



LABOEVAL

EvalByte

LaboEval: An Integrated Approach to Evaluation Capacity Building for Community-Based Organizations

Written by David Buetti (Research Associate, UOttawa) and Isabelle Bourgeois (Associate Professor, UOttawa)

What is the context of the project?

An increasing number of community-based organizations (CBOs) seek to use evaluation results to measure progress, learn, reflect, and make informed choices regarding programming and internal resource allocation (Bryan et al., 2021). Typically, data collection exercises conducted by CBOs to meet funder accountability requirements do not yield the kind of information they need in order to make internal decisions. In addition, studies have shown that CBOs are often limited in their ability to evaluate their programs and initiatives. Challenges CBOs face include a lack of internal evaluation related knowledge and skills, high staff turnover, limited financial resources, and limited access to evaluation supports (Despard, 2016).

The Social Innovation Laboratory for Evaluation in Nonprofit Organizations (LaboEval) is an applied research project that seeks to identify and document the most promising strategies for strengthening evaluation capacity in community organizations. The LaboEval team offers individual training and coaching and technical assistance to support participating organizations in their evaluation efforts. The team conducts research on evaluation capacity building in participating organizations.

Key points

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS (CBOS) FACE CHALLENGES IN PLANNING, CONDUCTING, AND USING EVALUATIONS FOR LEARNING AND DECISION-MAKING

LABOEVAL PROVIDES FREE TRAINING AND RESOURCES TO CBOS INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING THEIR EVALUATION CAPACITY

CASE STUDIES ARE CONDUCTED IN ORGANIZATIONS TO DOCUMENT THE EVOLUTION OF THEIR CAPACITY TO CONDUCT AND USE EVALUATION

KNOWLEDGE GENERATED WILL HELP IDENTIFY AND SHARE BEST PRACTICES IN BUILDING EVALUATION CAPACITY IN CBOS

What is LaboEval?

LaboEval is a five-year project (2019-2024) at the University of Ottawa that aims to advance knowledge on evaluation capacity within the community sector while supporting CBOs as they strive to reach their social development objectives. The LaboEval is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services (CRECS).

What is the project working on?

Since 2019, the project has provided training and support to 18 CBOs to build their capacity to do and use evaluation. A comprehensive online evaluation training program was designed collaboratively with community partners and evaluation specialists. It consists of seven online modules with practical activities to be completed by organizations with the help of a trainer. The training is offered in French and English, and the proposed curriculum is presented in LaboEval's Information and Orientation Guide (p. 7-9). In addition to the training program, case studies were conducted in participating organizations to document the evolution of evaluation capacity in these organizations and to identify the factors that best support or hinder their development.

The next steps of the project include conducting a comprehensive analysis of the case studies and sharing the knowledge gained so far through journal articles and presentations at conferences and seminars.

Why is the project meaningful?

This project provides community leaders with a complete training program and resources to build evaluation capacity in their organizations. It also generates new, empirically-derived knowledge regarding the most effective strategies to build evaluation capacity in the community sector. The hope is that LaboEval's work will lead to more evidence-informed programs and services in CBOs and, ultimately, to better community health outcomes.

Resources

- More information on LaboEval
- To participate in the project, contact the LaboEval team at laboeval@gmail.com
- Latest updates on LaboEval's research work
- Information on the Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services

Reference

- Bryan, T. K., Robichau, R. W., & L'Esperance, G. E. (2021). Conducting and utilizing evaluation for multiple accountabilities: A study of nonprofit evaluation capacities. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 31(3), 547–569. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21437>
- Despard, M. R. (2016). Strengthening evaluation in nonprofit human service organizations: Results of a capacity-building experiment. *Human Service Organizations, Management, Leadership & Governance*, 40(4), 352–368. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2016.1140101>

Acknowledgment

We thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services (CRECS) at the University of Ottawa for their financial support to LaboEval.



What is an EvalByte?

The EvalByte series are snapshot overviews of the Evaluation Capacity Network's ongoing evaluation and research projects. Additional resources are also shared in these EvalBytes.

Why you need to read it.

Our EvalBytes will give you the opportunity to learn not only about our current projects, but also about

- ✓ our partners
- ✓ collaborative research
- ✓ evaluation practice
- ✓ community engagement