and knowledge-sharing sessions for members.
Evaluation TA topics and content	Internal and external collaboration; theories of change; scenario planning; pausing and reflecting; adaptive management; relationships and networks; continuous learning and improvement; knowledge management; institutional memory; and decision making
Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative	Respondents said that the biggest challenge is time, as competing demands might make it hard for USAID staff to find the time to work with implementing partners on evaluation questions or approaches.

<p>Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences</p>	<p>Learning Lab is available in languages other than English. Each implementing partner requires different supports and resources based on the country in which the project is located and the program being evaluated.</p>
<p>Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative</p>	<p>Learning Lab administers a survey at the end of each course to assess participant satisfaction. For each course, Learning Lab also assesses pre- and post-course knowledge on the key themes covered and at three and six months after the course.</p>

^a Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

Table B.6. Learn, Innovate, Improve

Evaluation TA initiative	Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI ²)
Funding agency	Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) ^a
Sector ^b	Human services
Policy area	Various
Developer	Mathematica in partnership with the Harvard Center on the Developing Child
Implementing organizations	Mathematica
When and where implemented	2015–present; implemented with more than 100 Temporary Assistance of Needy Families, workforce development, and other human and social service agencies
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Help practitioners of public agencies/programs use evidence to improve program quality, efficiency, implementation, and effectiveness
Overview of initiative	<p>LI² occurs in three phases:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn. Practitioners clarify their reasons for seeking change and the problems they are trying to solve. Typically, practitioners and research partners (collectively, program stakeholders) assess the program environment by identifying problems, opportunities for improvement, and issues that could impede innovation. 2. Innovate. Program stakeholders identify and prioritize potential solutions to the problems defined during the learn phase, drawing on the best available evidence. They design a “road map for change” that specifies the program’s strategies, the desired outputs and outcomes, and hypothesized causal links between the program components and the changes. 3. Improve. Program stakeholders develop and launch a series of “road tests” (small-scale pilots) to strengthen the implementation of the program changes before scaling. Typically, a few direct service staff and/or clients try the program innovation and provide feedback over a short period of time. Program stakeholders collect and analyze detailed information from program administrators, staff, and clients about their experiences with the innovation. At the end of each cycle, research partners analyze the data and summarize the results for program stakeholders, highlighting opportunities to refine the innovation and further learning.
Principles of initiative	Co-creation, evidence using and building, iteration, impact. LI ² is informed by the Translational Science Model (Harvard Center), human-centered design, and implementation science.
Strategies of initiative	Research partner teams typically train program staff to use LI ² , through virtual or in-person workshops. LI ² involves the use of traditional research methods (quantitative and qualitative), human-centered design methods, and implementation science theories; frameworks; and process models.
Evaluation TA topics and content	LI ² typically gears learning toward program implementation and process improvement. Throughout the three phases, participants also learn about the evaluation life cycle and evaluation methods. For example, in the Learn phase, an evaluation TA participant might learn how to conduct a focus group and analyze results. In the Innovate phase, a evaluation TA participant might learn how to look to past research to identify a promising intervention to address their focal problem. In the Improve phase, a participant might learn how to use surveys or administrative records to assess changes in key outcomes before and after implementing a program change.
Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative	Challenges have included practitioners lacking the resources to sustain their innovations over the long term, and integrating the LI ² mindset and initiative into organizational cultures and processes amid competing priorities.

<p>Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences</p>	<p>The initiative is adaptable and can be tailored for each user.</p>
<p>Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative</p>	<p>Qualitative and descriptive feedback demonstrates evidence that participating practitioners are engaged. Sources of feedback include (1) surveys after workshops/trainings; (2) informal phone calls with sites about what is and is not working; and (3) questions the implementing organization asks about how the process is working for staff as part of the road test (Improve phase). Past participants have also used the model on their own.</p>

^a OPRE funded the initial development of this initiative and the practice briefs.

^b Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

Table B.7. Office of Evaluation Sciences

Evaluation TA initiative	Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES)
Funding agency	General Services Administration (GSA)
Sector ^a	Human services and sectors other than human services
Policy area	Various
Developer	OES based at the GSA
Implementing organizations	OES
When and where implemented	2015–present; implemented with federal agencies
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Help government agencies build their capacity to assess their impact using administrative data
Overview of initiative	<p>OES is a team of interdisciplinary experts that works across the federal government to help agencies build and use evidence. OES team members collaborate with agency staff to apply insights from behavioral science, draw on research and evaluation to make concrete recommendations for how to improve government, and conduct impact evaluations using administrative data. A central focus of this work is helping programs use research on how people behave and make decisions to make bureaucratic processes more efficient. OES also works with agencies to interpret and apply what they have learned together; to share leading practices and resources; and to build the skills of agency staff to continue this work independently. The initiative is guided by six steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partner with federal agencies at the program level to identify priority outcomes. 2. Translate behavioral insights into recommendations for program changes informed by behavioral science or evaluations of the program. 3. Embed evaluations by helping agencies design rigorous evaluations using existing administrative data. 4. Analyze data to produce results. 5. Ensure the work meets evaluation best practice. 6. Measure impact and generate evidence to continuously improve.
Principles of initiative	<p>OES follows the following tenets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigor. Findings should be credible. • Relevance. Evaluation TA initiatives should consider the policy or program priorities, the policy or program’s potential impact on a priority outcome, and the use of administrative data. • Transparency. The public at large should be able to learn from OES’s work. • Independence. OES retains control of decisions relating to project selection and the dissemination of findings. • Ethical practice. OES evaluations protect the dignity, rights, safety, and privacy of participants.

<p>Strategies of initiative</p>	<p>OES engages with about five to eight federal agencies each year. A typical initiative is about 9 to 12 months. Agencies that need less guidance on their evaluation plan might engage for only 3 or 4 months. The initial phase of most evaluation TA initiatives comprises discussions on agency priorities so OES can learn more about the challenges they face and identify where OES can be helpful. During these initial discussions, OES might develop a behavioral map to identify how people interact with the process being addressed. To help develop the evaluation design, OES provides participating agencies with a memo that outlines different design options. The agencies then select a design and develop research questions and an evaluation approach. OES then provides evaluation TA to help agencies as they conduct evaluations to answer their research questions. OES also provides agencies with a document near the end of the initiative that specifies how OES thinks agencies can conduct their evaluation.</p>
<p>Evaluation TA topics and content</p>	<p>Evaluation planning, analysis planning, using administrative data for analysis, using behavioral science to inform program improvements, and producing evaluation reports</p>
<p>Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative</p>	<p>OES has found that for its initiative to work, it must be willing to learn about the challenges the agency faces. OES found that not recognizing a challenge from past experience and recommending solutions without learning more about how a problem is unique to an agency often leads to problems implementing that solution within the agency. OES has also learned that it is important to review proposed data sources early to make sure they are appropriate for answering an agency's research questions. Another lesson learned is that agencies need a champion for each project who will hold leaders accountable. In addition, not all program staff have expertise in research methods. Therefore, OES has developed its materials in plain language so they can convey technical research and evaluation concepts to agency staff.</p>
<p>Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences</p>	<p>The initiative follows the same steps for each site, but the length of initiative and frequency of contact with an agency is adapted based on agency needs.</p>
<p>Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative</p>	<p>No evidence has been gathered yet on the effectiveness or promise of the approach.</p>

^a Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

Table B.8. Pew Fund Evaluation Capacity Building Initiative

Evaluation TA initiative	The Pew Fund Evaluation Capacity Building Initiative (ECBI)
Funding agency	The Pew Charitable Trusts
Sector ^a	Human services and sectors other than human services
Policy area	Various
Developer	The Pew Fund for Health and Human Services
Implementing organizations	The Pew Fund for Health and Human Services
When and where implemented	2018–present; implemented with Pew Fund grant recipients across five counties in the Philadelphia region. Pew Fund grant recipients are nonprofits that receive funding to serve individuals and families facing complex challenges live healthy and stable lives; low-income populations; and Philadelphia-area residents facing challenges to their health and well-being—including those related to poverty, mental illness, and homelessness.
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Help Pew Fund grant recipients use data to assess, inform, and strengthen services
Overview of initiative	<p>ECBI is an 18-month cohort-based program comprising group learning sessions and individualized coaching for participating organizations. Each cohort includes 20–30 organizations. The program helps Pew Fund-supported organizations meet the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the relationship between a program’s activities and its desired results, through theory of change or logic model development. • Gather and analyze meaningful data, identify appropriate evaluation tools, and use more rigorous evaluation methods. • Build an organizational culture that prioritizes evaluation and learning. • Identify and implement data management systems that facilitate learning and track progress over time. • Build strategies for developing in-house evaluation skills, funding evaluation activities, and aligning funder requirements. • Ensure race equity is a core element of evaluation and learning practices.
Principles of initiative	The Pew Fund conducted a landscape analysis on capacity building and identified three “Cs” of capacity building—continuous, contextual, and collective—that inform the ECBI approach. “Continuous” is operationalized by engaging with grant recipients intensively over 18 months. “Contextual” refers to meeting grant recipients where they are and tailoring the evaluation TA to address their evaluation needs. “Collective” is operationalized through group learning sessions that enable grant recipients to gather and share lessons learned and address common challenges. Another key principle is to “meet organizations where they are.” As such, each organization is placed into one of three tiers, or groups, to focus their efforts. The evaluation TA is then tailored to “beginning,” “intermediate,” or “advanced” stages of evaluation and learning practices.
Strategies of initiative	During the 18-month initiative, participating grant recipients both receive individualized coaching and participate in group evaluation TA activities about once a month. ECBI Learning coaches teach content and help grant recipients develop learning plans for the initiative, conduct pilot data collection activities, and ensure sustainability of lessons learned throughout the program.

<p>Evaluation TA topics and content</p>	<p>The evaluation TA offered through ECBI is tailored for grant recipients in beginning, intermediate, or advanced tiers. For grant recipients in the beginning tier, the evaluation TA focuses on helping them develop a logic model. For grant recipients in the intermediate tier, the evaluation TA focuses on developing a theory of change. Grant recipients in the advanced tier develop a strategic evidence plan that describes a three- to five-year organizational road map for collecting and using data, an evaluation strategy, and data collection and analysis plans. Grant recipients in all tiers receive evaluation TA on building a culture of evaluation and learning, using data to understand and track outcomes, using appropriate equitable data practices, and helping staff develop evaluation and learning skills.</p>
<p>Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative</p>	<p>Pew commissioned an independent evaluation of its initiative in 2018. Informed by initial findings from the developmental evaluation indicating that organizations needed more time to complete the program, Pew lengthened the ECBI from 14 to 18 months. Pew also refined the curriculum to simplify the theory of change activities. In addition, based on evaluation recommendations about the criticality of senior leaders' initiative in the ECBI, the program now includes more opportunities for executive directors to participate. The evaluation is ongoing, and Pew expects to continue to learn and make additional program adaptations as needed.</p>
<p>Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences</p>	<p>Pew and the coaches tailor the evaluation TA to each grant recipient's needs and tier, as described above. In addition, Pew assigns coaches to grant recipients based on each coach's understanding of the Philadelphia region, familiarity with the participating sites, and skills.</p>
<p>Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative</p>	<p>The evaluation findings to date suggest that the program's mix of learning theory and implementing data pilots has resonated with the grant recipients and supported progress in their evaluation and learning practices. Examples include grant recipients reassessing what data is useful in supporting their work and why, how to collect it more efficiently, and how to better use it to inform strategic and program decisions. Challenges include staff turnover, competing organizational demands, and the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure ongoing improvements, organizations would benefit from more funders supporting/integrating capacity building into funding opportunities, and ongoing opportunities for evaluation TA and peer learning.</p>

^a Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

Table B.9. Promising Youth Programs

	Promising Youth Programs
Evaluation TA initiative	Promising Youth Programs
Funding agency	Mathematica, Office of Planning Research and Evaluation (OPRE), and Family and Youth Services Bureau, an office of the Administration for Children and Families
Sector ^a	Human services
Policy area	Teen pregnancy prevention
Developer	Mathematica
Implementing organizations	Mathematica
When and where implemented	2016–2023; implemented with Personal Responsibility Education Innovative Strategies Program (PREIS) and Tribal Personal Responsibility Education Programs (Tribal PREP) grant recipients implementing strategies for preventing pregnancy among youth aged 10 to 19 years old or among pregnant and parenting teens aged 10 to 21
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Support grant recipients to conduct evaluation activities required as a condition of their grant award
Overview of initiative	TA liaisons worked with grant recipients to provide ongoing support and to troubleshoot evaluation issues that arose throughout the required evaluations of their grant-funded pregnancy prevention programs. This included evaluation TA for evaluation planning, data collection, analysis planning, and final report writing.
Principles of initiative	The initiative did not use a specified framework or set of principles for providing evaluation TA. However, the initiative was developed based on OPRE’s and the implementing organization’s experience with similar work.
Strategies of initiative	First, TA liaisons worked with grant recipients to develop an evaluation plan using a template developed for the evaluation TA initiative. Once the plan was in place, TA liaisons held regular calls with grant recipients to get updates on the progress of their evaluations (e.g., recruitment, attrition). The frequency of these evaluation TA calls ranged from monthly to quarterly, depending on the stage the grant recipient was in their evaluation. Grant recipients also completed templates semi-annually related to data collection and sample size. Using a template toward the end of data collection, the evaluation TA liaisons worked with the grant recipients to develop a rigorous data analysis plan to meet potential evidence-review standards (e.g., What Works Clearinghouse). After the analysis plan was complete, the TA liaisons worked with the grant recipient to develop and write their final reports using a predesigned template. Grant recipients received written feedback on all templates. They also received follow-up phone calls to review written feedback with their TA liaison. In addition to this individualized evaluation TA, the evaluation TA team provided webinars for grant recipients to review topics such as completing data-analysis templates.
Evaluation TA topics and content	Developing an evaluation plan and design, setting evaluation goals, tracking sample attrition, assessing baseline equivalence, creating an analysis plan, conducting analysis, and writing an evaluation report

<p>Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative</p>	<p>Budget constraints limited the number of evaluation TA activities Mathematica was able to provide through this initiative. For example, initially there were plans to host “community of learning” sessions, which would have enabled grant recipients to network with other grant recipients and share their experiences regularly. In addition, the analysis plans of some grant recipients did not align with their evaluation plans. The evaluation plans were meant to serve as a standing resource documenting the evaluation activities that grant recipients were implementing. However, for various reasons (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic), grant recipients had to make changes to their evaluations over time, and these changes were not always documented in their evaluation plans. The evaluation TA providers also learned that evaluation TA needs to be tailored to grant recipient needs and context. For example, Tribal PREP grant recipients had different evaluation TA needs, because they were implementing descriptive evaluations, whereas PREIS grant recipients were implementing impact studies. Another lesson was that spending more time at the beginning of their initiative with grant recipients establishing expectations and ensuring that grant recipients fully understood the purpose of the evaluation TA could have enhanced buy-in and initiative in the evaluation TA. Concrete benchmarks for the evaluation TA could have helped ensure each evaluation TA call had a purpose.</p>
<p>Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences</p>	<p>TA liaisons worked with grant recipients individually to provide support and to troubleshoot grant recipient-specific evaluation issues.</p>
<p>Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative</p>	<p>A goal of the evaluation TA was to ensure grant recipients implemented an evaluation that met evidence review standards, but none of the evaluations has completed a formal evidence review.</p>

^a Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

Table B.10. Rapid Cycle Tech Evaluations (“the Coach”)

Evaluation TA initiative	Rapid Cycle Tech Evaluations (RCTEs)—Ed Tech RCE Coach (“the Coach”)
Funding agency	U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology (OET)
Sector ^a	Sectors other than human services
Policy area	K–12
Developer	Mathematica developed the initiative with input from the U.S. Department of Education’s OET, Digital Promise, teachers, and representatives of school districts.
Implementing organizations	Mathematica
When and where implemented	2015–2018; implemented through an OET-supported project with 15 school districts across the United States from 2016 to present; implemented with more 2,000 registered users
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Help school administrators execute low-cost, quick-turnaround evaluations using a web-based, interactive research toolkit
Overview of initiative	<p>The Coach is a do-it-yourself tool that provides tools and guidance to facilitate rapid-cycle evaluations to help school administrators decide whether to adopt or keep specific educational technologies. A typical initiative with the Coach is about three months.</p> <p>The toolkit comprises five steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get started. Administrators answer three questions about their use of educational technology, and the Coach uses a set of questions to determine whether a participant could implement a study design such as a randomized controlled trial or matched comparison group. It then recommends a study design to evaluate that technology. 2. Plan the research. Guided by the Coach, administrators write a research question such as, “Did U-Read increase student academic achievement among 5th graders compared to similar 5th graders with no access to U-Read?” Then administrators use the Coach to plan how to use the evaluation’s results and describe the context in which the technology is used. 3. Prepare the data. Administrators follow a step-by-step guide to identify data sources and create a clean data file. 4. Analyze the data. Once data files are uploaded, administrators answer questions to identify the treatment variable, outcome variable, and characteristics to account for in the analysis. The Coach then automatically analyzes the data and delivers results. 5. Summarize key findings. After completing its analysis, the Coach compiles the results in a document or presentation that can be shared with stakeholders.
Principles of initiative	The Coach is designed to anchor inquiry in concrete decisions the user needs to make and prompts the user to consider what they will do if the results are positive, negative, or unclear. Mathematica tested the toolkit in real-world settings, through pilots with school districts, and refined it throughout testing to meet the needs of districts and developers.
Strategies of initiative	The Coach uses Bayesian modeling to transparently incorporate uncertainty and to enable the user to set different thresholds for decisions with high vs. low stakes. The Coach supports comparison group designs and provides tools for creating a randomized or matched comparison group. The evaluation TA providers created user-friendly infographic materials and facilitated in-person workshops to help school administrators learn how to use the Coach.

<p>Evaluation TA topics and content</p>	<p>To help school administrators conduct their own evaluations, the evaluation TA provider provided support on understanding types of evidence presented by developers or in the news, writing research questions, setting appropriate magnitude and confidence thresholds, choosing appropriate comparison groups, and interpreting results.^b</p>
<p>Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative</p>	<p>School administrators had many demands on their time and were not motivated to participate unless they had a strong incentive to do so. To address this challenge, the evaluation TA provider encourage districts to assign someone with interest in the evaluation results and access to data to participate in the work. The access to data was also identified as a major challenge during the pilot with school districts. Many school and district staff did not have ready access to the data needed to inform improvements. Also, the language in the original Ed Tech RCE Coach narrowly focused on educational technologies. Many potential users thought the tool could be used only to evaluate educational technology. Therefore, the updated version (the e2i Coach) uses language that covers a broader array of educational interventions. The developers also made the platform more customizable, which enables new subject-specific Coaches to be created quickly and at a low cost, so the tool feels relevant for users in different substantive areas.</p>
<p>Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences</p>	<p>The Coach uses language that makes it accessible to users with little evaluation expertise. But content is available for users who need more explanation or users who have evaluation expertise and want more detail on the methods used. During the pilot with school districts, the evaluation TA provider gave individual support on conducting evaluations that varied from talking users through a concept and answering a few questions to walking users through every step of their evaluation.</p>
<p>Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative</p>	<p>Several case studies highlight the usefulness of the Coach to school districts.</p>

^a Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

^b <https://medium.com/@OfficeofEdTech/eight-lessons-learned-from-piloting-the-rapid-cycle-evaluation-coach-1f7f681af96f>.

Table B.11. Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments

Evaluation TA initiative	Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA) Grant Program Evaluation TA
Funding agency	Chief Evaluation Office, United States Department of Labor (CEO-USDOL)
Sector ^a	Human services
Policy area	Workforce development
Developer	CEO-USDOL staff along with independent contractor
Implementing organizations	Chief Evaluation Office, USDOL, jointly with Division of Research and Evaluation, USDOL
When and where implemented	2019–2023; offered to all states over a multiyear period
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Support state RESEA grant recipients using evidence to inform programs and conducting rigorous program evaluations by providing them with evidence-informed information and tools about evaluation concepts. Grant recipients are working with their own independent evaluators to conduct evaluations.
Overview of initiative	The evaluation TA effort is a multi-pronged approach. Providers developed general evaluation TA that included a series of webinars and other evaluation and evidence resources offered periodically to all grant recipients over several years. These resources are available on USDOL's WorkforceGPS website , with links to all of the evaluation TA webinars available in the RESEA Evaluation Resource List . Evaluation TA providers also made a help line available for ad hoc questions from state grant recipients. Providers also offered customized evaluation TA support to a small group of states participating in a learning cohort.
Principles of initiative	The evaluation TA providers aim to understand grant recipients' needs and use a variety of communication and TA strategies to build grant recipients' capacity to understand, use, and conduct evaluations.
Strategies of initiative	The multi-pronged effort included the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An online hub (through WorkforceGPS) and other websites, such as DOL's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research, to support knowledge sharing across grant recipients and with the larger workforce system • Webinars, webcasts, and other interactive virtual events featuring presentations, Q&A, and panels of subject matter experts, followed by open discussion time for state grant recipients to ask questions • An action-oriented toolkit (RESEA Evaluation Toolkit) on key evaluation concepts • Periodic meetings with states to discuss evaluation activities, challenges, and solutions • Other resources, such as FAQs, plain language guides, and resource lists
Evaluation TA topics and content	Preparing for an evaluation; identifying research questions; understanding evaluation designs; identifying data needs; selecting an evaluator; developing research questions; implementing the evaluation, which includes protections for human subjects; and developing a high quality evaluation report

<p>Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative</p>	<p>Common challenges included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant recipients who are often new to evaluation and have varying levels of understanding in how to interpret, use, and design and conduct evaluations • Evaluation timelines and costs • Evaluator selection and independence • Timely completion of evaluation design reports, collection of data, and completion of analyses and reports • Varying challenges related to specific contexts (e.g., small sample sizes, varying local economic cycles, the COVID-19 pandemic) <p>To overcome such challenges, evaluation TA providers sought to develop a strong understanding of grant recipients' needs and timely solutions to meet those needs.</p>
<p>Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences</p>	<p>Evaluation TA activities are differentiated for each grant program and various audiences. For example, generalized evaluation TA for a large group of grant recipients required presenting ideas at a simpler, more basic level, while one-on-one evaluation TA could be tailored to a grant recipient's level of understanding and experience with technical evaluation concepts.</p>
<p>Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative</p>	<p>USDOL uses Google Analytics to track how many resources are downloaded from the WorkforceGPS website. USDOL also regularly seeks grant recipients' feedback on the evaluation TA activities.</p>

^a Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

Table B.12. Teen Pregnancy Prevention

Evaluation TA initiative	Evaluation Training and Technical Assistance in Program Evaluation—Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP)
Funding agency	Office of Population Affairs, the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ^a
Sector ^b	Human services
Policy area	TPP
Developer	Mathematica
Implementing organizations	Mathematica, Twin Peaks Partners, and Concentric Research and Evaluation
When and where implemented	2010–2017; implemented with 67 grant recipients. Grant recipients were located across the United States.
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Help grant recipients design and implement high quality impact evaluations that met the TPP Evidence Review standards by providing them with the tools (such as analysis plan and report templates) to carry out their evaluation plan, and ongoing support via monthly monitoring calls. ^c
Overview of initiative	Each grant recipient had one or two evaluation TA liaisons who worked individually to help them and their local evaluator develop an impact evaluation plan and implement it in a way that retained the internal validity of the approved study design, which was a randomized controlled trial or quasi-experimental design. The team also drew on other methods and data collection experts at Mathematica to provide support to grant recipients and their evaluators.
Principles of initiative	The evaluation TA provider drew from its experience providing evaluation TA on other projects, such as the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) peer review project. For example, the REL peer review used a checklist for reviewing evaluation plans and identified common evaluation challenges, such as confounding factors, that informed the evaluation TA topics covered under the TPP initiative. The final evaluation reports were required to meet the standards of the TPP Evidence Review.
Strategies of initiative	TA liaisons supported grant recipients through individualized and group-based evaluation TA. They reviewed and commented on evaluation plans, provided consulting during monthly monitoring calls, and delivered webinars and conference presentations. The evaluation TA site liaisons also visited sites when significant issues arose, such as an evaluation redesign. The project team also produced 12 methodological briefs to support grant recipient evaluations on topics such as developing a design plan, calculating attrition, assessing baseline equivalence, the effect of clustering in randomized controlled trials, conducting sensitivity analysis, and recruiting study participants and schools. The evaluation TA provider also trained Office of Adolescent Health and ACYF staff on relevant evaluation topics, such as the implications of sample attrition.
Evaluation TA topics and content	Developing an evaluation plan and design, study power, recruiting and retaining study participants and schools, tracking sample attrition, assessing baseline equivalence, conducting analyses, coping with missing data, conducting economic evaluations, conducting core components analyses, and writing an evaluation report

<p>Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative</p>	<p>The heterogeneity in experience of the evaluators made group evaluation TA less useful for some topics. Therefore, individual evaluation TA was used to tailor topics based on grant recipients' and evaluators' needs. This was achieved through monthly calls with each grant recipient and evaluator. Another challenge was that some problems could be identified only if grant recipients and evaluators were willing to participate in the evaluation TA and were forthcoming about the issues they were facing. To get grant recipients and evaluators to share these issues, relationship building was critically important in evaluation TA contracts.</p>
<p>Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences</p>	<p>The evaluation TA provider adapted its assistance based on grant recipients' skills, the populations they were serving, and the challenges they faced. For instance, some grant recipients were experienced with program implementation and survey design but not designing a rigorous randomized controlled trial. Therefore, evaluation TA providers spent time with them at the design, implementation, and analysis stages to ensure decisions upheld the internal validity of the study design. Other grant recipients were experienced with designing a rigorous evaluation but had not previously faced challenges recruiting study participants. Evaluation TA providers helped them develop systems to document the recruitment process; diagnose issues; and brainstorm solutions for issues with referrals, consent, or program take-up.</p>
<p>Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative</p>	<p>The evaluation TA provider shared descriptions of the evaluation TA initiative in a special issue of the American Journal of Public Health, including descriptions of the evaluation TA framework and lessons learned. A related article was published in Evaluation Review. Grant recipients shared with the evaluation TA provider that they found the methodological briefs helpful and kept them for future reference and to train new staff.</p>

^a OAH at the time of development.

^b Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

^c The TPP Evidence Review is a systematic review that identifies programs with evidence of effectiveness in reducing teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and associated sexual risk behaviors.

Table B.13. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Evaluation

Evaluation TA initiative	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Evaluation TA
Funding agency	Employment and Training Administration, United States Department of Labor (ETA-USDOL)
Sector ^a	Human services
Policy area	Workforce development
Developer	Office of Policy Development and Research, Employment and Training Administration, USDOL
Implementing organizations	Division of Research and Evaluation with evaluation TA contractor support, Office of Policy Development and Research, Employment and Training Administration, USDOL
When and where implemented	2018–present; primarily implemented through WorkforceGPS resources and events within two communities of practice: Workforce System Strategies and the Evaluation and Research Hub (EvalHub). Tailored evaluation TA is offered through the evaluation Peer Learning Cohorts. To date, 12 state teams have received assistance.
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Build the evaluation capacity of workforce investment system and professionals by providing information and tools about evaluation concepts through WorkforceGPS and information and tools compiled in the Key Elements for State Workforce Agencies Evaluation Toolkit
Overview of initiative	Focus on broad dissemination of research and evaluation reports profiled in Workforce System Strategies to increase awareness about more than 120 workforce program studies, annually. Use the Key Elements for State Workforce Agencies Evaluation Toolkit, designed to help states build evaluation capacity. States may complete two evaluation assessments and identify their states' evaluation needs. States also participate in cohort learning communities for six months. Participating states receive individualized support with an assigned coach. After the cohort learning community period ends, state team members are invited to share and review evaluation, webinars, capstone projects, and other resources on a website. States are also invited to participate in webinars for other learning communities.
Principles of initiative	States can access the evaluation TA resources to learn about evaluation studies, research reports, and other areas that inform evaluation plans or take a more practical learning approach to evaluation action planning through the Evaluation and Research Hub and the Evaluation Peer Learning Cohort.
Strategies of initiative	<p>Methods include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An online EvalHub (WorkforceGPS) and other websites to support knowledge sharing across grant recipients and with the larger workforce system • Open invitation for state workforce agency-led teams to participate in the Evaluation Peer Learning Cohort • Interactive virtual events featuring subject matter experts, followed by virtual breakout sessions for small groups of grant recipients to share evaluation challenges and solutions • When appropriate, annual in-person training events that include peer-to-peer brainstorming sessions and one-on-one consultations with subject matter experts • Virtual peer sharing opportunities, including office hours with coaches and technical evaluation experts • Webinars, webcasts, and action-oriented toolkits on key evaluation concepts • Evaluation TA email address for ad-hoc inquiries. • Other resources, such as topic-specific briefs, announcements, resource profiles, and plain language guides

<p>Evaluation TA topics and content</p>	<p>Evaluation TA topics generally focus on two topic areas of building evaluation capacity: (1) understanding evaluation readiness and (2) preparing an evaluation design. Elements of evaluation readiness include understanding evaluation culture and awareness; developing funding strategies for evaluations; mapping and supporting data management; strengthening staff skills, capacity, and knowledge; and using evaluation for strategic planning. Elements of evaluation design include developing an evaluation design plan and research questions, identifying a plan for data collection and analysis, understanding evaluation selection criteria, knowing participant rights, and determining the reports to prepare.</p> <p>More information on topics covered by the evaluation TA initiatives are available in the Key Elements for State Workforce Agencies Evaluation Toolkit.</p>
<p>Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative</p>	<p>Common challenges included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different levels of understanding in how to interpret, use, and design and conduct evaluations within an integrated state workforce development system • Limited to no funding to conduct evaluations • Uses of internal vs. external evaluators • Capacity to create learning agendas and form cross-agency partnerships for evaluation planning • Lack of planning tools to build evaluation capacity, develop evaluation action plans, design and implement evaluations, identify research questions, and select evaluators <p>To overcome such challenges, evaluation TA providers review responses from state teams' applications to identify grant recipients' strengths, challenges, and goals; prepare evaluation capacity-building activities for virtual sessions; and provide coaching activities. For example, during the first year of the initiative, the evaluation TA providers refined the toolkit and created the communities of practice to meet the needs of participating states.</p>
<p>Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences</p>	<p>Participating state teams may participate in the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a capstone project (e.g., research design for a specific project, statement of work for a request for proposal for an evaluation, state evaluation action plan) that supports evaluations and research projects on activities under WIOA core programs • Describe how research and evaluations will be coordinated with, and designed in conjunction with, state and local boards and with state agencies responsible for the core programs • Share how research and evaluations will be coordinated with the evaluations provided for by the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Education under WIOA • Provide feedback on the evaluation peer learning cohort's (called EvalPLC) evaluation activities and EvalHub resources
<p>Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative</p>	<p>USDOL uses Google Analytics to track how many resources are downloaded from its WorkforceGPS website; gathers feedback from webinar polling data; and administers a survey to assess the effectiveness of the evaluation TA.</p>

^a Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

Table B.14. Youth/Young Adults with Child Welfare Involvement at Risk of Homelessness

Evaluation TA initiative	Building Capacity to Evaluate Interventions for Youth /Young Adults with Child Welfare Involvement at Risk of Homelessness (YARH), Phases I, II, and III
Funding agency	Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Children’s Bureau
Sector ^a	Human services
Policy area	Child welfare
Developer	Mathematica, Children’s Bureau, and OPRE
Implementing organizations	Mathematica
When and where implemented	Phase I: 2013–2015; Phase II: 2015–2019; Phase III: 2019–2022. Light-touch evaluation TA was implemented with 18 grant recipients in Phase I. Intensive evaluation TA was implemented with Phase II and III, which included six grant recipients nationally: two state child welfare agencies, two county child welfare agencies, and two community-based organizations.
Primary objective(s) of initiative	Build the evidence base on what works to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults who have been involved in the child welfare system, through a multi-phase grant program funded by the Children’s Bureau. Build the evaluation capacity of grant recipients’ staff and their local evaluators to help them prepare for federal summative evaluations of their comprehensive service models.
Overview of initiative	<p>YARH occurred in three phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase I. The evaluation TA provider provided light-touch group-based evaluation TA through webinars and conference presentations at the Children’s Bureau grant recipient conferences. Evaluation TA was intended to help grant recipients and their local evaluators prepare for evaluation while developing their service models. The group-based evaluation TA webinars were recorded and posted on a hidden YouTube channel. The evaluation TA provider conducted a process study that documented the progress and experiences of the 18 grant recipients and administered a web-based survey to assess organizational readiness and partnerships among members of the planning team and key partners for each grant recipient. • Phase II. Six grant recipients and their local evaluators continued to define and articulate their interventions, including conducting formative evaluations. Each grant recipient had an assigned evaluation TA liaison team from the evaluation TA provider. The liaisons held individual meetings with grant recipients and local evaluators using templates to guide the work and preparation for summative evaluation. Grant recipients and local evaluators participated in group evaluation TA or peer learning sessions delivered in webinars. For the peer learning sessions, the evaluation TA provider selected topics that resonated with all grant recipients so that they could jointly benefit and share experiences with one another. • Phase III. Evaluation TA provider continued to provide evaluation TA to all six grant recipients (now sites) for the first year to support formative evaluation activities. The contractor worked to design and conduct a federal summative evaluation of at least one intervention implemented by a site.
Principles of initiative	Incorporated practices from other evaluation TA initiatives funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, such as the Permanency Innovation Initiative project, funded by the Administration for Children and Families, and several teen pregnancy prevention projects funded by the Office of Adolescent Health.

Strategies of initiative	The initiative strengthened from Phase I (group-based only) to Phase II in response to the needs of the grant recipients. Phase II evaluation TA was provided primarily in individual meetings, using established templates to guide documentation of elements of the program to demonstrate readiness for summative evaluation. Templates covered theory of change and logic model; defining their population, intervention, comparison group, and outcomes; and plans for (and findings from) usability tests and formative evaluations. In addition, group evaluation TA and peer learning experiences were offered to discuss elements of the templates and other topics. Phase III evaluation TA was primarily individual and focused on documenting and disseminating findings.
Evaluation TA topics and content	Accessing and analyzing administrative data to understand the problem in their community; designing comprehensive service models; developing logic models/theories of change; testing usability (rapid-cycle tests); planning and designing formative evaluation; and collecting, managing, and analyzing data
Issues/challenges and solutions in implementing the initiative	<p>A major early challenge was that local evaluators and evaluation TA providers used different terms for the same concept. To address this, the evaluation TA providers used plain language principals to explain evaluation concepts, so that everyone understood what was being discussed. Another challenge was the amount of time it took grant recipients to be ready for a summative evaluation, which resulted in expanding the grant effort from two to three phases.</p> <p>During Phase II, some grant recipients said they found it challenging to find the time to complete the templates while implementing services. The evaluation TA liaisons worked with grant recipients individually to support template work while recognizing the split focus between service delivery and preparation for summative evaluation.</p>
Ways that the initiative has been adapted or tailored for different audiences	The evaluation TA providers tailored assistance to grant recipients based on their level of readiness for rigorous evaluation. Providers also helped grant recipients address their most immediate needs first. While the six interventions share some features, evaluation TA was tailored to the particular intervention and context of each grant recipient.
Evidence supporting the effectiveness or promise of this initiative	There was no plan to gather evidence on effectiveness of the approach.

^a Sector indicates if the initiative served human services and related programs, programs that were not in the human services sector, or both.

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