# Understanding Evaluation's Influence on Stakeholders' Attitudes and Actions at a Social Service Organization

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## ABSTRACT

Research and discussions of evaluation use have a long history in the field of evaluation. Recently, discussions of evaluation use have expanded to include the concept of evaluation influence in an attempt to better understand the impact of evaluation through a variety of approaches. Much of the existing research on evaluation use focuses on how and under what conditions evaluations are used by stakeholders. However, to date, limited research on evaluation influence exists and less is known about the specific ways in which evaluation may influence stakeholders' attitudes and actions. This study focused on building an understanding of how stakeholder attitudes and actions towards evaluation change as a result of being involved in an evaluation process. An exploratory qualitative approach and case study design was used. The case was a single social services agency. An evaluation of the social service agency's employment program took place. Participants involved in the study were interviewed before and after the evaluation took place to better understand how they were using evaluation and their attitudes towards evaluation. This study found evaluation influenced stakeholders in multiple ways at the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels. The research demonstrated 1) people recognize the value of evaluation, but in different ways; 2) evaluation is more than just about the results, the process matters; 3) evaluation influences participants at multiple levels of an organization; 4) participating in an evaluation does influence stakeholders' attitudes towards evaluation in positive ways; 5) evaluation is important in facilitating communication among key stakeholders; and 6) evaluation has the potential to influence future evaluation activities.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

Evaluation involves addressing a wide range of questions relating to program implementation, effectiveness, efficiency, and attribution (Center for Disease Control, 2012). Explored through theoretical and practical ways, it is said that conducting evaluations can impact agency decision-makers and other stakeholders causing changes in attitudes and beliefs in the perceived value of the evaluation process (learning) and evaluation use (utility). Research and discussions of evaluation use have a long history in the field of evaluation and have recently expanded to include evaluation influence in an attempt to better understand the impact of evaluation through a variety of approaches. These conversations have led to a breadth of literature describing the theoretical approaches of use, concepts associated with use, and the factors that encourage evaluation use. What remains unknown are the ways in which evaluation influences stakeholders' views of the role of evaluation and evaluation influence within their own agencies.

Use in evaluation and has been examined through several different theoretical lenses, all of which together create a more complete understanding of the various ways evaluations can be used by and influence agencies (Alkin, 2013; Henry, 2000; Johnson et al., 2009; Kirkhart, 2000; Leeuw & Donaldson, 2015). Early decision-makers and evaluators in federally funded education programs criticized evaluation studies for not being used (Alkin & King, 2016). This led to calls for increased research on evaluation use (Alkin et al., 1979; Patton, 1977) and resulted in many investigations into types of evaluation use and factors/conditions that affect evaluation use (Fleisher & Christie, 2009). Calls to increase research on evaluation use have continued over the past several decades (Alkin, 2013; Johnson et al., 2009; Shadish et al., 1991) and have resulted in evaluation use being one of the most widely studied areas in the field of evaluation (Fleisher & Christie, 2009).

The ongoing, systematic study of evaluation use has led to conceptualizations of use that are empirically grounded (Fleisher & Christie, 2009). Major theorists have described evaluation use through results-based and process-based approaches. Results-based use concerns how the findings of an evaluation are used by an organization and its stakeholders (Cummings, 2002) while process-based use is more concerned with the learning and use that occurs as a result of being involved in the evaluation process itself (Patton, 1997). Typically, theorists have discussed types of evaluation use through four categories: 1) instrumental, or the type of use that occurs when decision-makers use evaluation findings to modify the object being evaluated (Greene, 1988a; Shulha & Cousins, 1997); 2) conceptual, or the type of use that occurs when evaluation findings are used to help build shared understanding of a program (Weiss, 1979 3) symbolic use, or the use that occurs when an evaluation helps persuade stakeholders (Alkin & Taut, 2003; Greene, 1988a; Henry, 2000); and 4) process use, or the use that occurs when changes result from engagement and learning throughout the evaluation process rather than the findings (Patton, 2003).

In addition to discussing types of use, theorists have also discussed use through ideas such as enlightenment, or the use of evaluation to generate generalizations used to inform policy, (Stake, 1995; Weiss, 1977); decision-making, the use of evaluation to generate knowledge used to make programmatic decisions (Stufflebeam, 1968); utilization, or the focus on evaluation utility and actual use (Patton, 2013);

transformation, or using evaluations to facilitate transformational learning where stakeholders are involved in the process of examining and understanding information needed to meet their goals (Preskill & Torres, 2000); and empowerment to promote stakeholder self-determination (Fetterman, 1993), amongst others. A more recent expansion of the term *use* as *influence* has gained a place in the literature on evaluation through authors such as Kirkhart (2000), Alkin and Taut (2003), Henry and Mark (2003a), and Christie (2007). Influence, as defined by Kirkhart (2000), includes "the capacity or power of persons or things to produce effects on others by intangible or indirect means" (p. 7). Kirkhart's (2000) proposed integrated theory of influence conceptualizes evaluation influence through three dimensions- source, intention, and time. Source, according to Kirkhart (2000), refers to either results-based or process-based influence; intention, refers to both intended and unintended influence that occurs during an evaluation; and time, refers to influence that occurs either immediately during an evaluation, at the end of the evaluation cycle, or long-term. Henry and Mark's (2003a) work supports and expands upon Kirkhart's (2000) theory of influence, to include three levels at which influence can occur: the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels. Through influence, authors and researchers have been able to discuss how and to what extent evaluation shapes, affects, supports, and changes people and systems (Kirkhart, 2000) by examining the larger impacts of evaluation beyond traditional ideas of results-based use.

Evaluation has the potential to influence and improve social services and participant outcomes. Specifically, scholars point to the essential role evaluation can play in improving services by enabling learning to be shared to address client's unmet needs more effectively (Brewster et al., 2015). Through evaluation, social service agencies and their staff can obtain important clues about the impact of their interventions on the people they serve and the components of the intervention that contribute to positive client and community outcomes. Additionally, evaluation can provide opportunities to bring together stakeholders at various levels of an agency and help them build shared understanding and meaning of their work and programs. Research by Forss et al. (1994) found that evaluation enhances agency learning through stakeholder involvement in the evaluation process and through effective communication. Through this process, evaluation holds the potential to provide important links to understanding and improving the theory informing social services efforts and interventions (Brewster et al., 2015; Steckler & Linnan, 2002). Specifically, evaluations can help build understanding of the mechanisms that produce successful change among selected subgroups and under what conditions certain mediators are more influential in the achievement of desired outcomes (Azzam & Whyte, 2018). By using evaluation methods, effective service/program improvement efforts can be identified before being replicated across a broad range of contexts (Gareth et al., 2013). This will allow programs to be innovative in their approach and tailor their interventions/services to the specific needs of the population they serve.

**Statement of the Problem**

Examining evaluation use and influence is an important endeavor that can lead to more effective program evaluation practices and contribute to the knowledge base necessary to advance the field of evaluation. Evaluation plays a critical role in understanding and improving programs and practices. It is through evaluation that agencies and organizations can better understand the extent to which their efforts improve social welfare, how they do so, and how they can do so more effectively (Shadish et al., 1991). However, there remains a gap in the literature in understanding the extent and manner in which designing and conducting an evaluation within an agency context can influence stakeholder attitudes toward evaluation.

Much of the existing research on evaluation use focuses on how and under what conditions evaluations are used (Fleischer & Christie, 2009). Examples of existing research on evaluation use include Preskill and Caracelli's (1997) study exploring the linkages between theories of evaluation use and evaluator perspectives on practice; Amo and Cousins' (2007) systematic review of studies related to process use; and Alkin and Taut's (2003) research on barriers to evaluation use, to name a few. However, due, in part, to the emerging nature of the field of evaluation, limited research exists on evaluation processes and their impact on stakeholders (Gajda, 2004; Henry & Mark, 2003a). While previous literature has identified possible precursors of use and general forms of possible use, there remains a gap in the literature about "the change processes through which evaluation influences attitudes, motivations, and actions'" (Henry & Mark, 2004, p. 45). Henry and Mark argue that evaluation is a field of expert based practices rather than evidence-based practices and suggest evaluators and evaluation theorists need to better understand what types of evaluations are more likely to make specific contributions by conducting research on evaluation and evaluation use.

While literature on evaluation use is prevalent, many authors have argued for a shift to expand research to include evaluation influence (Christie, 2007; Henry & Mark, 2003a; Kirkhart, 2000). To date, the literature on evaluation influence is limited and little is known about the specifics of how evaluation may influence stakeholders' attitudes and actions (Christie, 2003). This finding is echoed by other authors including Henry and Mark (2004) who maintain there is limited research that unpacks "how evaluations wield their influence" (p. 4) and the influence evaluation may have on programs, policies, and/or participant improvement.

One notable study researching evaluation influence was the work conducted by Christie (2007). Christie (2007) used Henry and Mark's (2003a) framework to study the reported influence of evaluation on decision-makers' potential actions. Her study examines the first level of influence, the individual level, and focuses on the concept of decision-making, a behavioral change process mechanism in Henry and Mark's (2003a) framework. Her study asked, 1) what is the likelihood that evaluation information will influence a decision-makers' actions, 2) are certain types of data reported to be more influential than others, and 3) what data sources do decision-makers choose when asked about relative influence. Christie (2007) found, 1) all types of evaluation information influenced participants but in general case-study and large-scale data tended to be more influential than anecdotal accounts; 2) certain types of evaluation data were more influential among certain groups of decision makers; and 3) choosing to use one type of evaluation data over others depends on the independent influence of other types of evaluation data on the decision maker, as well as their previously held beliefs about the program.

## Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The research presented in this study examined the extent to which an evaluation conducted within a specific program/agency context influences stakeholders' attitudes toward and motivations for sustaining evaluation as an ongoing practice. The context for this study was a social service agency engaged in providing information and referral services to low-income families and individuals. Henry and Mark’s (2003a) Theory of Evaluation Influence is used to guide the exploration of this research on evaluation influence and this study builds on their work as well as the work of Christie (2007) in several ways. First, this study includes all three levels of influence (individual, interpersonal, and collective) in the analysis rather than focusing on one level. Second, this study used a real-life evaluation case study rather than using simulations, or scenarios based on real life evaluations. Third, rather than focusing solely on one mechanism as in Christie’s exploration of decision-making, this study explores multiple mechanisms that emerged throughout the case study. It was the aim of this study to add to the work by Christie (2007), Kirkhart (2000), and Henry and Mark (2003a) by contributing to the discussion around the mechanisms by which evaluation influences stakeholders, teams, and agencies.

It is important to conduct applied research to understand how to solve problems that affect individuals, agencies, and communities in real life settings. There continues to be a growing momentum and demand for developing evidence-based practices as demonstrated by the increasing rate at which agencies are commissioning applied research and professional evaluations and the growing number of professional evaluation societies. In the early 1980s, only three national and regional professional evaluation societies existed but that number had grown to over 75 by the early 2000s (Donaldson et al., 2009). These professional evaluation societies regularly meet to discuss best practices for conducting applied research and evaluation to produce credible evidence to be used by evaluators (Donaldson et al., 2009). Conducting research on evaluation practices is of growing importance to the field as evaluation continues to define itself as a valuable profession, communicate about the work happening in the field to external stakeholders in the community, and understand the specific ways in which evaluation moves programs and communities towards the goal of promoting social betterment.

Increasingly, it is important to know how evaluation processes and findings are used and the perceptions stakeholders hold toward the value and importance of evaluation and its influence. Many research methods can be used to build insight and understanding into evaluation mechanisms. Experimental and quasi-experimental approaches, once considered the gold standard of research, now share space in the credible evidence field with non-experimental approaches. Meta-evaluation, or the evaluation of evaluations, serves as one non-experimental way of researching evaluation to learn about stakeholder attitudes, beliefs, and values towards the field of evaluation and evaluation use. This study aimed to contribute to the evaluation literature by engaging in meta-evaluation and piggybacking research on evaluation onto an actual evaluation of a non-profit social service agency providing information and referral services to low-income families and individuals. Using an applied evaluation of a collaborative social service agency, this study aimed to further understand the impact of evaluation on stakeholders' perceptions (attitudes) of the evaluation process and the use (actions) of evaluation findings and the intentions of stakeholders to potentially sustain evaluation practices long-term. By examining the evaluation in this way this research can help to contribute to the fields' understanding of evaluation use and influence, specifically to the way theoretical understandings of influence and use occur in real life settings.

To understand the impact of evaluation on stakeholders' perceptions (attitudes) of the evaluation process and the use (actions) of evaluation findings this study focused on two research questions:

1. What are stakeholders' initial perceptions of evaluation in a social services agency? The aim of this question was to identify stakeholders' previous experiences with evaluation; attitudes towards evaluation; and how, if at all, they currently use evaluation at the social service agency. This included building an understanding of any differences in experiences with evaluation or attitudes towards evaluation between stakeholder groups, including stakeholders involved in the direct service of programming and those at the leadership levels.
2. In what ways does an evaluation influence the immediate attitudes and actions of stakeholders in a social service agency? The aim of the second question was to gain insight into the ways in which being involved in the evaluation influences stakeholders' previously held attitudes towards evaluation, their perceptions of how evaluation can be used, and the ways in which they use evaluation at the social service agency. The interview questions used were based on concepts presented in Henry and Mark's (2003) Theory of Evaluation Influence and aim to better understand how these theoretical concepts are experienced in real world scenarios.

**Significance of the Study**

This study aimed to add to the literature on evaluation and evaluation use in several important ways. First, this study contributes to advancing research on evaluation, which is needed to advance both practice and theory. By researching evaluation theory, this study attempts to respond to the call for continued research on evaluation to take place. Through researching evaluation influence, this study seeks to build the knowledge base of evaluation, improve practice by understanding strategies that enhance influence, and build the evidence base that describes the way theory plays out in real-life contexts.

Second, the results of this study further sought to expand the current research on evaluation influence. While evaluation use has been studied extensively, room exists to further research and define evaluation influence as it occurs in real life settings. This research highlights the ways evaluation influence occurs in the context of a social service agency. This case study provides insight into evaluation practices that support evaluation influence and the mechanisms through which influence occurs. By building this knowledge, theories of evaluation influence can be further refined as research uncovers how they are understood in real life settings. This can help the field identify under what conditions, and in what settings, evaluation influence is likely to occur.

Third, the study used a case example which offers several design and methodological considerations which other researchers may find of interest. Based on the results of this study, the strengths and limitations of the case study design as well as the unique challenges this case presented are shared and discussed. Future researchers can learn from the obstacles encountered in this study and strengthen future research efforts that build on this study. Additionally, future research can expand on the findings of this study by replicating this case study design in different contexts to uncover situationally specific variables, mechanisms, and outcomes that may influence use.

Finally, the findings of this study were intended to provide a starting point for future research on evaluation influence to continue studying and expand upon. Collectively, through the work of future authors, this and future studies will help to expand the evidence base that supports evaluation influence theory and practice. This information will be of value and benefit to professionals in the field as they work to increase the likelihood their evaluation work is used and valued by stakeholders involved in the evaluation process.

Research indicates that evaluators need to be conscious of the multiple ways in which their evaluation work can influence individuals, teams, and organizations with whom they work (Appleton-Dyer et al., 2012; Christie, 2007; Henry & Mark, 2003a; Herbert, 2014). By encouraging agency stakeholders to participate in the evaluation process, understand the use of evaluation, and take ownership of findings/recommendations, evaluators can intentionally work to increase the likelihood that evaluation activities will be adopted and sustained by agencies and individuals. The study suggests that evaluators need to take on a wider array or roles throughout the evaluation process—including educator, facilitator, and advocate—to ensure not only the findings of the evaluation project they are involved in are used but the impact of their collaborative efforts works towards the goal of changing stakeholder perceptions of evaluation and the value stakeholders place on evaluation activities moving forward.

**Key Terms**

Before continuing further, it is important to take time to clarify definitions of terms that will be frequently used in this paper.

- **Evaluation**: the systematic investigation of the merit, worth, or significance of an object or effort (Patton, 1997)
- **Stakeholders:** those whose lives are affected by a program and its evaluation (Shadish et al., 1991)
- **Use**: the way social science information is used to modify programs and policies (Shadish et al., 1991)
- **Instrumental use:** concerns the direct application of evaluation knowledge/findings for the purpose of making decisions (Shadish et al., 1991)
- **Conceptual use:** occurs when a person's understanding of a program or policy is affected by an evaluation, but no direct action is taken as a result of the evaluation (Shadish et al., 1991)
- **Strategic use** (also known as **symbolic use**): when people use the existence of the evaluation to persuade others about actions to take in pursuit of specific outcomes (Shadish et al., 1991)
- **Process use:** includes changes among individuals and agencies as the result of being engaged in the evaluation process (Patton, 1997)
- **Influence:** the capacity or power of persons or things to produce effects on others by intangible or indirect means (Kirkhart, 2000)

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Chapter 2 provides a deeper exploration of the literature relating to evaluation use and influence by: (1) examining theories underlying evaluation use (2) reviewing literature on evaluation use/influence and how these concepts have evolved overtime; and (3) reviewing previous research on evaluation use and influence.

### Underlying Theoretical Perspectives Related to Evaluation Use and Influence

Many fields of study have contributed to the field of evaluation throughout its development and two, in particular, have been discussed in the literature.  Alkin and King (2016) describe the contributions of both the field of educational measurement and the field of social science research to the historical development and understanding of evaluation use.  Educational measurement brought a focus on tests and measurement as a means to provide information to decision-makers while social science research focused on the use of social science research methods to generate knowledge to be used in decision-making (Alkin & King, 2016).  This section discusses in further detail the contributions of the social sciences to the knowledge base underlying evaluation use theories.  Specifically, the review of the literature focuses on how the theory of planned behavior, self-efficacy theory, and expectancy value theory underpin and inform theories of evaluation use and influence.

#### *Social Psychology*

Social psychology or “the scientific study of the way the thoughts, feelings, or actions of an individual are affected by the real or implied presence of others,” (Mark et al., 2011, p. 6) has shared a long history of connection to evaluation. Broad contributions from social psychology towards evaluation can be seen in sets of theories and concepts that translate into theories of the program, policy, and/or practice being evaluated (Mark et al., 2011). Forming the foundation of social psychology and influence on evaluation, authors point to the work of Kurt Lewin and Gestalt psychology, which argued the whole is different from the sum of its parts (Mark et al., 2011). Further, Lewin's contributions to the field of evaluation through his process of action research can be seen through the attempt to scientifically study problems in order to guide, correct, and evaluate decisions and actions (Corey, 1953). The change processes of social psychology frequently underlie and inform social programs and policies. Some of the ways social psychology informs evaluation can be understood through the theory of planned behavior, self-efficacy theory, and expectancy value theory.

**Theory of Planned Behavior.** The theory of planned behavior (TPB) has been described as "one of the most popular social psychology models for predicting behavior" (Mark et al., 2011, p. 75). The TPB asserts human action is influenced by 1) a person's attitude toward a certain behavior; 2) subjective norms regarding that behavior; and 3) the individual's perceived self-efficacy (Ajzen, 1991). Informed by Peak's (1955) expectancy-value model of attitudes, the TPB suggests attitudes towards behaviors are the function of the: 1) judged probability that the object leads to good or bad consequences; and 2) the intensity of the effect expected from those consequences (p. 153). Subjective norms, or the perceived social pressure to engage in a given behavior, are said to be formed by either injunctive norms, or what others want us to do, and by descriptive norms, or the actions of others (Ajzen, 2012). Self-efficacy, or the perceived control of behavior, similar to Bandura's (1997) work on self-efficacy, focuses on the extent to which people believe they can perform a given behavior (Ajzen, 2012).

The theory of planned behavior is important to this study as it informs the underlying understanding of how stakeholders may be influenced to use evaluations (change their actions towards evaluation) based on their attitude towards evaluation, social norms around evaluation, and perception of their ability to successfully complete evaluation activities and implement evaluation recommendations. The theory suggests evaluations are more likely to be used if: 1) stakeholders have a positive attitude towards evaluation and place a greater value on evaluation activities and findings; 2) social norms in the context in which the evaluation takes place support the incorporation of evaluation activities and value evaluative thinking and findings; and 3) if stakeholders believe they are capable of participating in evaluation activities, thinking, and processes. Using this theory, evaluators may be able to better understand the conditions under which evaluations are used and intentionally pursue opportunities to change stakeholders' attitudes towards evaluation, improve stakeholders' self-confidence in their ability to carry out evaluation activities, and shift social norms towards supporting evaluation, in an effort to ensure their evaluations are used.

**Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory.** Related to the theory of planned behavior is Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Bandura (1982) asserts that self-efficacy is "a generative capability in which component cognitive, social, and behavioral skills must be organized into integrated courses of action to serve innumerable purposes" (p. 122). Self-efficacy is "how well and with what degree of confidence one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982, p. 122) and 'perceived self-efficacy' is how an individual judges their own self-efficacy. Schunk (1995) argued, however, that no amount of self-efficacy will produce desired and competent performance if requisite knowledge and skills are lacking. Within this present study, lack of stakeholder knowledge, skills, and know-how on what an evaluation entails or potential benefits that can be derived from an evaluation influences not only stakeholders' initial sense of competence, but also their confidence in undertaking an evaluation.

Self-efficacy judgments can have a significant influence on an individual's choice of activities, as people tend to avoid activities they believe exceed their capabilities and pursue those they judge themselves capable of managing (Bandura, 1982). Self-efficacy judgments can also influence the amount of effort people are willing to expend and how long they will persist when presented with an obstacle or challenge. If people judge themselves as capable, they are more likely to exert greater effort in face of adversity, while those with negative judgements of their self-efficacy are more likely to decrease their efforts and give up. This is important to this study in the understanding that if evaluators can work to facilitate stakeholder learning/training around evaluation processes/activities, they can help encourage stakeholders' perceived self-efficacy, which may lead to increased evaluation use. Finally, self-efficacy judgments may influence people's thought patterns and emotional reactions during interactions with the environment. People with a strong sense of self-efficacy "deploy their attention and effort to the demands on the situation and are spurred to greater effort by obstacles" while those who judge themselves as incapable "dwell on their personal deficiencies and view difficulties as more formidable than they really are" (Bandura, 1983, p. 123).

**Expectancy-Value Theory.** Expectancy value theory, first proposed by Vroom (1964), suggests that individuals are motivated to perform if they know that their performance is recognized and rewarded. The theory has two key elements: expectations for success and subjective task value. The theory suggests an individual is motivated when they expect to do well and when they value the activity they are pursuing (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). For this study, this suggests that stakeholders may be more likely to use evaluations when they value evaluation activities and findings and when they expect to do well in their involvement in the evaluation process and implementation of recommendations.

The model further defines the element of task value into four categories: 1) attainment value, or the personal importance of doing well on the activity; 2) intrinsic value, or the personal enjoyment one gets from performing the activity; 3) utility value, or the perceived usefulness of the activity for future goals; and 4) cost, or the perceived negative aspects of engaging in the activity (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Further, the model suggests the two elements of expectations for success and task value are related in that individuals are more likely to value the activities in which they feel confident (or have higher expectations for success). This suggests for this study that the more evaluators can build stakeholders' confidence in the evaluation process, the more likely it is that the evaluation will influence stakeholders' attitudes towards evaluation, specifically to hold more positive attitudes towards evaluation.

## Theoretical Views on Evaluation Use and Influence

Shadish et al. (1991) identified five core components that undergird all evaluations and can be used to better understand evaluation theories in terms of their defining characteristics. These core components include social programming, knowledge, values, practice, and use, and can serve as the criteria by which to judge evaluation theory. The authors argued that:

> The fundamental purpose of evaluation theory is to specify feasible practices that evaluators can use to construct knowledge of the value of social programs that can be used to ameliorate the social problems to which programs are relevant. The theory should have a knowledge base that corresponds to each of the five components of practice, knowledge, use, value, and social programming. (Shadish et al., 1991, p. 36)

This review discusses the evolution of the concept of use in the evaluation literature over time. To begin, the review focuses on theoretical views on evaluation use, including the initial concepts of instrumental, conceptual, symbolic, and process use. Next the review discusses ways in which the concept of use has been incorporated into the literature including use for decision-making, learning, transformation, and empowerment. This, then, leads to the introduction and discussion of evaluation influence in the literature including Kirkhart's (2000) integrated theory of evaluation influence and Henry and Mark's (2003a) expanded model of influence. The section will conclude with a brief review of the existing literature on evaluation use and influence, including the gaps in the literature focusing on researching evaluation influence.

## Theoretical Views on Evaluation Use

Theories of evaluation use have evolved over time due in part to the social psychology theories and social science research practices that have informed the conceptualization of use at various points in time (Alkin & King, 2016). Commonly discussed categories of use that have emerged in the literature include instrumental, conceptual, symbolic, and process use. These various forms of use will be defined and discussed along with their contributing theorists and historical contexts, and relevance to this study.

***Instrumental Use***

Use has a long history in evaluation as both an outcome objective and a concept for research (Henry & Mark, 2003a). The evolution of use in evaluation has changed with increasing contributions of authors studying utility and the application of use. In the 1970s, theorists began to propose new ways of conducting evaluation that focused on how evaluation information was used to design and modify social programming (Shadish et al., 1991). Early research on evaluation use tended to conceptualize use in terms of its direct impact on decision making, and the extent to which evaluation recommendations were implemented (Herbert, 2014). Early use theorists, such as Carol Weiss, Joseph Wholey, and Robert Stake focused on results-based use specifically through instrumental use and enlightenment (Cummings, 2002). Instrumental use concerned “the direct application of evaluation knowledge/findings for the purpose of making decisions” while enlightenment concerned using evaluation findings to “think about issues, define problems, and gain new ideas and perspectives” (Shadish et al., 1991, p. 179).

Each of these early use theorists focused on evaluation use for different stakeholders and purposes. While Weiss was concerned with evaluation for the purpose of policy research and development, Wholey was concerned with evaluation use for program improvement, and Stake was focused on using evaluation findings to improve local practice (Shadish et al., 1991). The researchers of this period found that evaluation findings were frequently used for decision making by, “1) influencing the management and practices within organizations; 2) changing the ways problems were understood by decision makers; and 3) researchers recognizing evaluation as one of many pieces of information that informed decision makers” (Herbert, 2014, p. 390).

***Conceptual Use***

The second form of evaluation use described in the taxonomy is conceptual use (Leviton & Hughes, 1981). Early discussions of conceptual use imagined it as the influence an evaluation has that cannot be linked to a specific outcome. However, in time the definition of conceptual use has evolved to describe evaluation use that is indirect and becomes intertwined with the common knowledge that decision makers use in their thinking (Herbert, 2014). More directly, conceptual use occurs when peoples’ understanding of a program or policy is affected by an evaluation, but no direct action is taken as a result of the evaluation (Johnson et al., 2009; Shadish et al., 1991). Conceptual use is especially useful when stakeholders involved in an evaluation seek to increase or clarify knowledge of a particular aspect of a program (Herbert, 2014). While immediate action (beyond changing the way stakeholders think about a program) does not occur with conceptual use, it may, over time, and given changes in contextual circumstances surrounding the program, lead to instrumental impacts and significant program changes (Bayley, 2008).

***Symbolic Use***

The third form of evaluation use described in the taxonomy is symbolic use (Leviton & Hughes, 1981). Symbolic use emerged from contexts of the politicization of evaluation in the late 1970s (Yoshizawa, 2009). Symbolic or strategic use happens when people use the existence of the evaluation to persuade others about actions to take in pursuit of specific outcomes (Johnson et al., 2009; Shadish et al., 1991) or when evaluation findings are used to legitimize and sustain stakeholders' predetermined positions (Weiss, 1979; Yoshizawa, 2009). It may also involve justifying decisions that have already been made about a program (Bayley, 2008). Some authors warn that at times, symbolic use of evaluations can occur for ulterior motives or out of self-interest (Herbert, 2014). For example, an evaluation could be commissioned with no intention of using the findings, but rather to defer a decision, or as a mechanism to retrospectively justify decisions made on other grounds (Bayley, 2008).

***Process Use***

More recently, theorists have become concerned with a fourth category of use, process use (Preskill et al., 2003). Unlike the theories of use discussed previously, process use does not concern use that occurs as a result of evaluation findings/results, rather process use is concerned with use that happens as a result of stakeholders' involvement in the evaluation process. Process use speaks to the benefits of evaluation processes, not just evaluation outcomes, for use that "includes changes among individuals and organizations as a result of being engaged in the evaluation process" (Patton, 1997, p. 90). Patton (1997) described four outcomes of evaluation process use that include: 1) enhancing shared understanding; 2) supporting and reinforcing the intervention/program; 3) increasing participants' engagement, sense of ownership, and self-determination; and 4) program/organizational development.

Other authors have continued to expand on Patton's conceptualization of process use outcomes including Forss et al.'s (2002) five category model of process use including: 1) learning to learn; 2) developing networks; 3) creating shared understanding; 4) strengthening the project; and 5) boosting morale. Similarly, Greene (1998b) proposed a three-dimensional model of process use including: 1) cognitive outcomes, or changes in understanding; 2) affective outcomes, or changes in feelings of worth and value; and 3) political outcomes, or changes in social problems and power relationships. Together these authors create a broader understanding of the potential outcomes process use can have on individuals and groups.

Together, these four theoretical views of evaluation use (instrumental, conceptual, symbolic, and process use) provide a broad understanding of the different ways in which evaluations can be used by stakeholders and influence stakeholders' attitudes and actions. The four types of use can be categorized into two general forms of use, results-based use and process-based use. Theories of evaluation influence, as researched in this paper, incorporate both results-based use and process-based use into their frameworks. As this study aimed to study the ways in which evaluation influences stakeholders' attitudes and actions it is important to analyze the findings of stakeholder responses for these various types of use, understanding that to only look for one type of use would not provide a complete picture of the ways in which evaluation takes its effects. This study was interested in understanding the various ways in which evaluation influences stakeholders. It was important to consider not only how the findings of the evaluation influence stakeholders understanding (conceptual use), and decisions (instrumental use), but also how stakeholders are impacted as a result of being involved in the evaluation process (process-use).

## Evaluation Use Concepts

Through the evolution and contributions of use theories, concepts of evaluation use concerning decision-making, learning, transformation, empowerment, and others have emerged.

### *Decision-Making*

Stufflebeam's (1994) CIPP (Context, Input, Process, and Product) model views the role of evaluation use to concern providing information to decision makers to encourage service improvement. To improve services, evaluations are to aid decision makers in allocating resources to programs that best serve the target audience (Alkin, 2013). Each of the four types of evaluation in CIPP aim to improve the decision-making process through: 1) identifying the needs to decide on program objectives (context evaluation); 2) making decisions about strategies and designs (input evaluation); 3) identifying shortcomings in programming and refining implementation (process evaluation); and 4) measuring outcomes for decisions regarding the program (product evaluation; Alkin, 2013). Stakeholders engaged in the evaluation process are typically ones that hold power to make decisions about programming and the evaluation aims to answer stakeholders' most important questions to assist in decision-making. To incorporate this understanding into this study, stakeholders at the case study agency were invited to participate throughout the entirety of the evaluation process. By involving stakeholders in the design of the evaluation, in the collection of data, in the data analysis, and in the drafting of the report and recommendations, the study hoped to increase the likelihood the evaluation would be used and the number of ways in which the evaluation might influence stakeholders' attitudes and actions. Through these methods, the influence of the evaluation was more likely to influence stakeholders through process-use (i.e., by learning about evaluation and building skills related to evaluative thinking) and results-based use (i.e., by building stakeholders buy-in and ownership of the data and recommendations).

***Utilization***

Patton (2013) viewed Stufflebeam's (1994) focus on decision making to be insufficient in generating effective evaluations. Rather than judging an evaluation by its capacity to meet decision-makers' needs, Patton (2013) argued for evaluations to be judged by their utility and actual use including how stakeholders apply evaluation findings and experience the evaluation process. Through utilization focused evaluation (UFE), evaluators incorporate evaluation procedures that would ensure the actual use of the evaluation with a larger and more diverse group of stakeholders (Alkin, 2013). Informed by a psychology of use that promotes evaluation utility by empowering stakeholders through their involvement and ownership in the evaluation process, utilization focused evaluations work to enhance stakeholders' commitment to utilization (Alkin, 2013), under the assumption that stakeholders know what they need to know (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009) by deliberately planning for use throughout the entire evaluation process (Cummings, 2002). The argument from the psychology of use in utilization-focused evaluation suggests:

> Intended users are more likely to use evaluations if they understand and feel ownership of the evaluation process and findings; they are more likely to understand and feel ownership if they've been actively involved; by actively

> involving primary intended users, the evaluator is training users in use, preparing the groundwork for use, and reinforcing the intended utility of the evaluation every step along the way. (Patton, 2012, p. 6)

By identifying and involving those who have a stake in the evaluation and care about the findings it generates, evaluators conducting utilization-focused evaluations take on a situational responsiveness in working with stakeholders to define the evaluation purpose and select the model, methods, and use that are appropriate for the specific context/situation of the evaluand (Patton, 2013). This reinforces the importance of stakeholder involvement as demonstrated by other authors. This is important to this study as it encourages the constant inclusion of, and collaboration with, stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. By encouraging stakeholder participation this study hoped to increase the likelihood that the evaluation may have an influence on the ways in which the evaluation impacts those involved in the evaluation.

***Transformational Learning***

Influenced by Patton's (2013) utilization-focused approach, Torres and Preskill's (2001) transformational evaluation is concerned with ensuring evaluations are tailored to meet the needs of primary intended users through engaging stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. However, unlike Patton (2013), Preskill views utilization as "the transformational learning that occurs as the result of the evaluation process" (Alkin, 2013, p. 51). According to Torres and Preskill (2001), transformational learning is "a process where individuals, teams, and even organizations are identifying, examining, and understanding information needed to meet their goals" (p. 28). By creating evaluative processes that are collaborative, dialogic, and action oriented, the authors argue that learning can be further advanced to meet the evolving demands of workplace learning with the goal of understanding something, addressing organizational issues, or for workplace improvement (Preskill & Torres, 2000). For this study, transformational learning contributes new ways of thinking about the ways in which evaluation influences stakeholder learning around programs specific to the organization in the study. The analysis explored the ways in which the evaluation process encourages learning for the purpose of shared understanding about the program being evaluated, the needs of the community, and underlying organizational policies.

Preskill's concept of transformational learning is informed by constructivist learning theory and transformational learning theory. Constructivist learning theory is predicated on the general idea that learners construct meaning for themselves (Hein, 1991), while transformational learning theory understands learning as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). Transformational learning theory suggests learning and transformation occur by interpreting, understanding, and making sense of experiences with the goal of understanding what others mean and making the self understood. The model of transformational learning suggests learning is most likely to occur when an evaluation is "collaborative, grounded in constructivist and transformational learning theories, and builds communities of evaluation practice" (Preskill & Torres, 2000, p. 29). This suggests, for this study, that creating opportunities for stakeholders to share perspectives with others and learn from one another, may increase the likelihood that evaluation influences those involved. Additionally, it provides another outcome of evaluation influence to consider when exploring how evaluation influences stakeholders, namely in the learning that may occur as a result of a participant's involvement in the evaluation process.

In transformational evaluations, the evaluator must use a clinical approach, spanning traditional program and evaluation boundaries, and help diagnose the organization's capacity for learning (Preskill & Torres, 2000). First, clinical evaluation approaches that support transformational learning view learning as incremental and iterative, use responsive methods, and articulate, formalize, and make time for learning processes. Second, transformational evaluators must be more intimately involved in the work of the organization in a way that blurs boundaries as evaluators guide program staff in dialogue and reflection focused on findings and action planning. Third, evaluators work to diagnose which aspects of an organizations' culture, systems, communication, and leadership support evaluative inquiry and learning and which do not (Preskill & Torres, 2000).

***Empowerment***

Fetterman's (2001) evaluation approach builds upon Preskill's prioritization of learning as a process and use of evaluation however rather than emphasizing transformation the ultimate goals of learning in Fetterman's approach are self-determination (i.e., "the ability to charge one's own course in life" (Fetterman, 2001, p. 13) and empowerment of evaluation recipients. For this study, empowerment approaches contribute an understanding of the potential ways evaluation can influence stakeholders' confidence in their ability to conduct evaluations and implement change at the organization. Empowerment evaluations are conducted by establishing a mission or vision statement for the program, identifying the most significant activities to the program, and rating how well the program is doing each of those activities, and mapping out the program's future as well as goals and strategies to achieve their future impact (Fetterman, 2001). By acting as a coach that provides stakeholders the tools for self-assessment and accountability, empowerment evaluators aim to foster the ability of stakeholders to conduct their own evaluations within their organization and in turn improve their own programming (Fetterman, 2001). By increasing the capacity of stakeholders to plan, implement, and evaluate their own evaluation and programming, empowerment evaluation aimed to increase the likelihood that programs will achieve intended outcomes and impacts. This model provided another outcome to consider when exploring the ways in which evaluation influences stakeholders in this study. Similarly, the model provides a number of strategies the evaluator can use in an attempt to build stakeholders' confidence/abilities to conduct evaluations within their organizations.

Overall, these perspectives provide insight for this study on the different strategies evaluators can use to encourage evaluation influence to occur, as well as the different outcomes evaluation influence can create. While each of the four conceptualizations (decision-making, utilization, transformational learning, and empowerment) are concerned with a different potential evaluation influence outcome, they overlap in their promotion of the idea of stakeholder involvement. Each model encourages evaluators to engage stakeholders throughout the evaluation process in order for the evaluation to influence stakeholders, even though they conceptualize the outcome of influence to be different in each model. These perspectives informed this study's focus on facilitating opportunities for stakeholder involvement throughout the evaluation process and provide different forms of evaluation influence to consider when analyzing later findings.

## Theoretical Views on Evaluation Influence

The notions of decision-making, utilization, transformation, and empowerment are just a few of the ways authors have traditionally conceptualized use in the field of evaluation. Recently, scholars have argued for a reconceptualization of evaluation use to evaluation influence, a term that more broadly captures the various ways evaluation can impact organizations and stakeholders. Kirkhart (2000) and Henry and Mark (2003a) are frequently cited as leading scholars rethinking evaluation use as influence. They argue that traditional theories of use do not adequately address non-results-based types of evaluation impacts, discriminate against non-results-based approaches to evaluation, lack a theoretical perspective, and are not aligned with more historically current forms of social research.

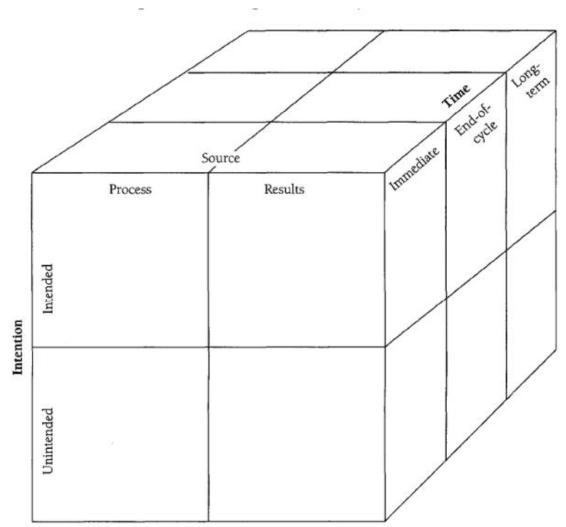
### *Kirkhart's Theory of Evaluation Influence*

Kirkhart (2000) first promoted an integrated theory of influence as a way to move away from simply looking at "unidirectional episodic, intended, and instrumental use" towards a framework that also encompassed "multidirectional, incremental, unintentional and non-instrumental" forms of use (p. 7). In short, Kirkhart aimed to develop a construct that more fully captured the impact of evaluation in both use of evaluation findings (results-based use) and in the experience and learning that occurred during evaluation (process-use). Kirkhart (2000) defined influence as, "the capacity or power of persons or things to produce effects on others by intangible or indirect means" (p. 7). Kirkhart's (2000) theory of evaluation influence encompasses dimensions of source, intention, and time by asking how and to what extent evaluation shapes, affects, supports, and changes people and systems.

In Kirkhart's model (see Figure 1), the source of influence refers to the agent of change or process of change. Unlike traditional use theories that focus on results-based influence or process-based influence, in Kirkhart's (2000) theory of influence, both process and results based influences serve as the sources that contribute to the overall influence of an evaluation—though Kirkhart does seem to be slightly more concerned with process-based influences. The second dimension, evaluation intention, is defined as "the extent to which evaluation influence is purposefully directed, consciously recognized and anticipated" (Kirkhart, 2000, p. 11). Intentions can be intended, unintended, or both, and attention to both is required throughout the evaluation. The third dimension of influence, time, refers to the developmental periods where evaluation influence might occur including the immediate, intermediate, and long-term. Immediate influence occurs at the same time as the evaluation is taking place. Intermediate influence occurs at the end of an evaluation and results from the products of the evaluation as well as the process of disseminating evaluation results. Finally, long-term influence represents influence over time and into the extended impact of an evaluation. Figure 1 illustrates the ways in which the three dimensions (source, intention, and time) intersect and portray evaluation influence as described in Kirkhart's (2000) model. The figure shows how the three dimensions build upon each other and combine to form the way evaluation influences those involved in the evaluation. For example, an evaluation could influence those involved by 1) being unintended, 2) as a result of the evaluation process, and 3) occurring at the end of the evaluation cycle.

**Figure 1**

*Kirkhart's Integrated Model of Evaluation Influence*




*Note:* Dimensions of Kirkhart's Integrated Theory of Evaluation Influence. From "Reconceptualizing Evaluation Use: An Integrated Theory of Influence," by K. Kirkhart, 2000, *New Directions for Evaluation, 88*, p. 8.

Evaluation theory, practice, and the study of evaluation are all impacted by the shifting conversation from evaluation use to an integrated theory of evaluation influence. A theory of influence: 1) helps clarify debates on use by incorporating different paradigms; 2) maps influence surrounding a particular evaluation by creating a framework to identify the types of influence occurring within an evaluation; 3) tracks evolving patterns of influence over time by encouraging evaluators to look at immediate and long-term influences rather than just intermediate or end-of-cycle influences; 4) sorts out use and misuse by expanding the dialogue of beneficial and detrimental influences of misuse by viewing it through source, intention, and time; 5) improves validity of studies of influence by more clearly specifying which dimensions of influence are to be addressed; 6) facilitates meta-analysis of studies of influence; 7) tracks evolution of evaluation theory by understanding the theory from three dimensions; 8) compares evaluation theories by encouraging comparison across dimensions; and 9) supports theory building by providing a framework for studying why evaluation may exert a particular influence in a specific context (Kirkhart, 2000, pp. 18-19). Since Kirkhart's introduction of evaluation influence into the dialogue of use, many other theorists have adopted, critiqued, and contributed to the concept of influence.

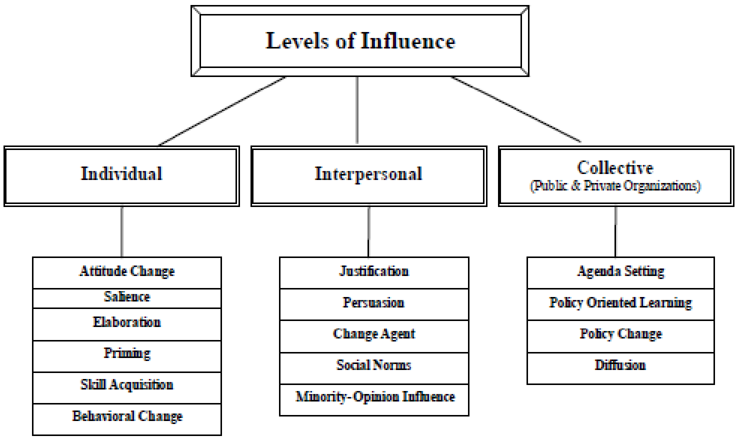
**Limitations of Kirkhart's Theory of Influence.** Some authors have discussed limitations and challenges that exist in adopting Kirkhart's concept of influence. Cummings (2002) suggests influence may be too deliberate and notes that influence implies the evaluator must take on the role of change agent. He continues that influence may be too active of an approach as the evaluator is expected to design, conduct, and report the evaluation in such a way as to deliberately try to influence stakeholders (Cummings, 2002). Others, including Alkin and Taut (2003), and Henry and Mark (2003a) have argued that Kirkhart's (2000) integrated theory of influence is limited in its exclusion of other dimensions that could be incorporated to expand the theory. One dimension excluded in the theory is the form (e.g. formative or summative evaluation) of the evaluation. Cummings (2002) notes that the form of the evaluation may affect the way influence develops and is received. Alkin and Taut (2003) noted that Kirkhart's (2000) model lacked the element of awareness, or the areas that evaluators can be aware of and do something about, namely intended and unintended use occurring both immediately and at the end of the evaluation cycle. Henry and Mark (2003a) noted that Kirkhart's model ignores the different levels and types of outcomes of evaluation, instead leaving them undifferentiated. They also note that Kirkhart's model does not include a listing of the mechanisms through which evaluation may achieve influence and the specific outcomes that would demonstrate that influence occurred (Henry & Mark, 2004). As a result of their critiques and others, Henry and Mark (2003a) created an expanded theory of influence that builds on Kirkhart's (2000) original theory and incorporates additional dimensions they identified as missing from the original theory of influence.

### *Henry and Mark's Theory of Evaluation Influence*

Henry and Mark (2003a) proposed an expanded model of Kirkhart's theory of influence, that incorporated mechanisms that may mediate evaluation influence at three levels (individual, interpersonal and collective). They argued that "influence combined with the set of mechanisms and interim outcomes, offered a better way for thinking about, communicating, and adding to the evidence base about the consequences of evaluation and the relationship of evaluation to social betterment" (Henry & Mark, 2003a, p. 293). This review discusses Henry and Mark's (2003a) Mechanisms and Outcomes of Evaluation Influence as illustrated in their model presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Henry and Mark's Theory of Evaluation Influence, Levels of Influence*




*Note*. Reprinted from "Beyond Use: Understanding Evaluation's Influence on Attitudes and Actions," by G. Henry and M. Mark, 2003, *American Journal of Evaluation, 24(3),* p. 298.

Henry and Mark (2003a) contribute to the work on evaluation influence by expanding Kirkhart's (2000) theory of evaluation influence by incorporating an additional dimension of influence, the level at which influence occurs. To the construct of influence Henry and Mark (2003) incorporate the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels. Through these levels, the authors highlight the "change processes that can result in influence and the complex pathways of processes and outcomes that can be formed" (Henry & Mark, 2003a, p. 309).

At the individual level, evaluation influences changes in the thoughts or actions of an individual. At the interpersonal level, changes occur both between individuals and in their interactions. Finally, at the collective level, evaluation may influence the decisions and practices of organizations or social agencies (Henry & Mark, 2003a). These levels of influence hardly occur in isolation and thus there are multiple pathways of potential evaluation influence. An attitude change in one individual may change the interpersonal behavior and interaction they have with others and over time influence collective change.

As depicted in Figure 2, various mechanisms and outcomes of evaluation influence can occur at each of the three levels, the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels (Henry & Mark, 2003). At the individual level, evaluations may influence participants through six mechanisms and outcomes including: 1) the direction of an attitude; 2) salience; 3) elaboration; 4) priming; 5) skill acquisition; and 6) behavioral change (Henry & Mark, 2003). Evaluations can *change an individual's attitude* from one direction of an argument to the other and encompasses one form of evaluation use that may precede collective action. *Salience* represents how important an individual judges a particular issue, and an evaluation's influence on individual salience may contribute to a larger societal appraisal of legislative issues. *Elaboration*, or how much an individual actually thinks about an issue, may be influenced by an evaluation, and can lead to attitude change. *Priming* describes bringing a specific issue to the front of one's mind and can be important in affecting the way individuals think about an issue leading to changes in attitudes and actions. *Skill acquisition*, or developing new abilities, may occur through participation in an evaluation and be later applied in different contexts thus expanding the evaluation's influence. Finally, *changes in behavior* can result from participation in an evaluation and represent instrumental use, especially in participatory and empowerment approaches (Henry & Mark, 2003).

At the interpersonal level, Henry and Mark (2003) identify five different ways evaluation can influence the attitudes and actions of others including: 1) justification; 2) persuasion; 3) change agent; 4) social norms; and 5) minority-opinion influence. An evaluation may be used to *justify* or support a previously held position and mediate other outcomes. Justification can be a critical first step in *persuading* others. By using evaluation findings as a means of communication, evaluation can help to *persuade* one party to change the attitudes of another. Through justification and persuasion evaluation may stimulate individuals or groups to rise to act as *change agents* that aim to influence organizational policies and programs. Finally, *social norms* or the shared standard of what is appropriate behavior in a specific context may be influenced by an evaluation leading to a change in internalized norms and behavior (Henry & Mark, 2003).

Finally, Henry and Mark (2003) focus on four outcomes at the collaborative, or organizational level including: 1) agenda setting; 2) policy-oriented learning; 3) policy change; and 4) diffusion. These four outcomes are often the final step in an evaluation's pathway of influence. Evaluations can influence *agenda setting* by elevating the public's attitude regarding an issue leading to other forms of collective change. *Policy-oriented learning* refers to changes in thought or behavior regarding policy objectives that result from new information gleaned from an evaluation. *Policy change* may occur as a result of an evaluation and was the originally expected type of evaluation influence. Finally, *diffusion* refers to the adoption of a policy, program, or practice in a setting other than where the evaluation took place and symbolizes the expanded influence of evaluation (Henry & Mark, 2003).

Many proponents of evaluation influence have argued that influence frameworks have allowed researchers to better consider the more indirect goals of modern evaluation, namely organizational learning, and empowerment (Henry, 2000). Specifically, Herbert (2014) wrote of the five benefits of shifting to the term evaluation 'influence' from evaluation 'use.' He commented that 1) influence provides a definition and framework that better represents the full impact of evaluation and provides a way to organize theoretical knowledge of the effects evaluation can have; 2) influence allows for the study of implicit mechanisms that affect change, including processes at the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels; 3) influence frameworks are oriented around linkages to constructs developed in other fields of study including attitude change, priming, skill acquisition, and persuasion, allowing for the integration of evaluation research with parallel areas of inquiry; 4) influence frameworks allow researchers to better study the pathways of influence to understand how it achieves its impact; and 5) influence frameworks focus on the goal of social betterment, rather than around use, lending to a larger impact and reach (Herbert, 2014).

**Limitations of Henry and Mark's Theory of Influence.** Even amidst the expansion and benefit of shifting to influence, the term influence and its corresponding views have not gone without criticism. The general term of influence has been critiqued for including factors outside the awareness or control of the evaluator (Alkin & Taut, 2003). Others have critiqued Henry and Mark's (2003a) theory of influence. Nunneley et al. (2015) presented three concerns that detract from the potential of Henry and Mark's theory. Nunneley et al. (2015) argued that Henry and Mark's (2003) theory: 1) provides vague and imprecise definitions of influence; 2) is weak due to its inability to predict or explain evaluation use; and 3) requires evaluation use for influence to occur. Other authors have suggested that the model's component of social betterment is unrealistic and impractical (Cousins, 2003; Patton, 2008) while others still say the model is just a hodgepodge of unparalleled processes (McEathron, 2008, p. 42). Some of these critiques were addressed by Henry and Mark in their revised model published in 2004 however, the critiques and limitations of the shift to influence still exist.

In Henry and Mark's (2004) revised model, the mechanisms and outcomes of evaluation influence, they expanded on their 2003 model to more completely describe the underlying processes and key mechanisms that may mediate the effects of evaluation on attitudes and actions. Their 2004 model details four change processes (general influence, attitudinal, motivational, and behavioral) occurring at three levels of analysis (individual, interpersonal, and collective). In their revised model, general influence processes are at the foundation of influence and are likely to set into motion changes in the cognitive/affective, motivational, or behavioral processes. Their model classifies mechanisms that mediate evaluation influence at each level of analysis. General influence may include: elaboration, heuristics, priming, and skill acquisition at the individual level; justification, persuasion, change agent, and/or minority influence at the interpersonal level; and ritualism, legislative hearings, coalition formation, drafting legislation, standard setting, and policy consideration at the collective level. Cognitive and affective processes may include: salience or attitude valence at the individual level; local descriptive norms at the interpersonal level; and agenda setting and/or policy-oriented learning at the collective level. Motivational processes may include: personal goals and aspirations at the individual level; injustice norms, social rewards, and exchanges at the interpersonal level; and structural incentives and market forces at the collective level. Finally, behavioral processes may include: new skill performance and individual changes in practice at the individual level; collaborative change in practice at the interpersonal level; and program continuation, cessation or change; policy change, and/or diffusion at the collective level (Henry & Mark, 2004). By paying attention to these mechanisms, evaluators can better capture and plan for the multiple processes that lead from one to another.

The various definitions of use, of influence, and their corresponding expanding models, highlight the diverse nature of evaluation and evaluation impact. These various distinctions make clear that use occurs as both a function of the evaluation process and from the findings of the evaluation (Alkin & Taut, 2003). Past and current research on evaluation use and influence have helped to demonstrate the factors that contribute to use in real world settings but it is through continued research on evaluation, and specifically research on evaluation use that components of use theories can be tested, verified, and/or amended. Next, a discussion is presented on the importance of conducting research on evaluation and a brief historical overview of research that has been conducted specifically on evaluation use and influence is presented.

**Importance of Research on Evaluation**

Evaluation scholars argue that up to this point evaluation research has struggled to create quality theory that advances the field (Berk & Rossi, 1999; King, 2015). The 1970s and 1980s saw a surge of scholars, such as Weiss, Patton, and Alkin, systematically conducting research on evaluation, however, in recent years this practice has diminished with a more recent emphasis placed on strategies and methods for conducting evaluations (Henry & Mark, 2003b). Some authors (e.g., Berk & Rossi, 1999; King, 2015) have argued that: 1) the lack of conceptual consensus in evaluation; 2) the practical focus of the field; 3) a sustained focus on evaluation models and methods instead of theory; 4) emphasis on program theory; 5) lack of research support, including financial support to develop theories, and 6) the relatively young nature of the field of evaluation have limited efforts to research evaluation and further the development of evaluation theory, to the detriment of the field's advancement.

The lack of evidence-based research that demonstrates the value of evaluation to stakeholders, guides the profession, or helps the profession intentionally advance (Henry & Mark, 2003; King, 2003) has contributed to an ongoing call to conduct research on evaluation (Mark, 2008). The American Evaluation Association's (AEA) Topical Interest Group of Research on Evaluation defines research on evaluation to be "any purposeful, systematic, empirical inquiry intended to test existing knowledge, contribute to existing knowledge, or generate new knowledge related to some aspect of evaluation processes or products, or evaluation theories, methods, or practices" (Coryn et al., 2015, p. 161). Research on evaluation is necessary to continue to build the evidence base that supports the field of evaluation through understanding its past and anticipated future contributions, improve practice by building an understanding of what approaches work in different contexts with the goal of social betterment, moving the field towards empirically supported standards and principles, and increasing professionalism by making the rigor and worth of evaluations clear (Henry & Mark, 2003; Mark, 2008).

### *An Agenda for Research on Evaluation*

Recent work by Christie (2003), Henry and Mark (2003), and Mark (2007) demonstrates a renewed interest in research on evaluation. This interest is mirrored in the results of a survey of AEA members that ranked articles on research on evaluation as among the most frequent types of articles read by theorists and scholars (Coryn et al., 2015). Many authors have contributed to the research on evaluation use. Forss et al.

(1994) studied the ways in which evaluation can be used to enhance organizational learning; Preskill and Caracelli (1997) studied strategies that influence evaluation use; Rockewell et al. (1990) wrote of factors to encourage evaluation use; and Marra (2003) identified five key issues affecting use, just to name a few.  Since this period, research on evaluation use has been more limited as the more recent writings have focused on methods and practice applications of evaluation, rather than on researching and developing theory (Alkin & King, 2019).

To encourage the momentum of research on evaluation and continue to advance the field, Henry and Mark (2003b) drafted an agenda for research on evaluation that detailed the domains of interest for future efforts in researching evaluation.  The authors argue that to advance research on evaluation, efforts must be made through: 1) researching evaluation outcomes; 2) conducting comparative research on evaluation practices; 3) engaging in meta-evaluation, or the evaluation of evaluations; 4) using analog studies; 5) using practice component studies; and 6) evaluating technical assistance and training (Henry & Mark, 2003b).

A number of techniques and approaches can be used to focus research on the domains of interest that may advance research of evaluation, including: 1) finding opportunities to piggyback research on evaluation onto actual evaluations; 2) working to develop grant programs and other funding for research on evaluation; 3) creating evaluation programs in more universities; 4) increasing recognition of research on evaluation; and 5) adopting the five percent solution, a federal accountability, credibility, and transparency act (Henry & Mark, 2003b).  These techniques and approaches can help move the field in the direction of researching evaluation, but as research is conducted frameworks are needed to define the criteria on which theory should be judged.

**Research on Evaluation Use and Influence**

Focusing research on evaluation use is of significance to the field of evaluation because of its demonstrated prominence in the field throughout time. Alkin and King (2009) discussed how the importance of use to the field of evaluation can be seen in terms of: 1) in the incorporation of use concepts into the field's professionalizing documents (including in the Program Evaluation Standards [Yarbrough et al., 2011], the American Evaluation Association's (AEA) Competencies, and the Guiding Principles of the AEA); and 2) its role in evaluation theories (including not only theories focused on use but also in theories related to values and methods), and researchers continued focus on use. These factors indicate the importance of use to the field of evaluation and the necessity of research to continue to study the concepts and theories of use in real life settings.

In addition to theoretical discussions, evaluation use and influence have been a prominent area of focus for research on evaluation for some time. To date, much of the literature on evaluation use has focused on program evaluation in various settings and examines the way evaluations are used in different contexts (Alkin & King, 2017). The previous discussion in the chapter focused on theory and conceptualizations of evaluation use and influence. Next, this review explores current literature and research on evaluation use and evaluation influence. It is important to further examine these conceptualizations and theories in terms of research that has been conducted to better understand how they play out in real life situations and under various circumstances. The knowledge generated through research on evaluation theory and conceptualizations will allow theories to be further developed/refined and practitioners to have a better understanding of the different variables that may affect how evaluations might influence stakeholders' attitudes and actions in the future.

***Research on Evaluation Use***

Many authors have contributed to research on evaluation use in specific and unique ways. Fleisher and Christie (2009) conducted a survey with U.S. American Evaluation Association members on evaluation use. The survey sought to explore: 1) evaluators' current attitudes and experiences related to evaluation use theory and practice; 2) how the findings of the survey compared to previous study by Preskill and Caracelli (1997); and 3) what characteristics mark high endorsers of use. The authors found responding evaluators generally shared similar attitudes towards evaluation use, noting: 1) evaluators agreed stakeholders should be involved in the evaluation process; 2) evaluators take on many roles; 3) certain evaluation activities can foster organizational learning; and 4) agreement on factors that increase evaluation use (Fleischer & Christie, 2009).

Other authors contribute to the research on evaluation use in unique and varied ways. Controdiopoulous and Brouselle (2012) highlighted the relationship amongst context, choice of evaluation model, and use of the evaluation results. Neuman et al. (2013) developed a local theory about evaluation use specific to that organization and discussed how such theories might help increase use. Hojulund (2014) used institutional theory in a policy environment concluding that increased focus needs to be paid to the organizational context of the evaluation and less focus needs to be spent on the evaluation and its immediate conditioning factors when discussing use. Sturges (2015) presented a case study that documented the ways evaluation findings can be used by suggesting evaluation recommendations can be used to alleviate problems inherent in power asymmetries. Together these authors, and others, have helped build an expanding knowledge base related to evaluation use, the factors that promote use, and the various ways in which use occurs.

Cousins and Leithwood (1986) conducted a systematic review of evaluation literature on evaluation use and identified 65 empirical studies concerning evaluation use between the years 1971 and 1985. The authors found evaluation quality to be the most important characteristic influencing use, followed by decision-maker characteristics, receptiveness to evaluation findings, and relevance (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986). Johnson et al. (2009), following the same framework put forth by Cousins and Leithwood, conducted a systematic review of evaluation literature from 1986 to 2005 and identified over 98 publications that explicitly concerned evaluation use. After reviewing 41 studies, 38 were found to examine results-based use and just three studies focused on process-based use. From their review, an additional characteristic was added to the Cousins and Leithwood framework, namely stakeholder involvement.

While the characteristics influencing use identified in these studies are important, another important finding can be gleaned from the studies the authors were able to review. During both timeframes of the systematic reviews, numerous scholars had studied and discussed results-based use, but very little research had been conducted on process-based use and influence. The studies reviewed by Johnson et al. (2009) indicate that the field may still be more focused on evaluation outcomes and traditional forms of use concerned with evaluation results rather than on process use. The emergence of stakeholder involvement may reflect an expansion of participatory evaluation methods as a means to enhance use (Johnson et al., 2009) and may hint towards a shift to a focus on more recent conceptualizations of use, but there remains a lack of attention to these conceptualizations in the research.

The literature on evaluation use demonstrates its importance to the field of evaluation and the ways in which researchers and evaluation practitioners are currently conceptualizing use. What we need to know more about is to what extent (if at all) stakeholders' attitudes towards evaluation and intentions to sustain evaluation practices are influenced by being engaged in an evaluation. This study incorporated factors that promote evaluation use that have been identified in the literature (specifically, encouraging stakeholder involvement) into the case study as a means to ensure those involved in the study actually use the evaluation and the use can be explored by this study. Secondly, knowing that research on evaluation use has predominantly focused on results-based use, this study intentionally focused on researching both how the evaluation case study findings impact stakeholders and how being involved in the evaluation process impacts stakeholders. By exploring how both the evaluation findings and process impact stakeholders, this study attempted to address the gap in the literature and move the agenda to research evaluation impacts beyond results-based use forward.

### *Research on Evaluation Influence*

The current state of the literature reflects a growing but still limited body of research on evaluation influence. Herbert (2014) wrote of the need for increased quality of research on evaluation influence, noting, "many of the studies reviewed offered vague and inconsistent definitions and have applied influence in an unspecified way in the research" (p. 389). Still, a growing number of studies exploring evaluation influence can be cited. For example, Fleming (2011) wrote of the social psychology research that underpins some of the concepts and mechanisms present in evaluation influence models and assessed the quality of suggestions in the evaluation literature on ways to increase evaluation influence. Appleton-Dyer et al. (2012) proposed a conceptual model of evaluation influence applied to partnership relationships in the public sector. Their work provided an analysis approach to better understand evaluation influence in complex interactions between organizations.

With respect to original research drawing on evaluation influence, Herbert (2014) identified 28 studies citing Henry and Mark (2003a), Kirkhart (2000), and Mark and Henry (2004) in a meta-analysis. These studies analyzed aspects of evaluation influence and ultimately categorized the studies as descriptive research, analytical research, and/or hypothesis testing. Articles categorized as descriptive research used evaluation influence as a framework to present how the influence of an evaluation played out over time. Nine of the 28 articles reviewed were classified as descriptive research on evaluation influence and predominantly used a meta-evaluation approach. Herbert argued that while these articles illustrate the mechanisms and their interconnection of influence, they lack a systematic analysis of what influence did or did not occur and are limited in their ability to suggest approaches to facilitate or increase influence. The majority of the articles Herbert (2014) reviewed, 15 of the 28, were categorized as analytical research that attempted to analyze evaluation influence in an effort to explain why influence did or did not occur (p. 400). These articles frequently used a case study approach that observed evaluations with the purpose of being able to make some inferences about factors associated with evaluation influence. The remaining four studies included in the review were categorized as hypothesis testing and used evaluation influence as the conceptual foundation. Some of the studies made specific inferences based on an evaluation or among participants with experience of evaluations.

Another notable researcher focused on evaluation influence is Christie (2007). Christie (2007) used Henry and Mark's (2003) framework in her study aimed at developing a better understanding of evaluation influence. Specifically, her study aimed to understand the reported influence of evaluation on decision-makers' potential actions. Christie surveyed 326 participants using evaluation simulations, or scenarios derived from actual evaluation studies, to explore: 1) the likelihood evaluation will influence a decision-makers actions; 2) what types of data are most influential; and 3) what data sources decision-makers choose when asked about relative influence. The results of her study not only have implications for evaluators intending to influence decision-makers actions/behaviors but also for Henry and Mark's (2003) model. Her findings help bring insight into evaluation' influence on participants' actions (via decision-making) and the types of evaluative information that lead to actions. However, further study needs to be done on how evaluative information may influence an individual's beliefs and attitudes towards evaluation and the influence pathway between attitudes and actions.

This study sought to contribute to the currently limited research on evaluation influence by broadly exploring what mechanisms/outcomes of evaluation influence emerge during an evaluation case study and exploring influence theory within this context.

***Perspectives on Future Research on Evaluation Use and Influence***

While scholars continue to conduct research on evaluation use throughout the world, in various contexts, and with different groups of people, much remains to be understood in terms of evaluation influence. Even though studying evaluation influence is said to potentially be more challenging than the study of use has been, it is argued that studying influence and its pathways offers promise for better understanding evaluation and its consequences (Mark, 2011). Even though research on evaluation influence has existed for roughly twenty years, there does not yet exist expansive research literature on the topic (Alkin & King, 2019; Gildemyn, 2014). Recently, a growing interest has surrounded directing research on evaluation influence to produce a critical mass of evidence that can be used to inform evaluation practice (Lawrenz et al., 2011; Mark, 2008; Mark, 2011; Murphy, 2007; Poth, 2008).

Alkin and King (2019) recently put out a call for future research on evaluation influence and use to focus on four sets of key factors, "those related to users, evaluators, the evaluation process and the context of the evaluation" with the goal of improving evaluation practice and increasing evaluation use (p. 449). The authors urge future scholars to consider environmental conditions—including the expansion of evaluation, attention to diversity and equity, technological developments, and the potential for evaluation learning—while planning future studies.

Of the research that has been conducted on evaluation influence, many authors have pointed to areas for continued efforts, namely methods of inquiry for future research. Many authors wrote of the importance for future researchers to consider the wide range of methods available to them in their study of evaluation influence. Mark

(2011), specifically, wrote of the appeal that multiple and mixed methods hold within and across studies of influence. He suggested that a range of research methods be used and for an increase in more direct and narrow research that explores specific influence mechanisms and chains of influence (Mark, 2011).

In addition to Mark (2011), other authors have contributed to the discussion of methods for future inquiry into evaluation influence. In his review of the literature on evaluation influence, Herbert (2014) noted that many researchers have used case studies to research evaluation influence. He argues this can be problematic as the research is conducted by the same individuals who conducted the evaluation being studied, leading to potential issues of bias. He goes on to suggest researchers employ other approaches, specifically surveys and citation analyses in their work (Herbert, 2014). While promising, there are drawbacks to surveys discussed in the literature on influence. Mark's (2011) work noted that surveys administered at a single point in time may not capture the dynamic nature of influence processes and suggests methods that can better trace the sequence of change over time and across parties be used. Gildemyn (2014), taking a different approach, suggested future researchers begin by conducting a more comprehensive review of evaluation influence research. While different authors argue for different methods in the exploration of influence, it is important to remember that there are tradeoffs, resources, and pragmatics within each method that researchers must weigh and consider. In general, the authors suggest that future research make explicit their methods for the purpose of replicability (Herbert, 2014).

Adding to the body of literature on evaluation influence, this study explored evaluation influence as presented by Kirkhart's (2000) original model. Specifically, this research explored dimensions of Kirkhart's (2000) model including: 1) source of influence (including both influence that occurs during the evaluative process and influence that occurs as a result of the evaluation, findings/recommendations), and 2) time of influence (or influence occurring during the evaluation and after). The research in this study also focused on a dimension from Henry and Mark's (2003) theory of influence, namely the level at which influence occurs (focusing on the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels). By studying influence in this way, this research attempted to add value to the field of evaluation practice by building understanding of how use/influence occurs in a real life setting and generating strategies for evaluators to use to increase the likelihood influence will occur in their work with individuals and organizations. By building understanding of what works in different contexts, this research hoped to add to the literature on evaluation use, specifically noting what mechanisms promote influence to occur, at different levels, and in different settings. By building understanding of what works in different settings, evaluators will be able to better adapt their approach to fit the unique considerations of different contexts and more effectively encourage evaluation use/influence to occur. By more efficiently planning for use, evaluators can more confidently ensure stakeholders use evaluation findings, implement recommendations, and develop the knowledge/skills necessary to sustain evaluation activities.

This study proposed conducting research on evaluation influence in the context of a social services agency. The importance of this research agenda has been detailed in chapter two through the discussion of the existing literature on evaluation use/influence and the gaps that exist. Next, chapter three will describe the methodology this study used to research evaluation influence and use. Specifically, chapter three describes the participant interviews that took place before the evaluation, the evaluation that took place as part of the case study, and the participant evaluations that took place after the evaluation. Finally, details of the analytic procedures used, positionality and preconceptions of the researcher, and ethical considerations specific to the study are discussed.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodology for this exploratory qualitative study regarding the influence of evaluation on stakeholders' attitudes and actions in a social service agency. Stakeholder *attitudes* towards evaluation include the value and importance stakeholders give to the relevance and usefulness of evaluation practices and results in supporting agency planning and decision making. Stakeholder *actions* towards evaluation include using evaluation findings in program planning and improvement, using participant involvement in evaluation processes as a source of staff learning, and the broader influence of evaluation on agency policies and practices including their reach to the community.

The overall premise of the study was to examine how and in what ways stakeholder attitudes and actions towards evaluation change as a result of being involved in the evaluation process. To address this premise, the study was designed to include three phases: 1) conducting pre-evaluation interviews prior to initiating the evaluation to assess participants initial knowledge of and attitudes toward evaluation, (2) conducting the evaluation at the social service agency over a seven month period, and (3) conducting post-evaluation interviews following the conclusion of the evaluation to assess participant changes in attitudes and intentions to sustain evaluation practices going forward. The phase one and three pre- and post-evaluation interview questions were guided by the theory of evaluation influence presented by Henry and Mark (2003a) and Kirkhart's (2000) theory of evaluation influence. For phase two, a qualitative case study design was used. Case studies that use qualitative methods enable the experience and complexity of a phenomenon to be studied in-depth and interpreted in the context in which it is situated

(Simons, 2012). According to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) contextual conditions need to be included because they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (c) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. A case study design was therefore used as the social service agency evaluation was intended to assess how and to what extent client services achieved desired outcomes as intended as well as to gain relevant insights on the agency's relationship within the broader community of similar service providers.

The applicability of qualitative research and case studies for studying evaluation influence and use are discussed in-depth in this chapter. The research plan, including methodology, participants, procedures, analysis, and ethical considerations are presented below.

**Research Questions**

Research has shown that evaluation findings can help answer questions relating to implementation, effectiveness, efficiency, and attribution (CDC, 2012). More recent discussions of evaluation use have expanded to include the concept of evaluation influence as a way of capturing how evaluation can shape, support, and change people and systems. What remains unknown are the ways in which evaluation influences stakeholders' perceptions of the role of evaluation and evaluation use within their own agencies. This study was designed to explore the impact of evaluation on stakeholders' attitudes and actions while also building an understanding of successful models of social services.

In an effort to understand the impact of evaluation on stakeholders' perceptions (attitudes) of the evaluation process and use (actions) of evaluation findings this study focused on two research questions:

- RQ1: What are stakeholders' initial perceptions of evaluation prior to conducting an evaluation of a community social services agency's services?
- RQ2: In what ways does an evaluation influence the attitudes and actions of stakeholders following the completion of an evaluation of a community social service agency's service?

To address the research questions of this study, an exploratory qualitative method was used. The goal was to demonstrate the value and benefits of investing agency time and resources into ongoing evaluations of programs and services. Qualitative research methods provide "holistic, in-depth accounts and attempt to reflect the complicated, contextual, interactive, and interpretive nature of our social world" (Staller, 2012, p. 1159). It is through qualitative approaches that researchers can explore the deeper meanings of lived experiences (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). Using a qualitative approach helped to tell the stories and experiences of stakeholders to better understand how evaluation processes influence the attitudes and actions of those working in a social services agency.

**Research Design**

This study was conducted in three phases: (1) conducting pre-evaluation interviews prior to initiating the evaluation to assess participants initial attitudes toward evaluation, (2) conducting the evaluation at the social service agency which occurred over a 7 month period, and (3) conducting post-evaluation interviews following the conclusion of the evaluation to assess participants changes in attitudes and intentions to continue to sustain agency evaluation practices.

***Pre and Post Interviews on Evaluation Influence (Phases 1 and 3)***

Semi-structured interviews, using open-ended questions, were used to explore meaning, understanding, and interpretations (Staller, 2012) of participants involved in this study (see Appendix A and B). Specifically, this research focused on gaining insight into participants actions and attitudes towards evaluation and their experience of the evaluation process. Interviews were conducted at two time points, both before the evaluation took place (during phase one of this study), and after the evaluation was complete and results were shared (during phase three of this study). Phase one, pre-evaluation interviews focused on understanding stakeholder attitudes towards evaluation and use of evaluation in their roles before participating in an evaluation process. Phase three, post-evaluation interviews focused on understanding how participating in an evaluation process impacted/changed stakeholders' perceptions of the usefulness of evaluation and behaviors surrounding using evaluation and sustaining evaluation activities at their agency. Responses from phase one, pre-evaluation interviews were used to address research question one while responses from phase three, post-evaluation interviews were used to address research question two.

**Site Selection.** The first step in this study was to identify and select a site in which to situate the study. The site was a small social services agency located in a suburban community of a mid-western state. To ensure confidentiality of the agency, the agency will be referred to as 'Helping Hopkins' in this paper rather than by its true name.

Helping Hopkins was an ideal site for this research because of its potential to exemplify how evaluation may be used by and influence a community social services agency.

In the context of social service models, Helping Hopkins strives to connect and support at-risk individuals and families by collaborating with community partners. Through direct service programs, hosted services provided on-site, and social services case management, Helping Hopkins helps individuals and families living at or near the poverty line. Helping Hopkins works with participants who might otherwise be ineligible for services (i.e. 'the working poor') to access assistance and work towards stability. Co-located at a County Human Services and Public Health Department's West Suburban Regional Center, Helping Hopkins acts as a non-profit partner for the county and receives a significant number of referrals from the county.

In addition to following an agency model of collaborative, community social service delivery, Helping Hopkins was also a good fit for this research because of their interest in participating in this study. The Executive Director, who is the primary contact for this project, was excited and open to incorporating different strategies to inform, improve, and advance programming at Helping Hopkins. The agency had some history of evaluation work, but it was limited to assessing community needs as part of their most recent strategic planning process. Leadership was aware of evaluation work but had not fully experienced the breadth of possible evaluation projects and influences. Similarly, only agency leadership had been involved in the strategic planning process, so direct service staff had less experience with evaluation work at the agency. This helped to ensure stakeholders involved in this study were not positively biased to the impact and potential of evaluation services going into the evaluation process.

Helping Hopkins was also a good fit for this study because of its size. Due to the small size of the agency, there was a high likelihood that more staff and stakeholders at various levels of the agency could be involved in the study. Engaging stakeholders at various levels of the agency was useful to this study because it allowed for diverse perspectives on evaluation to be shared and compared. This allowed for the possibility that the study could explore the complex pathways of influence at the individual and agency levels more directly.

While the study was focused on the social services agency, Helping Hopkins, other external social, political, and cultural structures of the larger social services system could have influenced the agency and the stakeholders within it. Information about context was collected as it surfaced naturally throughout the course of the study, but it was not a focus.

**Participant Selection.** As this study aimed to understand the influence of evaluation findings and processes on social service agency stakeholders' attitudes and actions, participants included agency stakeholders involved in the evaluation process at Helping Hopkins. Stakeholders at the agency included direct service providers, leadership team members (i.e., the Executive Director), and members of the board of directors. The study intentionally drew upon the inclusion of staff members as well as leadership to explore the breadth and depth of differences in the way evaluation was viewed and used by individuals at various vantage points in an agency. Due to the small number of agency staff, all stakeholders were invited to participate in the study, reflecting a convenience sample (Lavrakas, 2008). Helping Hopkins stakeholders included the four direct service providers, the Executive Director, and the twelve members of the agency's

Board of Directors. Of the Board of Directors, only four were involved directly in programming conceptualizations though all were invited to participate in the study.

**Participant Consent, Confidentiality, and Participation.** Approval was sought through the Institutional Review Board at the University of Minnesota prior to contacting stakeholders to participate in the pre-evaluation interviews. The study was determined to not be classified as human subject research, and approval was granted on September 20th, 2019. Participants received by email a short description of the study including a statement of the voluntary nature of their participation in the study, including the fact that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any time, when they were invited to schedule a time for the interview. Participants were again provided a brief description of the study and a statement of the voluntary nature of the interview was provided at the start of the interview. Verbal consent was also obtained prior to the start of the interview, which was audio-recorded.

Similar to the pre-evaluation interview, participants who chose to participate in the post-evaluation interview received a statement describing the purpose of the interview, as well as the voluntary nature of their participation, by email when the interview was scheduled. At the beginning of the interview, participants were read a statement of the purpose of the interview and the voluntary nature of their participation before the interview questions were asked. The post-evaluation interviews were also audio-recorded.

To help ensure confidentiality, interviews were conducted by phone and scheduled at the interviewees' chosen time to ensure they had the opportunity to take the call at a time away from other staff members if they did not want others to know whether they participated. All identifiable respondent characteristics were removed from the transcripts. Participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts of their interviews to check for accuracy and fill in any information they felt was not included or missed in the interview. All transcripts, audio recordings, and research were kept on the researcher's password-protected, personal computer. All transcripts and audio recordings will be deleted from the researcher's computer following the completion of the study and presentation of the findings to the researcher's dissertation committee.

**Data Collection Methods**. Both pre- and post-evaluation interview questions were guided by the theory of evaluation influence presented by Henry and Mark (2003a) in "Beyond Use: Understanding Evaluation's Influence on Attitudes and Actions" and also by Kirkhart's (2000) theory of evaluation influence. Kirkhart (2000) suggested evaluation influence occurs across three dimensions: intention (i.e., the explicit purpose of the evaluation vs latent, unintended influences), source (i.e., results-based influence vs. process-based influence), and time (i.e., immediately during the evaluation, at the end of the evaluation cycle, and long-term). These dimensions were considered when drafting interview questions to allow participants to reflect both on how being involved in the evaluation process changed their thinking, attitudes, and/or actions (process-based influence) as well as how the results of the evaluation findings were used (results-based influence). The analysis focused on both intended influence as well as unintended influences in participant responses.

Henry and Mark (2003a) expand upon Kirkhart's (2000) model through their addition of a level of influence dimension. The authors note evaluation influence can occur at the individual, interpersonal, and collective level. According to Henry and Mark

(2003a), influence that occurs at the individual level may include “changes in the thoughts or actions of one or more individuals" (p. 297); changes occurring at the interpersonal level of influence may include those happening in the interactions between individuals or more precisely “to a process or outcome that predominantly takes place within interactions among individuals" (p. 301); and changes occurring at the collective level may include the “influence of an evaluation on the decisions and practices of agencies" (p. 303).

The three levels of influence informed the questions asked in the pre- and post-interviews. During post-evaluation interviews participants were asked to reflect on how the evaluation processes and findings impacted, if at all, their individual actions, and beliefs. They were also asked about how the processes and findings impacted the interactions between members of Helping Hopkins as well as the impact it had on Helping Hopkins as an agency. While each of the three levels of influence include specific types of changes or outcomes that might occur because of the evaluation, the interviews did not directly ask about each of these. This was done to allow themes to emerge from the data which demonstrate how evaluation took its effect and influenced those involved in the evaluation process and the ways participants found evaluations influence to be most important. Interview questions were piloted at two times: first with the executive director of the agency to clarify language and ensure understanding of questions; and second with a colleague of the researcher to think through the sequencing and flow of questions and the interview protocol.

***Phase 1: Pre-Evaluation Interviews.*** In an effort to better understand stakeholder attitudes and actions related to evaluation before participating in an evaluation process, interviews with participants took place before the evaluation was conducted at the social services agency. The primary purpose of the pre-evaluation interview was to collect data on participants' previous experiences with, attitudes towards, and use of evaluation. Specifically, the pre-evaluation interview focused on collecting information on participants' previous experiences with evaluation, how evaluation was (and had) been used specifically at Helping Hopkins, and participants' attitudes towards the value, use, and practice of evaluation in general. Broad questions for each participant remained the same but modifications were made to the interview protocol (including adding definitions of terms, incorporating examples, and providing additional prompts) as participants were interviewed and insight was gained about some participants' limited familiarity with evaluation terms and concepts.

Participants received an email introducing the study, the interview process, explaining the voluntary nature of participation, and included an invitation for participants to schedule an interview through an online scheduling system. Those that agreed to participate in the pre-evaluation interviews were sent the drafted questions upon scheduling the interview. This allowed participants to reflect upon questions and prepare for the interview ahead of time. During the interview, attempts were made (including sharing interview questions before the meeting, providing different options for meeting [telephone or in-person], and ensuring confidentiality of responses) to help interviewees feel comfortable and build trust through the interview protocol that focused on participant confidentiality. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for easier analysis and to increase engagement in dialogue throughout the interview.

***Phase 3: Post-Evaluation Interviews.*** Participants were again interviewed after the evaluation to gain insight into the ways participating in the evaluation process changed participants' attitudes towards evaluation and actions related to sustaining evaluation activities at the agency in the future. Similar to the process used in pre-interviews, participants were sent an email introducing the purpose of the post-evaluation interview, the interview process, explaining the volunteer nature of participation, and inviting participants to schedule an interview through an online scheduling system. Those that agreed to participate in post-evaluation interviews were sent the drafted questions upon scheduling the interview.

The primary purpose of post-evaluation interviews was to gain insight into the experience of stakeholders during the evaluation process, to uncover how the evaluation findings and processes were being used (if at all) both by staff and the agency as a whole, and to again gauge participants attitudes towards the value, use, and practice of evaluation both at Helping Hopkins and in general. Again, interview questions were in part guided by the concepts presented in Henry and Mark's (2003) theory of evaluation influence, including exploring possible evaluation influence at the individual, interpersonal, and community levels. By including similar questions gauging value and use of evaluation used during pre-evaluation interviews in post-evaluation interviews, insights into how stakeholders' attitudes towards evaluation and use of evaluation findings and processes have changed throughout the time of their involvement in the evaluation process were uncovered.

**Data Analysis Procedures.** This study involved the analysis of qualitative interview data collected in pre- and post-evaluation interviews. Common methods of qualitative analysis include thematic analysis, constant comparative methods, discourse analysis, content analysis, and narrative analysis (Staller, 2012). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was chosen for its flexibility and ability to examine the perspectives of different participants, highlight similarities and differences, and generate unanticipated insight (King, 2004).

For this thematic analysis of interview data, the researcher examined texts (including interview transcripts), applied codes, and developed themes based on those codes (Staller, 2012). The purpose of this research was to explore the influence being involved in an evaluation process had on participants' attitudes and actions towards evaluation. Subsequently, data analysis focused on the content of people's stories and experiences related to the evaluation process. Interview questions formed around the three levels of influence (individual, interpersonal, and collective levels) found in Henry and Mark's (2003a) theory of evaluation influence were used as preliminary categories for the thematic analysis. Once the data was categorized by level of influence, preliminary or 'open codes' (Suter, 2012) were applied during the first pass through the data. Codes were later combined into overarching concepts and themes were allowed to emerge from the data and analysis. Finally, axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007), or the grouping of open codes, took place to identify how codes related to each other. This process allowed for data to be organized by category (level of analysis), themes, and subthemes.

NVivo computer software was used to assist in the process of managing, organizing, and analyzing the multiple forms of evidence. A form of 'member checking' (taking results back to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences; Birt et al., 2016) occurred by taking preliminary interpretations of the data analysis back to participants to check whether the interpretations made were true, complete, or in need of amending. Efforts to engage in member checking (or 'stakeholder checking'; Suter, 2012) is a form of triangulation, a method used to increase the credibility and validity of research findings (Thurmond, 2004). By bringing data and analyses back to the participants the researcher was able to check that the interpretations being made reflected participants' actual attitudes, opinions, and actions.

***Social Services Evaluation Case Study (Phase 2)***

Since this study was exploratory in nature, a case study design was beneficial in understanding the complexity of evaluation in the context of one community social services agency (Putney, 2012). A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and is especially useful for answering "how" and "why" questions (Yin, 2003). Cases are bound by time and activity, and the researcher works to collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2014). By conducting an evaluation at the social service agency and interviewing participants before and after the evaluation, this research aimed to study how evaluation impacts the attitudes and actions of stakeholders at one social services agency (the case). This research was an instrumental case study, since the case was chosen to explore an issue (evaluation influence and use) and give insight and understanding (Stake, 1995). A single case was selected rather than multiple cases due to issues of feasibility and the time constraints of this study.

**Document Review.** One method of data collection in case studies is to collect and review documents and artifacts related to the case. Documents may consist of archival records, artifacts, and websites that provide information about the phenomenon in the context of what people make and use as resources in the setting (Putney, 2012). This study collected previous evaluation materials/products used by the social services agency, literature describing their services, copies of strategic plans, and reports of outcomes. Data was collected by reviewing public reports, websites, and other documents as well as through the collection of internal documents that were procured from the Executive Director of the agency. In reviewing the social service agency's literature and files, client files as well as any literature containing client identifying information were excluded from the review, and not obtained by the researcher.

**The Evaluation.** As a part of this study, an evaluation at the case site was conducted. An initial meeting was held with the Executive Director and the President of the Board of Directors before the evaluation took place to discuss feasibility, evaluation activities currently in place at the agency, and potential areas to focus this evaluation. With the implementation of their strategic plan, the agency had been working to improve program offerings and delivery. One area of service delivery that had yet to be assessed for development was the employment program. Through discussion, the Executive Director and President of the Board of Directors decided that the employment program would be a good program for the focus of this evaluation.

After pre-evaluation interviews took place, a scoping and planning meeting was held with agency staff, the Executive Director, and a board member. At the scoping meeting, the group worked to create a basic logic model for the employment program, detailing program inputs, outputs, and anticipated outcomes. This provided an opportunity for the group to build a shared understanding of the employment program, services offered, and goals. Once the general logic model was created, the group brainstormed questions they had about the employment program that an evaluation might be able to address. After the list of questions was created, they were prioritized to identify what information would be most valuable to the group. Given the limited evaluation activities happening at the agency, the group decided to prioritize learning more about the program, who was being served by the program, and outcomes for those that participated in/utilized services within the employment program. Follow-up meetings were held with the Executive Director and staff to identify evaluation methods to be used, create timelines, define processes, and assign roles/responsibilities.

The evaluation focused on exploring three main areas of the employment program: 1) who the employment program is serving, 2) what services within the employment program participants access and request, and 3) what happens next for participants after they have accessed the employment program. To answer these questions, a review of services documented within the agency's electronic record took place. This review allowed the group to explore what services were accessed and who accessed services within the past year. To explore these questions further, and to answer the question "what happened next" participants who had accessed the employment program within the past year were invited to participate in a brief telephone interview about their experience. agency staff conducted the review, identified participants who accessed services, and conducted interviews with participants. This allowed for participants identifying information and confidentiality to be protected. Staff and the

Executive Director collaborated in the evaluation process to help identify what questions to ask and to build the interview instrument and process. Due to language barriers, a staff member who speaks Somali completed the interviews with program participants.

After interviews were complete and electronic records were reviewed, data was sent to the evaluator for analysis. Staff were invited to review findings as they were developed and contribute to recommendations. A meeting was held with staff, the Executive Director, and Board members as an opportunity for the group to provide feedback on the drafted report and to brainstorm additional recommendations around how the findings might be used and what changes in processes might be made at the agency. A final report and executive summary including the feedback generated from stakeholders was delivered to the Executive Director, Board of Directors, and staff members as a final step to completing the evaluation.

**Positionality and Preconceptions of the Researcher.** In qualitative research, the researcher is likened to a vessel through which information is processed, meaning all observations and interpretations are filtered through the researcher who brings their own values and identity to the process (Staller, 2012). Due to the intense involvement the researcher has in qualitative studies, reflexivity must be prioritized to ensure the quality of the study (Berger, 2015). I must acknowledge that my own identity helped shape this study. I have over ten years of work experience in social services agencies and I hold both a B.A. and M.A. in social work. While this helps provide some insight into the functioning of social services agencies, I had to be mindful not to assume the experiences of the agency in the study, or the stakeholders' experiences in social services, were the same as my own.

Similarly, my identity as an evaluation scholar and professional shaped my opinions and attitudes towards the field and practice of evaluation and its potential influence. I had to be mindful to not search for the positive impacts of the evaluation or ignore any negatives. This was especially important as I was working collaboratively with the agency to facilitate the evaluation being studied. Thus, I had an additional interest in the findings and ensuring evaluation use and utilization as it can also be a reflection of myself.

**Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness.** Qualitative studies often refer to standards of negotiated validity, trustworthiness, transferability, transparency, and credibility as quality indicators (Staller, 2012). I used different strategies to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the research findings. First, I made efforts to triangulate (Merriam, 2009) data by collecting multiple forms of evidence, including interview data, survey data, and document reviews. Data was collected over multiple periods of time and through multiple ways to help ensure the trustworthiness of the data. Additionally, participants were asked to review data throughout the study. Participants were given a copy of their interview transcript to ensure their thoughts were captured accurately and completely. If a participant wanted to add to the recorded interview data, they were encouraged to do so. Initial findings of the thematic analysis were brought back to participants and they were asked if they thought the findings were consistent with what they intended to communicate about their attitudes and experiences.

Chapter three described the methodology used in this exploratory qualitative case study. The methods and procedures used to select the site/’case’ and invite participants were described. The chapter laid out the three phases in which the study was conducted, including: 1) conducting pre-evaluation interviews prior to initiating the evaluation to assess participants initial attitudes toward evaluation, (2) conducting the evaluation at the social service agency over a seven month period, and (3) conducting post-evaluation interviews following the conclusion of the evaluation to assess participant changes in attitudes and intentions to sustain evaluation practices going forward. The chapter also described the process used in the thematic analysis and efforts made to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Next, chapter four will share the findings of the analysis presented for phase one and phase three of the study.

# Chapter 4: Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine how and to what extent being involved in an evaluation process influences stakeholders' attitudes and actions towards evaluation. Henry and Mark's (2003a) beyond use model informed interview questions, including concepts within the framework at different levels of influence. As such, the results of the data analysis reflect these levels of influence in three categories: the individual level, interpersonal level, and collective level. Themes and subthemes are then reported within each category.

The results of the study are presented in two sections. The first focuses on the responses collected from stakeholders of a social service agency before conducting the evaluation and addresses Research Question 1 (RQ1): "What are the agency stakeholders' initial perceptions of and attitudes toward evaluation?" Participant responses collected during pre-evaluation interviews addressed this first research question. The second section focuses on responses collected from stakeholders following the completion of the evaluation at the agency and addresses Research Question 2 (RQ2): "In what ways does an evaluation influence the attitudes and actions of the agency stakeholders?" Participant responses collected during post-evaluation interviews addressed this second research question.

## Initial Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Evaluation

To explore RQ1, data was collected during phase one of this study through one-on-one interviews with agency stakeholders before the evaluation took place. Agency stakeholders included three members of the agency's Board of Directors, four direct service staff members, and the agency's Executive Director. Members were asked questions about their previous experience with evaluation, how evaluation was being used at the agency, and how evaluation factored into their specific staff/board member position at the agency (if at all). Responses were first coded according to the level of evaluation influence, including the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels. Themes within each level emerged from stakeholder responses and were informed by the concepts within Henry and Mark's (2003a) beyond use model. Additional thematic analysis identified emerging sub-themes or how stakeholders were discussing and describing different themes.

Table 1 presents an overview of identified themes and subthemes within each level of influence that emerged through the analysis of stakeholders' pre-evaluation interviews. At the individual level, three themes emerged: 1) enhancing client services, 2) relationship to staff roles, and 3) as a "tool" for learning. At the interpersonal level, one theme emerged, building team capacity and cohesion. Three themes emerged at the collective level: 1) understanding community needs, 2) planning programs and services, and 3) influencing agency social norms. Sub-themes emerged from the data and will be discussed in detail within each section of the findings presented below.

**Table 1**

*Stakeholders' Pre-Evaluation Attitudes and Actions Towards Evaluation*

| Level of Influence | Theme | Sub-Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Individual | Enhancing client services | Informing decision-making and planning for the future |
| | | Understanding client service needs |

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|---|---|---|
| | | Facilitating work plans between agency staff and clients |
| | Relationship to staff roles | Evaluation as a central part of the role |
| | | Evaluation as an insignificant part of the role |
| | | Evaluation as a shared responsibility |
| | As a “tool” for learning | Program improvement and innovation |
| | | Staff development |
| Interpersonal | Building team capacity and cohesion | Improving staff role alignment |
| | | Decision-making |
| Collective | Understanding community needs | Assessing community needs |
| | | Measuring community impact |
| | | Communicating with community stakeholders |
| | Planning programs and services | Informing program expansion |
| | | Agency resource allocation |
| | | Strategic planning |
| | | Ambivalence toward evaluation remains |
| | Influencing agency social norms | Valuing evaluation |

***Individual Level***

Individual-level evaluation influence refers to the impacts happening in individuals' thoughts and actions (Henry & Mark, 2003a). Interview respondents were asked to answer questions about how they use evaluation within their specific job at the agency and how they think evaluation impacts their work. Three themes emerged: 1) enhancing client services, 2) relationship to staff role, and 3) as a "tool" for learning. Each theme and emerging sub-themes, or the ways respondents described each theme, are discussed below.

**Theme One: Enhancing Client Services.** Respondents shared that a more formal approach to evaluation would be useful and important to their unique individual roles at the agency. The ways in which respondents described how a systematic approach to evaluation could be useful and important to their work make up the sub-themes associated with this theme, including informing decision-making while planning for the future of the program, understanding client service needs, and facilitating work plans between agency staff and clients. Respondents on the leadership team more frequently spoke of how evaluation could inform planning their work about the agency's future direction. In contrast, direct service staff members more often spoke of how evaluation could help build program understanding and understanding client needs.

***Informing Decision-Making While Planning for the Future of the Program.*** Several respondents on the leadership team noted that evaluation would be important to enhancing client services by informing and planning the agency's future direction. One of the agency's board members indicated that evaluation could help inform their responsibilities and decisions around policies, strategic planning, and finances: "I think it's essential. In a general sense, it's an essential part of the work as a board member. With the fiduciary responsibilities and the responsibility around policies that need to be informed by evaluation.” This board member went on to highlight the importance of evaluation for future planning: “Oh, [evaluation is] incredibly important because I think it helps- back to what I said about strategic planning or resource allocation- I think having that evaluation is crucial to determine the future direction.”

***Understanding Client Service Needs.*** Direct service staff members spoke of how evaluation could be useful to their work by increasing their understanding of the agency’s programs and services. They discussed how using evaluation in monitoring and tracking program metrics could provide insights to help identify who is using a program, what program components are most useful to participants, and what gaps in services exist:

> I'm essentially in charge of the children and youth programs that we operate, so I need to know how many families have come through and utilized our programming. How many winter coats did we give out during our coat drive, or how do people feel about the process? How easy was it for them to get the information and to get here (to our office)? There are so many ways to measure whether this is going well, and I haven't moved into that world of evaluating anything. Still, I think it would be excellent to do that, so we know where to go forward from here and if new programs should be added if some are not working well, and what the next steps are to fix those things and add new stuff in. -*Direct service staff member*

***Facilitating Work Plans Between Agency Staff and Clients.*** Direct service staff members spoke of the important role evaluation could play in helping them systematically monitor client progress to assess needs for additional services and support. Staff noted that routine monitoring/assessment activities may not only allow for staff to track client progress but could provide opportunities for staff to have additional encounters with clients where they could provide support and build client/staff relationships. One member, in particular, shared an example of how evaluation helped them build relationships with clients when they first started working for the agency:

> I was able to introduce myself to the client and introduce myself as a new clinic person. And then kind of following up with that list (client list) every three months. Most clients appreciate the fact that you are checking up with them to see if everything is okay and if they need more assistance. So, I felt like it was good to reach out to clients and say, you know, we're here, we're an agency that's still here to help you. - *Direct service staff member*

Staff interviews suggest that a formal evaluation system was not in place at the agency to monitor client progress, but the intentional outreach efforts described by the staff member above did prove to be beneficial to their work. The staff member noted that these calls provided an opportunity to gather the information needed to monitor and evaluate the program and allowed them to connect to their clients. The staff member introduced themselves to the client and asked if they had any new needs that they could help them address. For this staff member, evaluation could be useful in tracking client progress and outcomes and facilitating ongoing support and connection to clients.

In addition to connecting staff members and clients, other staff members also spoke of the potential for evaluation to be used as a tool to help them organize and prioritize services needed by their clients. One staff member described how they could use evaluation to track client visits, schedule follow-ups with clients, and assess/prioritize the client's ongoing service needs:

> I think with the workflow, it would help me organize clients and know the last time they've walked in and kind of had those dates set in place. To prioritize, okay, this person, the last time he came in was two weeks ago, let me see if I could check on them to see if they still need help. Or to evaluate what the needs are and how you would meet the more important ones than others. So, I feel like it would be very helpful for the workflow organizing who to call back. *-Direct service staff member*

**Theme Two: Relationship to Staff Roles.** Respondents answered the question of how often they envision evaluation as part of their staff role. Responses varied in frequency from evaluation being embedded into the nature of their work (i.e., always thinking about evaluation as a part of their responsibilities) to only thinking about evaluation at specific times or around particular projects. Two respondents reported that while evaluation is not currently a part of their work responsibilities, they would like to find ways to build it into their routines.

***Evaluation as a Central Part of the Role.*** Two board member respondents noted that evaluation is a part of their role at the agency, and it is something that they are continually thinking about during their work. Both board members indicated that they always question what is working, what is useful, and what can be improved for their role in programming and leadership:

> But I think the nature of my job and the nature of my background, in what I do, evaluation is kind of just second nature - of always questioning, what do we have? -*Board member*

> How is that working? How is it effective? How well are things going in terms of how different programs are working together? -*Board member*

***Evaluation as an Insignificant Part of the Role.*** Several respondents reported that while they value evaluation and think about it often, it is an insignificant aspect of their role in the agency. Respondents in this group noted different times that they think about evaluation, from never thinking of evaluation, to thinking of evaluation daily. Some respondents think about evaluation when they are running numbers at the end of the program year when thinking about/ discussing the effectiveness of specific programs, when considering other resources to support the program, and when communicating with donors and sending out communications (i.e., the newsletter) to other external stakeholders. One respondent shared that they think about evaluation in relation to the overall effectiveness of the programs they offer:

> I probably think about evaluation at least every two to three months when we're discussing some of the programs in particular because I do wonder how effective some are and, at times I wonder, are those programs that we should always be doing or are there other resources in the twin cities that could be doing that instead of us? -*Direct service staff member*

***Evaluation as a Shared Responsibility.*** Respondents also spoke of the need to add evaluation to workflows in the future to make it a routine part of the everyday work processes that all team members take responsibility for. Respondents spoke of how evaluation could help the agency be more focused on data, starting with what data they have, then what data they can get, and finally how they could use that data in evaluations. They noted how these data monitoring points and tracking would have to be woven into workflows and staff job responsibilities for effective evaluations to occur.

However, one respondent cautioned that while evaluation would be an important part of the work moving forward, it should not interfere with staff attempts to serve clients. The respondent noted that caution would have to be taken when attempting to collect client data. They emphasized that serving clients and striving to meet the agency's mission would need to remain the ultimate priority, even over efforts to collect credible data for evaluation:

> I think in the big picture it (evaluation) is very important from a management perspective on how we do everything. However, in the heat of any given moment, sometimes meeting a client's needs when they're upset and hurting is the core of what we do. So, you know, it doesn't always work to stop everything to collect data. -*Direct service staff member*

A second staff member discussed how evaluation could potentially interrupt their ability to carry out the tasks of their job. The respondent noted that all staff members would need to understand the importance of the evaluation to get on board; otherwise, evaluation could be seen as disruptive to interactions with program participants:

> So, the staff do a lot of collecting of really basic data when people come in and when the computers are all working and up it's not super difficult. Most of us all find it useful to take paper notes, and then when we have time to enter it into the computer because if you try to collect the data on the computer, at that moment,

> it's disruptive to the interaction. So, I guess I would say it gets in the way of providing customer service so that we need compelling reasons why we're collecting this specific bit of information. I think if it's understood to be important, it can be managed, but without understanding its importance, it can seem like a bother. *-Direct service staff member*

**Theme Three: As a "Tool" for Learning.** When discussing the possible use of evaluation as a tool for learning, respondents mostly discussed the ways evaluation could be used to learn about and improve programming. Others shared ways that evaluation could be used to inform what ongoing learning/education staff can pursue to serve their communities better.

***Program Improvement and Innovation.*** Over half of the respondents discussed how evaluation could be used as a tool for learning about programs and to improve program offerings to meet the community's needs better, specifically through program improvement, development, and innovation. As a method for program improvement, four respondents discussed the role evaluation could play in helping stakeholders, with one respondent saying evaluation can help them "learn about what you're doing and how you can do it better." It was noted that by learning about agency programs and services, board members and staff could identify gaps in program offerings and, in turn, use those gaps as opportunities to pursue further support/services that can be used to improve the program.

Respondents also discussed the possibility of using evaluation to educate people involved in the program, including staff, volunteers, and board members, on the program and how it functions. They described how evaluation could lead to learning what components of the program could be improved and understanding how the program could be implemented differently in the future. One board member described the importance of evaluation to be “for learning and development because it’s all around data and learning.” The board member continued that, “for growing and developing and innovating, you have to have data. You have to have an evaluation.”

***Staff Development.*** Evaluation was also discussed as a possible way to facilitate the development of staff capacities by identifying unmet needs in the community and pursuing training opportunities for staff to be more effective at addressing these unmet needs. One board member described the importance of getting feedback and learning from the community they serve, as a way to learn what they can do better as an agency:

> I think it's important to learn from the actual community or work with real people and see what’s working instead of what we think is working. We get feedback at times, but if we find gaps or are not being as successful as we hope or things are not translating, there’s lots of room for learning. We can then sign up for this seminar, or online learning, and learn how we can be more effective. -*Board member*

### *Interpersonal Level*

Interpersonal-level evaluation influence refers to impacts occurring in the interactions between individuals (Henry & Mark, 2003a). One theme emerged at the interpersonal level: building team capacity and cohesion. This theme and its sub-themes are discussed below.

**Theme Four: Building Team Capacity and Cohesion.** Most respondents reported they were not sure how evaluation impacts how their team works together. Still, they discussed ways they thought evaluation could change the way teams work together in the future. Respondents mainly discussed the potential role of evaluation in improving staff role alignment and also the part of evaluation in decision-making.

***Improving Staff Role Alignment.*** Many respondents discussed how evaluation could help bring focus to teams by building shared understanding and as a staff member said, ensuring everyone is "on the same page." Respondents from both the leadership team and staff spoke of internal and external teams that have been created at the agency for evaluative purposes. One example shared by a board member was creating an executive committee that could add focus to what the board is discussing and what metrics they are looking at: "I think having some hard data could be extraordinarily beneficial in focusing efforts and teams. Our Executive Director, who is in the driver's seat and sets priorities, can use evaluation to show where teams should be focusing their energy." Similarly, direct service staff members described the way evaluation could be used to help get everyone focused on a shared mission and understanding: "I think evaluation data can be a great tool to help people get on the same page and build understanding. I think evaluation helps teams understand and really get around the mission of the agency and focus."

***Decision-Making.*** Respondents discussed the ways teams could use increased information and data from evaluations for decision-making. Respondents spoke of the informal role that evaluation is currently taking at the agency, namely through direct observations and follow-up conversations between staff. A board member noted that if more formal evaluations were to take place at the agency, team discussions and decisions could be based more on data than they have been in the past: "I think with increased information and data from evaluation, decisions can be based more on facts; I'll call it fact-based decisions, rather than in the past."

***Collective Level***

Collective-level evaluation influence refers to the impact of evaluation on agencies' decisions and practices (Henry & Mark, 2003a). Respondents were asked to answer questions about how evaluation is/was being used at the agency, and the role evaluation could play for the agency in the future. These questions aimed to explore the role of evaluation on the collective or agency level. Three themes emerged at the collective level, including, 1) understanding community needs, 2) planning programs and services, and 3) valuing evaluation. These themes and their subthemes are discussed below.

**Theme Five: Understanding Community Needs.** Respondents spoke of three main ways they thought evaluation would be important to the agency's work. Respondents noted evaluation could be important to the agency in terms of 1) assessing community needs, 2) measuring community impact, and 3) communicating to community stakeholders.

***Assessing Community Needs.*** Six of eight respondents spoke of the role evaluation could play in assessing community needs and linked this type of evaluation to an opportunity for the agency to grow. Respondents discussed the potential for evaluation to identify unmet needs in the community. Knowing what needs remain in the community could help the agency expand its program offerings to meet this need in the community and potentially reach a new audience. One board member shared that through assessing community needs, the agency could grow both its program offerings and program reach:

> As far as our work in the community, I think it will help us evaluate if there are areas of growth, not because we're deficient in it, but because there's a need in the community and somebody needs to show up and would that be a good place for our agency to show up if that makes sense. Like capacity wide and development. - *Board member*

A second board member explained that evaluation could help the agency assess if they were successfully meeting the needs of the community and identify areas for providing additional support:

> I think in order for us to understand and serve the community that we're trying to serve in the best way possible, we need to evaluate and see one, are we doing that and two, are there gaps or anything else we should be doing to help them further. - *Direct service staff member*

***Measuring Community/Program Impact.*** When discussing areas for improvement, respondents noted how important evaluation might be for measuring program impact. By measuring program impact, the agency could better understand where the program is succeeding while also identifying potential areas for program improvement and reform. This information could help the program decide what components of the program to continue to put resources into and grow, and which components of the program to stop pursuing:

> Because if we're not stepping back and measuring where we're going, what our successes are, where there are some failures and room for improvement, then it's

> hard to say that you're taking your work to the next level. I feel like it'd be easy to just fall into a place of complacency with work if you don't have a process in place for evaluating. What worked well 20 years ago may not be working well today. *-Board member*

***Communicating with Community Stakeholders.*** In addition to assessing community needs and measuring community impact, respondents also noted the potential role of evaluation in communicating with external stakeholders. Leadership, specifically, noted how evaluation could be essential to the agency's work because it would give them talking points that they could share with external stakeholders. Leadership spoke of the potential for evaluation to provide a shared language to talk to funders about their program, to collect donations, and increase partnerships:

> So, I think it's a matter of how do you serve the community? How do you use your resources? And then I think the third thing is that you have to be able to connect with our community for fundraising, growth, and development and getting those donations. How are we saying that we're using it to make the agency viable and strong? *-Board member*

**Theme Six: Planning Programs and Services.** When asked about the potential impact evaluation could have on planning programs and services at the agency, respondents spoke about evaluation's role in informing program expansion, agency resource allocation, and strategic planning. In contrast, some respondents described ambivalence toward evaluation.

***Informing Program Expansion.*** Half of the respondents reported seeing evaluation as potentially influencing the expansion of their agency's scope of work.

Through informal evaluations, the agency leaders were able to recognize that the community they were serving was changing, and they needed to bring on a new staff person that could better serve this new population. Following this, leadership respondents wondered what other information evaluations might bring to light that would help them amend their program offerings: “It was when we witnessed the changing needs of the community; we saw that there was significant growth in our Somali population. That observation led us to bring on another staff member full time. So, I think it changed our scope of work.” -*Executive Director*

Through another form of informal evaluation—observation—the agency noted that more and more participants were coming in requesting employment services, explicitly asking for help searching for and applying to different jobs. As a result of this observation, the employment services program was expanded, and more funding was provided to meet this need of the community. Respondents reported that evaluations in the future might be able to help them better monitor and track their service utilization and client feedback to improve service offerings in the future. Specifically, one staff member shared:

> Well, for the employment aspect, I feel like we were able to see that there was a need for more services. We did see a lot of people coming in for help with job searches. I feel like with that information we were able to put more energy into that employment aspect of it, to help more participants apply for employment. -*Direct service staff member*

Finally, respondents spoke of how evaluation could help to identify the needs of community participants. In one instance, the agency held focus groups with program participants to better understand what barriers they experienced and what services they needed. Through these focus groups, the agency was able to identify additional areas they could provide grant funding to support participants, including providing emergency transportation and childcare funding and funding for participants to attend various employment-related training. These focus groups, however, were not routinely scheduled or conducted even though the information obtained was beneficial in program planning. Respondents noted that participating in formal evaluations in the future could build an even stronger understanding of community participants' needs:

> So, we used to only fund emergency transportation grants, but now are able to provide funds to people that are wanting to take different training. We now set aside funds for people who are interested in completing a training whether it's like a CNA training or something else. We also provide funding for people that are having a hard time paying childcare bills. Having data demonstrating the need was an important factor in deciding to create these funding opportunities. *-Direct service staff member*

***Agency Resource Allocation.*** Half of the respondents spoke of the potential importance of evaluation for making decisions about how program resources should be used. Three of the four respondents who discussed the importance of evaluation for resource allocation were board members or members of the leadership team. One of the four respondents was a direct service staff member. Respondents emphasized needing to maximize the impact of the minimal resources available to the agency. They reported that evaluation could be used to identify areas to direct resources that would make the most significant impact not only in their programming but also in their target community.

One board member described how resource allocation is especially important in the nonprofit space because it determines how many people the agency is able to serve: “I know just coming from a nonprofit space, our resources are very important because it's how many people we can essentially help.” Another board member went on to describe how evaluation can help the agency make the biggest impact possible with the funds that are available: “You're receiving funds that you want to make sure are being used in the most impactful way possible without being redundant to other services in the area. Evaluation is going to really help do that.”

Respondents discussed various types of resources available to the agency including financial resources, time, and human resources. One board member noted the importance of considering all types of resources when working for an agency that is reliant on donations and limited sources of funding:

> I think the second part of it (the importance of evaluation to work being done at the agency) is when you run so lean (on so little), you have to figure out how you're going to use your resources in the best way possible. Whether that's the human resources or it could be the financial resources here or the volunteers' time. You've got to use them and maximize them the best way possible. -*Board Member*

A second board member echoed this statement and noted that evaluation could help the agency focus their efforts in order to make the most of the resources available to them:

> Yeah, I think because we're small it’s really important to know how we can get the most bang for our buck. We only have limited people and limited resources.

> We want to do as much as we can do with what we've got. Evaluation that helps us focus our efforts on the ways we can be the most beneficial, I think would be really important. *-Board Member*

As an agency that relies on external funding and charitable donations, respondents noted the importance of evaluation to identify who they are receiving funding from, who their repeat donors are, and any patterns they might see related to the funding the agency receives. Also, they noted how they could use evaluation findings to communicate the success of the services they provide to clients to help share the story of their work to potential funders as a way to secure future donations:

> Perhaps I've seen a little more of that with the donor side. We're trying to focus on how the board can reach out to certain people based on evaluating or you know, crunching numbers anyway, like who are we getting from, who are our repeat donors, when, and what do they tend to give to...I also think we can measure success with our service to our clients, which plays into how successful we are with getting donations. *-Board member*

***Strategic Planning.*** Another way respondents described the potential importance of evaluation at the agency was for informing strategic planning. Three respondents discussed using evaluation for strategic planning for programming. One respondent noted that currently, evaluation is done more informally through observation and conversation with other staff. They described how they could use evaluation data points to identify what services participants are coming in for and identify any trends that might be helpful when thinking about what direction the program should go in the future:

> The strategic plan that we are going through on the social service side is more based on the conversations of reporting back on what we're getting asked. So it's not a formal evaluation with the participants of what your top three needs are; it's more like seeing, asking, looking at the database and saying, yeah, this is how many people came in this year for employment, so this is what we need to do. - *Board member*

Another staff member elaborated on using strategic planning for programming but gave examples of how evaluation could be used for strategic planning within the delivery of the agency's employment program, specifically. The respondent discussed how evaluation could be used for setting goals within the employment program by looking at trends of what types of jobs people are applying for and tailoring the connections the agency makes in the community to fit the types of jobs participants are looking for:

> So when it comes to strategic planning, I feel like it would be setting goals of seeing the trends of what kind of jobs people are applying for and then going into the community and meeting different types of employers and connecting- kind of doing outreach on our side. So as of right now, it's mostly setting goals of going into the community to search for different types of employers to see who would best meet our client's employment goals and figuring out how we can connect our clients better. -*Board member*

The third respondent, a board member, spoke of how the agency used a community needs assessment to identify the community's needs within the agency's affordable housing, childcare, and employment areas.

***Ambivalence Toward Evaluation Remains.*** Half of the respondents noted that they have not yet seen evaluation formally occurring at the agency. Several respondents noted that the planning is either in process and will occur in the future or is happening more informally through staff observations and discussions. One staff member noted that staff members are continually observing agency operations and flow and having discussions with one another because of the small size of the agency. They commented that it is through these more informal types of evaluation that programming has been impacted the most:

> We made changes in the funding we give to childcare and for training, but it was mostly based on conversations we were having and checking in with each other. Because we are a small team we could say, this is what we're seeing, this is what people are asking for. And that's more driving program changes, I'd say. If everyone's asked for money for training. Okay. What does that look like? Without doing surveys or other things. -*Executive Director*

Finally, one leadership member spoke of how evaluation has started to be implemented but has not yet yielded sufficient data to inform program changes. Specifically, this member discussed using evaluation to inform the agency's strategic planning efforts over the next three years:

> We started three years ago with a strategic plan and trying to identify the community's needs limiting to areas like affordable housing, childcare, and employment. From that, we've tried to identify what we're currently offering and evaluate in that aspect. But yeah, I wouldn't say we're at that point; this is the third year of our three-year plan. The goal is by the end of this year to have that

> information, evaluate, and then pull a trigger and make a decision. -*Board member*

**Theme Seven: Influencing Agency Social Norms.** Respondents shared experiences of how the agency can use evaluation to build a culture that values data collection and accurate reporting.

***Valuing Evaluation.*** Two board members spoke of the growing emphasis that leadership is placing on data collection. They described how this ever-increasing emphasis had generated more awareness of what information the board wants to collect and the importance of collecting data at the leadership level. They both shared that this data could lead to an increased awareness of what's happening at the program level and help encourage change at the agency. Their sentiment was echoed by the Executive Director, who said the board's efforts have already started to shift perceptions about the importance of continuing to collect data. One of these board members noted that once they can shift the norms at the leadership level, they will then work to change the data gathering attitudes and behaviors throughout the agency to prioritize collecting this information:

> From the board side, I guess we're very focused on the data gathering and what data can we get since everything we do is very qualitative and there's so much out of our control in terms of like, well the more people we help, is that because the word is getting out there or is that because the economy's doing poorly and there are more people that need help? So, we're trying just to get the data gathering and the metrics. So, I think that kind of change or data-gathering behavior is what I'm trying to get at. -*Board member*

The importance of evaluation and data emphasized at the leadership level has begun to trickle down to direct service staff. A couple of staff members are now talking about data collection and accurate reporting becoming a norm at the agency, but this has yet to be formalized. Respondents spoke of the importance of continuing to grow a culture of evaluation at the agency and ensuring that all members of the agency, at leadership and staff levels, understand the power of data for decision making and learning:

> I would, I mean, this would be within the last 12 months, I'd say data collection and accurate reporting is becoming more of the norm, which is, I mean, the normal as opposed to the kind of wishy-washy writing of someone's case notes on a post-it. But that's what was happening when I came (to work at the agency). So, I mean, that's a long-term trend of evaluation and accurate reporting is now the norm. *-Direct service staff member*

**Evaluation Influence on Stakeholders Attitudes and Actions**

During phase three of the study, participant responses were collected through one-on-one stakeholder interviews after the evaluation took place to explore research question two. Agency stakeholder participants included four members of the agency's Board of Directors, four direct service staff members, and the agency's Executive Director. Participants were asked to reflect on their experience in the evaluation process, lessons learned, how findings were being used, and how their attitudes toward evaluation changed since being involved in the evaluation process.

Table 2 presents an overview of identified themes and subthemes within each level of influence that emerged through the analysis of stakeholders' post-evaluation interviews. At the individual level, two themes emerged: 1) changed attitudes towards evaluation, and 2) evaluation influence on professional roles. At the interpersonal level, three themes emerged: 1) gaining insights on agency programs and services, 2) improving agency programs and services, and 3) informing team conversations. Two themes emerged at the collective level: 1) planning programs and services, and 2) influencing agency norms (valuing evaluation). Sub-themes emerged from the data and will be discussed in detail within each section of the findings presented below.

**Table 2**

*Stakeholders' attitudes and actions towards evaluation after the evaluation case study*

| Level | Theme | Sub-themes |
|---|---|---|
| Individual | Changed attitudes towards evaluation | Affirming positive attitudes |
| | Evaluations influence on professionals' roles | Facilitating internal discussions |
| | | Communicating to external audiences |
| | | Informing agency service delivery |
| | | Enhancing agency support for services |
| Interpersonal | Gaining insights on agency programs and services | Identifying who is receiving agency services |
| | | Assessing the service needs of agency clients |
| | | Understanding the relevance of agency services to clients |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Determining the impact and outcomes of services |
| | Improving agency programs and services | Adapting services to better meet client needs |
| | | Building and strengthening community partnerships |
| | | Strengthening agency-client relationships and connections |
| | | Improving agency programs and services alignment |
| | Informing team conversations | Sharing diverse perspectives |
| | | Informing internal conversations |
| | | Informing external conversations |
| Collective | Planning programs and services | Defining programs and services |
| | | Identifying the agency's role in the community of services |
| | Influencing agency norms (valuing evaluation) | Creating and embedding evaluation practices |
| | | Thinking evaluatively about other programs |

### ***Individual Level***

Individual-level evaluation influence refers to the impacts happening in individuals' thoughts and actions (Henry & Mark, 2003a). Respondents described the way the evaluation findings and evaluation process influenced them at the individual level including changing attitudes towards evaluation and using evaluation in professional roles.

**Theme One: Changed Attitudes Towards Evaluation.** Respondents shared how participating in the evaluation process influenced their previously held opinions of, and attitudes towards, evaluation. Most respondents noted that being involved in the evaluation process either reaffirmed the positive value and importance they held for evaluation or changed their opinion of evaluation from neutral to positive.

***Affirming Positive Attitudes.*** The majority of respondents (all but two) reported that being involved in the evaluation process affirmed their previously held positive attitudes towards evaluation. These respondents were a mix of leadership and direct staff. Leadership respondents tended to focus on how their professional backgrounds and previous work experience outside of their current administrative or board position had demonstrated to them the importance of evaluation. One board member shared how their professional background reinforced the importance of evaluation in decision-making: “I think coming from my background as an auditor, I already knew evaluation was very important for data to support decision making and all of that. So, it just reinforced that it is important.”

Direct service staff members more frequently noted that while they knew of the value of evaluation before this experience, participating in this evaluation helped them learn more about the evaluation process and helped them understand the potential value it could have in informing other areas of work at the agency:

> I definitely didn't think evaluation wasn't important, but I just didn't know enough. Now I can see how evaluation could be a useful tool for so many things. I mean everything we do could be evaluated and better understood. So, I am excited that I've gotten a little more involved because I think this is going to be useful for us to do a little more of this work going forward or maybe a lot more. *–Direct service staff member*

One staff member shared that being involved in this evaluation process influenced them to change their opinion of evaluation from negative to positive. The respondent noted that they had only seen evaluation be used for reporting back on grants for funders in the past. By being involved in this evaluation, the respondent shared that they learned that evaluation can be done for many other purposes and can be driven by the agency's needs and goals:

> I think this evaluation process makes my opinion of evaluation more positive. The purpose of this evaluation felt more open, as opposed to just being done for grant dollars. This evaluation asked 'what do we need to know from the community' rather than us having to look for an answer before we even started the evaluation. *-Direct service staff member*

Finally, a few respondents noted that in addition to confirming their previously held favorable view of evaluation, participating in the evaluation process also demonstrated that they were capable of engaging in evaluation activities moving forward. By participating in the evaluation process, respondents were able to view evaluation as positive, feasible, and adaptable to different situations and contexts. Specifically, one board member noted that they were worried about the agency's ability to carry out the evaluation before it took place but learned through the evaluation process that with support the agency is capable of participating in an evaluation that is tailored to their unique context and needs:

> I'm a scientist (board member) and I think a standard process is always valuable. So I didn't go in as a skeptic, but I would say if I had any reservations about it, it was that it sounds daunting, and we (the agency) have a very small staff and are very busy. So, if I had any concern up front, I just didn't know if we had time to do this justice. And, I maybe was a little bit worried that we wouldn't be able to put our best foot forward and get the value from it. And I guess what I've learned is you can tailor the evaluation process to the situation. You know, it's not a one size fits all. So I've learned, I think that in these situations with nonprofits and agency evaluations, that they can do this if you have someone who knows what they're doing and you can adapt it as you go, as you learn more and make it so that it fits the situation. *-Board member*

**Theme Two: Evaluations' Influence on Professional Roles.** Respondents described how they were currently using what they learned through the evaluation process in their professional roles. The ways respondents reported using evaluation findings varied by position held. Evaluation findings were used to facilitate internal discussions, communicate to external audiences, inform the employment program's delivery, and enhance support for service delivery.

***Facilitating Internal Conversations.*** Most respondents at the leadership level (board members and Executive Director) described using the evaluation findings to facilitate conversations among agency leadership regarding the agency's mission, goals, services, and outcomes. One board member described how they are using the evaluation findings to define the purpose of the agency and to have conversations with others at the agency about their purpose:

> So, this definitely had a lot of impact for me as far as how I could leverage this (evaluation findings/results). And, for me, it was a matter of how can I take this and have a conversation with (the Executive Director) and potentially more of the team members around it? Again, around adding value. What's the purpose we (the agency) provide versus what other agencies provide and use that to have conversations around focusing our efforts? We still have to provide good service, but we have to be smart about how we leverage other resources, and this evaluation has helped us begin to have those discussions. -*Board member*

***Communicating to External Audiences.*** Both respondents in leadership and direct staff roles described using the evaluation findings when communicating with external audiences (e.g., funders, partnering agencies in the community, etc.). Nearly all of the respondents at both levels described how the evaluation results helped build their understanding of the employment program. For half of the respondents, the evaluation gave them information about the employment program to use when communicating to individuals and other agencies in the community about this agency's services. One staff member described using the findings when explaining services to potential clients and donors:

> I'm more of a behind the scenes person and this really helped me get up to speed on what they (other service providers) are doing. So, this provided a great perspective for me to use when I'm explaining to people what we offer, whether

it's a potential client or a potential donor. I can tailor a lot of what you provided in the report in how we go forward both helping with clients but also how we talk to our donors and the board about what we're doing. -*Direct service staff member*

Several respondents also described how the evaluation provided them with data to use when describing program efforts and impacts to external audiences. These respondents noted how grounding their descriptions of the employment program in data helped strengthen their communication of the agency's work and added credibility to their promotion of the program. One board member shared how they are able to use evaluation data to build partnerships in the community:

It's great to have an understanding of the agency based on data and great to see the numbers. I have been able to pull some of that evaluative information and share it with community groups and affiliations. I am able to be more solidly on the ground as I speak to the good work that the agency does. I can pull from this report and be able to use strong data to build these partnerships. -*Board member*

***Informing Agency Service Delivery.*** In addition to the leadership respondents, all direct service staff who work in the employment program described using the evaluation findings to inform their delivery of services and interactions with clients. Staff described how they are using direct feedback from the evaluation on what services clients communicated were beneficial to them:

I think for me, it was important to learn about the importance clients put on learning technology (in the employment program). Knowing that let me know that I need to continue to teach the technology piece and make sure people

> understand how to access their email, what websites to go to for job searches and to make sure they understand the process. -*Direct service staff member*

These same direct service staff in the employment program also described using client feedback to identify agencies in the community that would be helpful to collaborate with to strengthen services and supports available to clients to meet other needs they have. For them, the evaluation highlighted services clients wanted, such as training opportunities outside of the agency's scope of service. Using this information, staff could look to community agencies to partner with in order to further support clients:

> I would say the evaluation highlighted the need to connect more, and do more community outreach and to make sure that people are getting referred to services….making sure that when clients have requests or needs that we (the agency) can't serve as far as like job skills and different things, that we'd have those connections with the community and be able to make the right referrals. -*Direct service staff member*

Finally, several of the direct service staff described the value of the evaluation process in connecting with clients that had previously been served by the agency's employment program. Staff found that clients who were contacted to participate in the evaluation interviews often appreciated the opportunity to reconnect with staff and ask for additional support and services. Staff at the agency noted that scheduling time to reconnect with previously served clients is an activity that they will schedule into their workflows moving forward to ensure that client needs have been met and to facilitate further services if requested by the client:

> I feel that following up was very good for clients. That for them to get a call back a couple of months after they came in (to the agency), asking, 'how are you? Do you need help with any resources?' or you know, kind of just checking up on them. That was one of the things that I took from the evaluation, that clients appreciate that. Getting a call from an agency in their community and kind of sending the message that, 'yes we care about you' and 'if you need help, we're available. -*Direct service staff member*

***Enhancing Agency Support for Services.*** Finally, both direct service staff working outside of the employment program described ways they have used the evaluation findings and processes they learned throughout the evaluation to enhance their support of the employment program and other agency services. These staff members described being able to take what they had learned about the employment program and incorporate that information into promotional materials they created for the program:

> I don't do as much of the direct interaction with the clients, so I'm more of a behind the scenes person. But I think the findings helped educate me on the employment program. Now when I'm asked to make signs or I'm asked to make forms for the program, or I'm asked to help with the brochures that we post, it just really helps me get up to speed on what they're doing in the employment program. Because I don't know, we see them (employment program direct service staff), and we don't always have long in-depth conversations about what's happening and what's going on (in the program) so this helped me learn more about what they're doing. -*Direct service staff member*

These same staff members described the importance/value of collecting consistent and accurate information for all clients served by the agency. They noted that participating in the evaluation process and looking over the evaluation findings highlighted the need for the agency to do a better job of more consistently collecting information from all clients to better track service utilization and understand their programming and who they are serving:

> Well, I think it (the evaluation) has me thinking a lot about the importance of the careful tracking, consistent record keeping of our participant data and the importance of asking the right questions…And this is just bringing more to light the need for me to spend some time looking harder into what works well for us and what could we streamline to makes things easier and more efficient on our end like client registration. Because honestly, when people are filling out their intake form, it's busy and crazy and so many people are coming through that we are really not gathering info very well. And then it is like we're missing almost all-important data on somebody and we can't even really create a proper record for them because we have barely any info. It's hard to measure even how many people we are serving if we can't even input that information correctly. So, I think it's just some work for me to do on making sure we're not wasting time asking the wrong things from the beginning and then making sure we stay consistent with what we're doing. *-Direct service staff member*

### ***Interpersonal Level***

Interpersonal-level evaluation influence refers to impacts occurring in the interactions between individuals (Henry & Mark, 2003a). Respondents described the way the evaluation findings and evaluation process influenced interpersonal dynamics, or the interactions between staff and leadership members, including gaining insights that lead to the improvement of agency programs and services as well as informing team conversations.

The evaluation findings and report were reviewed and discussed in a team meeting with staff and the Executive Director and, again, in a meeting with the Board of Directors and the Executive Director. Each group had the opportunity to critically discuss the findings and brainstorm recommendations on how the agency could implement changes. Both groups discussed ways to modify the employment program and ways they can incorporate more evaluation activities into the agency's work in the future.

**Theme Three: Gaining Insights on Agency Programs and Services.** During the debriefing meetings of evaluation findings, both groups (the board and staff) had the opportunity to review and discuss the evaluation findings. All respondents described how the evaluation findings helped them learn more about the employment program and the clients being served by the program. Specifically, all respondents described the way the evaluation findings helped them learn who is being served, their needs for services, how client services were being utilized, and the employment outcomes clients achieved.

***Identifying Who Is Receiving Agency Services.*** All respondents reported using the evaluation findings to build a collective understanding of who was being served by the employment program during their team conversations. By learning more about the client's background, prior work experiences, and demographics agency, staff were able to better understand who they were serving and what services were most needed to support their employment goals. Developing a more systematic way of collecting this information and using it in client service planning was a recommendation discussed by two staff members who work in the employment program:

> So, it gave us good information, I'll say just to start with the demographics as far as “who do we serve?” and “who needs some of that help (that the employment program provides)?” I think that helped me understand that population and see if it does somewhat align with our typical user or clients, and yes, it does. So, it just confirmed that part of it. -*Board member*

***Assessing the Service Needs of Agency Clients.*** By learning more about who they are serving, all respondents in both leadership and staff groups reported they better understood the needs of people served in the employment program. Specifically, through the evaluation, some respondents were able to identify client needs around receiving language-specific services that were immediate. One board member in particular went into further detail about the need for language specific services in the community and the agency’s ability to meet this need:

> I think part of the community need we saw was around language barriers. So I think even though there might be other resources available in the community, people might not be able to be served by them and this is an area where we can provide support because we have staff that speak their language. -*Board member*

***Understanding the Relevance of Agency Services to Clients.*** The need for clients to receive immediate and brief services was highlighted by the evaluation findings, which demonstrated how clients access and utilize services at the agency. Both leadership and direct service staff members noted that the evaluation findings pointed out that most of the agency’s clients access employment services for a brief period of time at the agency.

Most respondents in both groups reported that the evaluation highlighted that clients often sought direct assistance with one specific need related to employment services. Most often, clients requested help building resumes, setting up technology (email) to assist in the job application process, or needing assistance with the job search process. In contrast, clients that accessed services more than once typically had more in-depth and longer-term employment related needs. This finding was shared by a staff member who works directly in the employment program:

> And the other reason why people only access employment services once is that they need help with a specific thing like a resume so they can go to a staffing agency. So, they are aware of where to find a workplace elsewhere or what to and the next steps. I would say for most of the people who will come in more than once, they are not familiar with where to go, how to apply for a job, or what the steps are for getting employment. *-Direct service staff member*

***Determining the Impact and Outcomes of Services.*** Finally, all respondents described the way the evaluation findings were used to help build an understanding of "what happened next" for the people who were served by the employment program. For all respondents, the evaluation findings helped provide a better understanding of what companies hired their clients and what type of employment they were hired for. Specifically, staff working in the employment program said: "It was interesting to see what areas people were hired in; how many hours they're working; who started as a temporary worker and was later offered a permanent position; and just some of those kinds of things- like where people landed."

**Theme Four: Improving Agency Programs and Services.** In using what they learned about the program and the clients served, all respondents were able to begin thinking of ways to improve the employment program to better meet the needs of those being served. Respondents reported that they shared their ideas with their teams while meeting to talk about the report. During interviews, all respondents described how the evaluation helped them identify opportunities to improve the program by building and strengthening community partnerships, strengthening client relationships and connections, and connecting and coordinating employment services to other agency programs in the community.

***Adapting Services to Better Meet Client Needs.*** By learning what services clients requested most frequently, all leadership respondents and half of the staff respondents were able to identify areas where the agency could adapt their services to increase support for the services most requested by clients. One staff member described client's need for help building resumes and the ways in which the agency shifted their services to meet the need: "Most people (clients) were looking for resume help and help responding to individual job ads that were posted, so now we are asking how we can adapt our services and our engagement with individuals to widen that support and provide more career services." Using the data to identify "what the common needs we're seeing with all the people we serve and what services we can provide to help clients more" was a takeaway also shared by the Executive Director. In knowing what services were needed most by clients, all of the responding board members and several staff reported they were able to think through what areas of service would be worth investing more resources into to further support clients:

> Since we're a small agency and have limited resources, we have to take what services people want and see if we really can offer them. And, we have used the information you provided as a starting point. We are looking at what additional services people requested and asking are they realistic for us to provide- are they an efficient use of our resources- or is it better just to know other agencies (that we can refer clients to)? - *Direct service staff member*

Learning about what services were utilized by clients and what services were requested by clients that the agency does not currently provide has led to conversations between board members about what services are feasible for the agency to provide and what services are better left addressed by community partners. This feedback has provided grounding for respondents when discussing how their services can, or cannot, be adapted to better meet the needs of their clients.

***Building and Strengthening Community Partnerships.*** Both staff and board members noted that the data highlighted improvements that could be made to the employment program by building and strengthening partnerships with agencies in the community. Board members noted that the data demonstrated that clients do follow-up with community agencies when referrals are made, so building stronger relationships with these community partners and others would allow for innovative service development and connections to be made.

> The fact that most of the people you spoke to reached out when they were requested to do that is great and there really are some great partnerships. We need to forge deeper partnerships with specialized employment services and have some kind of joint strategic planning session, and maybe even pilot a program with a

> particular industry as a learning point that we could get some data on and apply. We're thinking about cultural ambassadors for employment. If we find diverse community representatives who are currently working in industries, and we bring them together, maybe as part of that pilot, then we can use it as a model to build this cultural ambassador network that could mentor, coach, advise, and supplement our staff resources. -*Board member*

Two board members and the Executive Director noted that building community partnerships will help create new opportunities for clients served by the employment program and provide an opportunity for employees at the agency to focus on providing specialized services. Building relationships with community partners—who are experts in areas of service that employees at the agency are not experts in—allows for referrals to be made that will not only potentially better serve clients employment needs but also free up agency employees' time to provide the services in which they are the experts:

> We potentially could be doing a better job of looking at this data and thinking about the referrals and the other resources that are out there that people should and could be utilizing. We need to ask ourselves how we use this (data) to understand where we are the experts. Because I certainly don't feel that the employees (at the agency) are experts in the employment field. I think that's what the Minnesota sites or offices are really good at. That's what they specialize in. So, I think it's best to align them with the experts, give them those resources, and then you can focus on other needs of the clients. -*Board member*

***Strengthening Agency-Client Relationships and Connections.*** One direct service staff member discussed the importance of staying connected with clients once they complete agency services and find employment. Respondents noted that the evaluation findings demonstrated that clients often only accessed the employment program one time. This finding prompted staff to think of ways to maintain a relationship with clients to further support their employment needs and follow-up on their employment outcomes, even after being served by the program:

> At some point, the findings highlighted the fact that most people are coming in at one time, just once, and then we may or may not see them again, but is there a way to maintain that connection, to see what further help we could be giving? I liked that idea of if it's possible and it's within the capacity of the people working there (at the agency) to do those check-ins to see how things turned out. So, finding ways to stay connected, felt like a great recommendation. *-Direct service staff member*

One board member also described this improvement and discussed ways to use different technologies and tools to stay in contact with clients. By connecting to clients in different ways, this board member hoped the agency would be able to extend their impact and relationship with clients beyond a single visit:

> It's clear that we need to have more real-time relationships with people that we work with and virtual tools, whatever they are, can do that. And I don't think our agency has embraced that in the past for many reasons like other agencies have. So I think about CRM (customer relationship management) type tools -if you're my client I might know about you, who you are, what your cat's name is and when your birthday is, and I can know when you started a certain job, and I might even be able to say, well, how's it been going, you know, and try and track their

> progress better. So how do we use technology to keep that cadence of the relationship alive and address the whole point of the one-time visitors only? Why is that? What can we do to keep the relationship living and extend our impact? -*Board member*

***Improving the Alignment of Agency Programs and Services.*** Finally, board members discussed using the evaluation findings to think about how the employment program could be further linked to the other services offered at the agency. These respondents noted that it's not enough to help clients secure employment. Rather, they need to ensure that the client's employment is sustainable by providing other services, such as transportation and childcare. This will help improve the employment program by adding additional support for client employment outside of the job search:

> Your conclusions helped us see what additional services were aligned with our current employment services which we need to pay attention to such as transportation and childcare. So, when we're talking about employment, we should also be asking about transportation. We should already be positioning it as a stability service. If you get a job, then where are your kids going to stay? And if you get a job that's too far away, and you can't get the bus, how are you going to get there? And if it's around our mission about making change sustainable and supporting people on their longer-term journey, then I think we can put those things together more clearly. -*Board member*

**Theme Five: Informing Team Conversations.** Respondents discussed how both the evaluation process and the evaluation findings helped facilitate conversations with the internal board member and staff team meetings and with external community service agency partners. They described how the evaluation process was useful in obtaining feedback from direct service staff who have differing views on what services the agency should be providing.

***Engaging Other Agency Staff to Share Diverse Perspectives.*** Staff members described the benefit of using evaluation findings in engaging other staff across the agency to obtain feedback on agency services from diverse perspectives. These four respondents described the value of hearing their colleagues' opinions as they are all involved in agency programming in different ways and contribute to the agency’s work from unique angles. These staff members noted that this allowed for more significant brainstorming, an ability to see the bigger picture, and an opportunity to engage those that otherwise might not immediately want to participate in the conversation:

> I am appreciating now how much I need other people's input and thoughts and sharing some ideas and brainstorming. It’s wonderful to take time and just start even asking some beginning questions with them (others at the agency) because they've all worked for the agency longer than I have at this point, and they've all been involved in different ways with these programs. Like we all contribute something from each of our different angles. I had some ideas, and they had some different thoughts, like what do we most want to find out about these programs right now and what's going to help us move forward? And it is totally different from a caseworker perspective than from my perspective working at the front desk. So, I think coming together around evaluation and asking for some help and sharing some ideas and everybody being a part of the process is helpful.

> We're all involved in this work, so everybody's perspective is going to be helpful in figuring it out. *-Direct service staff member*

Another staff member added that engaging staff across the agency in the process allowed for staff who otherwise are less likely to share their opinions to come to the table, speak up, and be a part of the process.

> And so, this is a way to get a lot of feedback from people who aren't always the loudest talkers or in the senior role. There's a lot of really great perspectives, and sometimes the data doesn't support what people are saying, so evaluation is a really great tool to use as a team to keep people engaged and not feel talked over and also to be dealing with figures instead of opinions. *-Direct service staff member*

Respondents also described using the evaluation findings to facilitate conversations held within their internal agency team and with external stakeholders (e.g., community members, other agencies, funders, etc.). They explained how the results helped bring clarity and focus to the internal team discussions and provided evidence to support their work when communicating with external stakeholders.

***Informing Internal Conversations.*** Both board members and staff described different ways the evaluation findings helped facilitate internal discussions at board and staff meetings. Respondents discussed using data and recommendations from the evaluation report to discuss how the agency can continue to support and better serve their clients by focusing their efforts and defining their purpose. Board members noted that while it was helpful to have a meeting specifically focused on reviewing the evaluation findings/report, it is not enough to discuss the evaluation findings at just one point in time. Instead, a couple of board members highlighted the importance of revisiting the data and building on ideas generated in the initial board discussion after follow-up meetings in the future:

> I think we're going to have to be fairly purposeful to revisit this information. I've seen it happen too often where we gathered data, and we're all gung-ho about what it says, and a month later, we forget about it. And so, I'm using this evaluation to say how do we take this information and seek out another data point in six months or a year, whatever. Maybe there's additional information we seek out about the employment program, and when you combine or look at the two data points. I just think there's value in taking the data and then adding to it to see if there are trends and see how things change. I mean, I think that's the point of maybe there's some type of follow-up that we could do. -*Board member*

All board members, the Executive Director, and most of the staff also described using the evaluation process and findings to facilitate conversations around future evaluation efforts and programming. Participants discussed using the process they experienced in this evaluation and the questions asked, to model future discussions with their teams at the agency around different programs, noting that the process helps to keep conversations objective and focused on outcomes. Staff, specifically, reflected on being involved in the evaluation planning meeting and how they would replicate that process of thinking through the program theory (steps of a logic model) and brainstorming questions around each logic model component:

> I think we will use this evaluation process to model some discussion based on some of the questions you asked and reformat it to a new situation. Since this

> evaluation was focused more on what we are doing rather than on chasing grant dollars, we can ask similar questions, like: what are we doing for the community? What evaluations can we do in the future as a team to show and to find out what we're doing that is working for the community, what is working, and what's not working for the community. *-Direct service staff member*

Similarly, board members also noted that in the future they will be able to use this evaluation as a model to inform and shape their future evaluation questions with other programs:

> So I think not as though we need it all the time, but just a reminder that having a report like this or an evaluation like this or even if we could model some discussion based on some of the questions you asked, like reformatting it to a new situation or the same one. Again, it just sort of depersonalizes everything and keeps it focused on outcomes. *-Board member*

***Informing External Conversations***. Several board members, the Executive Director, and staff members described using the evaluation findings when communicating with external community agencies and other potential partners (e.g., employers, job training programs, etc.). This group of respondents described how being involved in the evaluation process, including reviewing the evaluation findings, gave them a deeper understanding of the employment program. They explained how they are able to take this understanding with them when meeting with agencies in the community and better articulate what services the agency offers, the clients they are serving, and impact they have on clients and the community:

> This (evaluation) process helped build an understanding of the program for communicating to community agencies.  This opens the door to more conversations about what would be helpful- probably even asking more questions about what are the greatest needs right now? Who's coming in? It helps me to be well informed because I'm the one out in the community the most. And, I'm sharing this information at all these community meetings and have better information I can share. I also just have a better understanding of who we are and what services really matter. -*Board member*

Two board members also shared how the evaluation findings help their communication to external stakeholders by adding an objective process they can reference. These two respondents noted that they do not have an evaluator on staff to help them through the evaluation process resulting in ad hoc data gathering that is not informed by an established evaluation procedure.  Specifically, they described how the findings of this more formal evaluation help add credibility to the narrative the agency is sharing about their work with the community because it gave them a chance to engage in a disciplined exploration and review of the program.  One board member noted that they now have “something concrete to look at instead of making educated guesses or taking pieces of things we’ve heard others say.”  Other board members described how the evaluation provided them a new way to present information about their programs and concrete examples to illustrate their work:

> Well, one of the things that's clear is that if the process is consistent and objective and if you can- if you're asking for funding for programs or you're trying to convince community stakeholders to support the agency, you need to be able to

> relate your work in a consistent way to think to different outcomes. And with the best of intentions, our own little projects don't have the rigor and discipline of that process. We just don't have the expertise. We don't have the resource, you know? It's just not something we can do. So, this evaluation process gives us a lot more credibility when it comes to funding because of the objectivity of it and being consistent. -*Board member*

Finally, both board members and support staff also described using the evaluation findings when communicating with external agencies around potential partnerships or collaborations. Respondents described how the evaluation gave them insight into what was working well in their program and where the gaps exist that other agencies could help them fill. This insight has helped inform what questions members asks when they go into the community and pursue partnerships:

> Some of that is connecting to do more community outreach and to make sure that people are getting referred to the right services. It helps us make sure that when people have needs that we can't serve at our agency, we'd know where we'd have those connections with the community as an agency. It helps us think through our community outreach and ask when we're talking to people in the community, to kind of have ears to the ground to say, ok, how does employment work at your agency, how can we work together, and what else do we need to know about your business? -*Direct service staff member*

***Collective Level***

Collective-level evaluation influence refers to the impact of evaluation on agency's decisions and practices (Henry & Mark, 2003a). Agency members described how the evaluation findings and evaluation process influenced the agency as a whole, including the impact the evaluation had in planning programs and services as well as influencing agency social norms.

**Theme Six: Planning Programs and Services.** Respondents described how the agency was able to use the evaluation findings in planning programs and services offered at the agency. Specifically, respondents described how the evaluation helped them prioritize efforts to define their programs and services, and also to identify the agency's role in the community and how they might partner with other agencies to meet the needs of the people they serve.

***Defining Programs and Informing Services.*** For all participating board members and the Executive Director, the evaluation highlighted a need to be more intentional and clearer in the way they define the employment program. One board member discussed the way identifying activities that are an important part of the employment program through the evaluation allowed the group to be better able to design the employment services model they use at the agency and focus their efforts on specific interventions.

> As it relates to the specific employment program evaluation, some of the findings were interesting in the sense that it showed we could do a little better job in defining our program or what we do. Before this, it was more ad hoc, so probably a little bit more intentional in defining would be helpful. -*Board member*

All participating leadership members discussed using what they learned about who they are serving and why clients choose to receive services at their agency to think through how to define their programs best and to be specific in making choices about what services they want to offer and what they want their programs to look like.

Specifically, the Executive Director described learning more their service offerings and using the evaluation insight to design services to meet specific needs and ideals:

> We learned a little more about what it is we are offering and why people are even coming in the door. It's nice to find out a little bit more about that, and as a larger agency, it helps us make choices as to what we want this program to look like. You know, is it exactly what we want it to be? But the evaluation was just an overall education on this particular program. - *Executive Director*

***Identifying the Agency's Role in the Community of Services.*** In thinking through how the agency defines their programs, some respondents (including board members, the Executive Director and several staff members) broadened the conversation from specific services to explore and define the agency's overall purpose and what role the agency plays in the community. The Executive Director noted that through the evaluation process the agency, "learned more about why people are turning to use versus going somewhere else." They continued and described how the insights gleaned from the evaluation "helped us make choices as to what we want to offer and what agencies in the community we may want to partner with." As a result, leadership members are now asking questions about how the services they provide either duplicate or add to the services that other agencies in the community offer and how their services help to meet the unique needs of the community:

> Step one (for our agency) is to define what we already do and include that in more program materials. So that is one specific step that we are looking at taking. But also, for the long-term future, we are asking, "Is this an area that we want to grow in, or do we want to kind of stay in our lane as more of a referral service." So, the

> bigger picture questions on do we want to add or expand the program offerings and intentionally to think through those questions as we move forward in defining our services. -*Board member*

**Theme Seven: Influencing Agency Social Norms.** Since participating in the employment program evaluation, most respondents described thinking more about evaluation, data collection, and how they might embed these practices into their work in the future. Specifically, respondents noted a need to create and embed evaluation activities into staff workflows and agency activities and the agency's opportunities to evaluate other programs in the future.

***Thinking Evaluatively About Programs.*** For most respondents in both leadership and staff roles, the evaluation has helped them think more evaluatively about the rest of the agency's work outside of the employment program. These respondents identified assumptions they were making about their service delivery and program models and noted that evaluation can be important in asking questions that will help them better understand what they're doing and how they can do what they do better. Board members described how they are now talking more about the importance of asking the right questions so they can improve the efficiency of their service delivery and clients' experience working with the agency.

> Currently, we do not follow up with anyone to ask any questions. And how will we know anything about clients' experience unless we ask them and evaluate? I mean, are people enjoying the process of how we help them? Is the way we distribute materials to them a good process, or would they rather have some more privacy around that? Or do they like that its people showing up and they're

> waiting together for their turn to go in? There are so many pieces of what we do that we're not sure if they work well on our end, but we don't know how that participant's experience feels. -*Board member*

In addition to asking the right questions, every respondent described how they are beginning to think of how they can continue their evaluation efforts. They described how their experience helped demonstrate how useful evaluation can be and how it can be applied to other program areas. One staff member described how evaluation has "helped us start to look at how evaluation could be useful in the future and think about the direction we'd want to go in if we evaluate other programs." Participating in the evaluation process led a board member to realize the underlying assumptions that shape the agency's programs and critically think about what changes might need to be made to service models they have relied on in the past:

> The evaluation has given us some ideas about what we might want to do with other programs. We're making a lot of assumptions based on how things have worked in the past and what was needed, and I don't think there's been a lot of huge changes in how we deliver the programs over the years. It seems like it's been a consistent model but how do we know we're still meeting the need? We won't know that until we just ask a few more questions and evaluate. And, I don't know if this (evaluation) has ever been done for those programs, but not in recent years. So, this (evaluation) is a of a starting place for how we can start to do that with our other programs -*Board member*

Several respondents noted that to expand their evaluation efforts to other programs, they will need to be intentional to have record keeping and documentation processes and evaluation tools in place. This reflects the new prioritization staff and leadership are placing on creating and embedding evaluation practices into staff workflows and agency activities:

> Well, even thinking about the beginning of evaluating with some of the children and youth programming and even just the importance of careful tracking, consistent record keeping of our participant data and the importance of asking the right questions. If we are to evaluate other programs, we need to have these processes in place. -*Staff*

***Creating and Embedding Evaluation Practices.*** At the time of the post-evaluation interviews, many respondents were thinking through how to embed more evaluation practices into staff workflows and the larger agency's activities. Many respondents at both the leadership and staff levels described how participating in this evaluation process highlighted the need for the agency to focus on improving their data collection practices. A couple of direct service staff members noted that the evaluation brought to light the inconsistent practices used to collect client information and the need to expand how client information is collected, documented, and used moving forward. A few board members and staff referenced a need for the agency to develop a plan and processes around data collection and review that are clearly understood, and contributed to, by all staff:

> So, we (all direct service staff members) need to connect and make sure we're all using the same form, and maybe we get rid of ones that are not used anymore. Just really streamline things. And then I feel like there are just some basic questions about like, how did you come to us? Why did you come here? From

> what I've seen in the system, I don't think we are tracking that, and that's what made me start to think about, well, what else could we be gathering just on the intake side and then the data entry process that would help us better serve clients and better understand what we're doing. So there are all these ways to run reports and measure things through that system (electronic record platform), but we don't do a ton of that right now, and we could probably do a bit more, and then that information could help us better evaluate other programs, too. - *Staff*

Most respondents at both the leadership and staff levels described improvements that could be made to the agency's client intake process and forms. Intake is the first opportunity for the agency to track who they are serving and the needs of the people they're serving. By improving the intake process, and ensuring all clients complete the intake form, these members believe they will have more complete data that can be used to understand demographics of who is being served, client needs, and an ability to follow-up with clients in the future:

> We don't have the information we need if that person just didn't get tracked for some reason. This (the evaluation) makes us think a little bit about what we can be doing, even from the first step. Are we making sure that we're getting all the info we need so that we can go back and circle around with people and make sure that we help them the best that we can? Or, if we're evaluating a program, if we want to ask deeper questions, can we get a hold of them? If we had those processes in place from when clients arrive, we could do these things better. - *Board member*

Some of those same respondents also described how improving the intake process could be used to target services and interventions from the very beginning of clients' interaction with the agency. By rethinking what is asked during intake and asking a few different questions, they described how they could use the intake process as an opportunity to get to know the client and their needs in greater detail so that they could better direct them to services that will meet their needs:

> And I think this could be useful in redesigning a shorter intake form that clients are handed when they come in for our services. It could be a way of educating them on what we offer and educating ourselves too by asking, is this somebody we can assist, or do we need to refer them to elsewhere? I think we could add some simple questions quickly based on some of the feedback you gave us that would smooth the whole process along quickly. -*Staff*

A couple of board members were also able to identify improvements that need to be made in the way direct service staff document client participation and service utilization in case notes. The evaluation highlighted that not everything was captured in the notes, and this created an incomplete picture of how clients utilized services offered at the agency. These two board members noted that by making specific and accurate case notes a staff priority, they would be better able to reflect on and share the work being done at the agency:

> So, the evaluation showed that not everything was captured by case notes. You know, you're trying to be brief, you're trying to be accurate, but you have 10,000 other things to do...that was a highlight for me, that idea that we could probably do more here. We could be more thorough in telling people the work that we do

> if there was a more accurate reflection within the notes of all the work. So, this felt important to me and is a practice we will be working on. *-Board member*

This chapter presented the results from interviews with stakeholders at the agency. Findings were presented in two sections that corresponded with the time stakeholders were interviewed. Section one focused on phase one responses collected from stakeholders before conducting the evaluation. The first section addresses Research Question 1 (RQ1): "What are the agency stakeholders' initial perceptions of and attitudes toward evaluation"? The study found at the individual level, three themes emerged: 1) enhancing client services, 2) relationship to staff roles, and 3) as a "tool" for learning. At the interpersonal level, one theme emerged, building team capacity and cohesion. Three themes emerged at the collective level: 1) understanding community needs, 2) planning programs and services, and 3) influencing agency social norms. Section two focused on phase two responses collected from stakeholders following the completion of the evaluation at the agency. The second section addresses Research Question 2 (RQ2): "In what ways does an evaluation influence the attitudes and actions of the agency stakeholders?" The study found at the individual level, two themes emerged: 1) changed attitudes towards evaluation, and 2) evaluation influence on professional roles. At the interpersonal level, three themes emerged: 1) gaining insights on agency programs and services, 2) improving agency programs and services, and 3) informing team conversations. Two themes emerged at the collective level: 1) planning programs and services, and 2) influencing agency norms (valuing evaluation). Next, chapter five presents a discussion of these findings related to the literature and includes recommendations for future research and evaluation practices.

# Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

Chapter four presented the results of the pre-and post-evaluation interviews as they related to RQ1 and RQ2. Chapter five revisits the analysis objectives of this study to: (1) develop an understanding of stakeholders' initial perceptions of an evaluation prior to conducting an evaluation at a social services agency and (2) understand in what ways evaluation influences the attitudes and actions of stakeholders following the completion of the evaluation. The results of the study produced several themes and subthemes which will be discussed in relation to the original research questions, RQ1 and RQ2. The findings discussed here focus on six key lessons that were learned through the integration of the thematic analysis of the pre- and post-evaluation interviews and the existing literature on evaluation influence and use. Implications for evaluation practice and future research are also discussed.

## Discussion of Findings

After applying thematic analysis to the pre- and post-evaluation interview data, several key themes emerged in response to the study's main research questions: (R1) "What are stakeholders' initial perceptions of the value and use of evaluation prior to conducting an evaluation at a social services agency?" and (R2) "In what ways does an evaluation influence the attitudes and actions of stakeholders following the completion of an evaluation at a social service agency?" Six key lessons can be drawn from the results of the study, which will be described and discussed within the larger context of the existing literature.

***Stakeholders' Perceptions of Evaluation Before Conducting the Evaluation***

The first question this study sought to obtain stakeholders' initial perceptions of evaluation prior to conducting an evaluation at a social services agency. Before this study, the agency was only minimally involved in evaluation activities/evaluative thinking. In the year before this study began, the agency had worked with an external consultant to develop a five-year strategic plan for the agency. The strategic plan helped the agency identify needs in the community and programmatic areas that the agency could focus on building to address the identified needs. This knowledge informed the decision for this study to focus on the agency's employment program. Outside of the needs assessment that took place as part of the strategic planning process, the agency did not have monitoring activities in place to routinely review program participation and outcomes. While some leadership members on the Board were aware of the potential of evaluation, most leadership and staff members had not previously been involved in formal evaluation activities at the agency. While limited evaluation activities had previously taken place at the agency, many leadership members expressed enthusiasm and excitement to embed evaluation activities into their work. One key lesson was identified describing the ways in which stakeholders valued and used evaluation before the study took place.

**Lesson Learned: Participants Recognize the Potential Value of Evaluation, But in Different Ways.** This study found that before taking part in an evaluation process, staff and board members at the agency recognized the potential value of evaluation. Participants shared the value and contributions they thought evaluation could bring to their individual roles, to the way they work as a team, and to the agency overall.

The discussion of the value and contributions of evaluation at these levels reflects the three levels of influence described in Henry and Mark's (2003) beyond use framework.

***Individual Level.*** Participants shared the potential value they saw in evaluation at the individual level in terms of using evaluation to enhance client services and as a learning process. Participants described how evaluation could enhance client services by providing information used in decision-making and planning, by helping to build understanding of client service needs, and in facilitating work plans between agency staff and clients. From the agency leadership level, individual board members and the Executive Director more frequently spoke of the potential to use evaluation in developing strategic plans for the agency and in decision-making around services offered at the agency (collective level) while direct-service staff participants more often described the potential of evaluation in better understanding the needs of the people they serve and in understanding the programs they offer (individual and interpersonal levels).

The Executive Director described that planning and conducting an evaluation has a direct fit within their current role. Direct-service staff, however, described evaluation as being a less significant part of their role. Direct-service staff members were more likely than leadership members to describe concern over potential interruptions evaluation activities could have in their workflows, mainly in their ability to serve clients.

***Interpersonal Level.*** At the interpersonal level participants described how participating in evaluation could potentially help build team capacity and cohesion, particularly in terms of improving staff role alignment and team decision-making. Both leadership and staff described the potential evaluation could play in building shared understanding of the agency's programs and services. Direct service staff members more frequently spoke of the potential for their informal conversations and observations made during their work to inform their discussions with team members while leadership participants more frequently spoke of the potential to use data and numbers in their discussions with other leadership members. Both groups described how these discussions could be expanded through the incorporation of more evaluation activities.

***Collective Level.*** At the collective level, participants described the potential value of evaluation in building understanding of community needs, influencing agency social norms, in planning programs and services, and in staff development. Participants described how evaluation might help them understand community needs by conducting a needs assessment, measuring the impact of programs on the community, and in communicating with community stakeholders. Board members described how they could potentially use evaluation to facilitate the development of staff capacities by tailoring staff training and development opportunities towards learning interventions that will best address identified client needs within the community. In contrast, direct service staff members more frequently described how evaluation could help them to better understand how the services they offer aligned with other similar service providers in the community. In terms of planning programs and services, participants described how evaluation might also help inform program expansions, resource allocation, and strategic planning. Leadership participants more frequently described the potential of evaluation to impact the agency at the collective level than did direct staff, but they also were more likely to discuss concerns over the agency's capacity to conduct evaluations and concern over staff’s ability to carry out evaluation activities.

***Evaluation's Influence on Stakeholders' Attitudes and Actions Following an Evaluation***

The second research question, RQ2, focused on ways in which the evaluation influenced the attitudes and actions of stakeholders following the completion of the evaluation at the social service agency. Five key lessons were found in this study that help answer this research question. These lessons include: (1) evaluation use is about more than just results; (2) evaluation processes and results impact individuals, teams, and agencies; (3) participating in an evaluation process does influence participants attitudes towards evaluations usefulness and feasibility; (4) evaluation findings can be immediately used by participants to facilitate communication both internally and externally; and (5) participating in an evaluation can influence the way participants think about future evaluation activities.

**Lesson Learned: Evaluation is More Than Just About the Results.** This study found participants not only used the findings of the evaluation (results-based use) but also used what they learned throughout the evaluation process (process-based use). This finding supports the idea that an integrated theory of influence that includes both results-based use and process-based use best captures the nuanced ways that evaluation impacts the actions of stakeholders and agencies as proposed by Kirkhart (2000) and Henry and Mark (2003).

***Results-Based Use.*** This evaluation found results-based use occurring through the broader strategy of instrumental use. Instrumental use involves applying evaluation findings for the purpose of planning and decision making (Shadish et al., 1991). Participants in this study used the findings of the evaluation to make decisions about the employment program in relation to: (1) what services the agency's employment program should prioritize; (2) adapting the employment program to better meet client needs; and (3) determining what agencies in the community would be best to approach for potential referral partnerships. Similarly, Herbert (2014) described the importance of evaluation findings being used for agency decision-making and in influencing management practices within an agency. In this study, leadership participants described using the evaluation findings to make decisions on what role the agency would play in the community, how they would define their services, how they would communicate their services to others, and how they could focus their services to best meet the needs of the people they serve. This aligns with Stufflebeam's (1994) view of evaluation being used to provide information to decision-makers to encourage service improvement and Alkin's (2013) understanding of evaluation findings being used to aid decision-makers in allocating resources to programs that best serve the target audience.

Another form of results-based use is conceptual use. Conceptual use occurs when an individual's understanding of a program or policy is affected by an evaluation, but no direct action is taken as a result of the evaluation (Johnson et al., 2009; Shadish et al., 1991). Conceptual use did not occur in this study because even though the evaluation helped build both direct-service staff and leadership participants' understanding of the employment program, ultimately actions were taken based on the findings. The evaluation itself focused on building an understanding of the program by asking questions about who was being served by the employment program, what services they accessed/requested, and the impact the program had on participants. By engaging in conversations about the findings of the evaluation, both groups were able to discuss what the findings mean in their roles and build a shared understanding of who they were serving.

Finally, while symbolic use falls under the larger category of results-based use, it is more concerned with the use of evaluation to persuade or convince, rather than using a specific aspect of the evaluation's results (Johnson et al., 2009). Symbolic use was not observed to have occurred during this study as the existence of the evaluation was not used to persuade others of the importance of the employment program being evaluated, or to set an agenda for policy/activity around changing the employment program. Rather, it was the findings of the evaluation that were used to share the importance of the employment program and inform changes to be made to the program.

***Process-Use.*** This study also found that participating in the evaluation process influenced stakeholders at the agency in several ways. Process-use as described by Patton (1997) "involves changes among individuals and agencies as a result of being engaged in the evaluation process" (p. 90). Patton described four outcomes of process-use including enhancing shared understanding, supporting, and reinforcing the intervention, increasing participants engagement, and program development. By participating in the evaluation both leadership and direct-service staff developed a shared understanding of the employment program. Stakeholders engaged in conversations with others at the agencies and shared varying perspectives both during the evaluation planning activities and in the meetings focused on discussing the evaluation findings. Creating shared understanding is an outcome of process-use not only supported by the current study and Patton (1997) but numerous other authors as well, including Forss et al. (2002) and Greene (1998b).

***Integrated Theory of Influence.*** The idea of incorporating an integrated theory of use was first captured in Kirkhart's (2000) theory of influence which helped move discussions of evaluation use beyond traditional forms of use—including instrumental, conceptual, and strategic use—to an integrated theory that involves both process-based and results-based use. In her theory, Kirkhart (2000) describes the source of evaluation influence, or the agent of change, as either being process-based or results-based use but goes further to assert that these two forms of use are interrelated. This was reflected in the findings of this study. The study found that by engaging in the process of the evaluation, participants learned new evaluation practices/techniques and started to ask different questions that later provided a new perspective/lens in which participants interpreted and used evaluation findings.

Staff involved in data collection were able to identify opportunities to improve service delivery and project monitoring. By facilitating client interviews as a data collection method used in the evaluation, one staff member found an opportunity to continue to connect with previously served clients through follow-up conversations. By using the organization's electronic database that stores client/service information, staff members were able to see gaps in the information they were collecting/documenting and opportunities to improve intake processes in the future. Similarly, by reviewing the evaluation findings, two leadership members were able to identify improvements that could be made to the process direct service staff use to document service interactions had with clients. Finally, by engaging in the evaluation planning meeting, many staff and leadership members were able to think through the theory/logic underlying the employment program and create a logic model. These members later described plans to use a similar process to think through the theory/logic of their child services program to create a framework that guides their work and future evaluation activities in that service program area.

**Lesson Learned: Evaluation Influences Participants at Multiple Levels.** This study found that evaluation processes and results impacted not only the actions of individuals but their interactions with one another and their collective work. Henry and Mark (2003a) describe evaluation influence that occurs at the individual, interpersonal and collective levels. The ways in which participants in this study described how evaluation influenced them at the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels both reflects and differs from the concepts that the authors use to describe influence at each level in their model.

***Individual Level.*** At the individual level, Henry and Mark (2003a) describe the ways in which evaluation influences the attitudes and actions of key staff at an agency. Their model includes the concepts of attitude change, salience, elaboration, priming, skill acquisition, and behavioral change. In this study, after participating in the evaluation process, participants held an increasingly more positive view towards evaluation (attitude change), placed an increased level of importance on evaluation activities (salience), and thought about evaluation more frequently (elaboration). Participants began to incorporate evaluative thinking into their workflows and also built in new data collection practices. For staff, this came in the form of changing intake questions and processes to ensure accurate data was being collected for all program participants. For leadership, this came in the form of increased conversations around the importance of data and reflections/analysis of the data they had previously collected.

Skill acquisition, or developing new abilities related to evaluation, was another outcome at the individual level that participants described in this study that also reflects a concept that Henry and Mark (2003a) included in their individual level of influence. By participating in the evaluation process, some participants in this study were able to build new skills on evaluation planning and design, data collection practices, and logic model creation. This was true for staff at the agency (versus leadership), as staff members were more directly involved in each step of the evaluation process from planning the evaluation, to data collection, and building recommendations based on the findings This skill acquisition is directly tied to evaluation capacity building (ECB), or " the intentional work to continuously create and sustain overall organizational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine" (Stockdill et al., 2002, p. 14). ECB involves building stakeholders' understanding of evaluation concepts and practices and helping them develop the skills and attitudes to think evaluatively in an effort to create evaluation cultures (Preskill & Boyle, 2008). Participants in this study who developed skills related to evaluation will be better able to continue putting this knowledge to practice, and work to sustain evaluation activities at the agency moving forward.

Finally, the study also demonstrated how participating in an evaluation can lead to behavioral change at the individual level. Behavioral change "involves direct instrumental use of evaluation findings at the individual level" (Henry & Mark, 2003a, p. 301). This was demonstrated in several ways in this study. Staff who were directly involved in the delivery of the employment program described ways in which they used the findings of the evaluation to determine what services are most important for them to offer to clients and what relationships they need to build with partnering agencies in the community for appropriate referrals for clients. For some staff that serve in support roles, their understanding of the employment program developed during the evaluation, influenced them to change aspects of their daily workflow including making time to complete client intake paperwork for every client that enters the agency. For board members, the evaluation influenced them to change the way they review and discuss agency data and activities as a leadership group.

***Interpersonal Level.*** At the interpersonal level, Henry and Mark (2003a) describe the ways in which evaluation influences the way individuals and groups work together at the agency. Their model includes the concepts of justification, persuasion, change agent, and minority-opinion influence (Henry & Mark, 2003a). This study found that participating in an evaluation process led to some participants using the evaluation findings for justification or to build support for a previously held belief. That is, stakeholders at the agency used evaluation findings to support their belief in the value and impact of the employment program and the agency overall on clients. Staff teams used these findings both internally and externally. Internally, teams used the findings to justify the use and continued emphasis of specific activities within the employment program (i.e., focusing on helping clients build resumes, teaching clients how to apply for a job, and focusing on tech support). Externally, participant teams used the evaluation findings to justify the value of the employment program and the agency's impact to external audiences. Specifically, staff and board members described using the evaluation findings as a credible means to discuss the work happening at the agency and share the impact of the work with community partners and potential funders.

This study found less evidence of the evaluation leading participants to act as change agents or in minority-opinion influence. A change agent is someone who is focused on changing agency policies, programs, or operations (Henry & Mark, 2003a). This may be happening slowly at the board level with some board members advocating for the need to improve case notes and data collection practices. However, this is currently happening more in discussions around use and has not yet resulted in direct actions. Similarly, in this study the evaluation did not influence stakeholders who held a minority opinion to use the evaluation findings to discount widely held beliefs. This could be due to the exploratory nature of the evaluation and its focus on learning about the employment program. This may also be due to the small nature of the team and the shared values of those who work at the agency.

***Collective Level.*** At the collective level, Henry and Mark (2003a) describe the ways in which evaluation influences the agency overall in terms of program and services and how others in the community perceive them. Their model includes the concepts of agenda setting, policy-oriented learning, policy change, and diffusion. To begin, the decision to focus the evaluation on the employment program was a form of agenda setting by the Executive Director and President of the Board of Directors. The board had previously identified the employment program as an area to focus future improvement efforts in their strategic plan and the decision to focus the evaluation on the employment program reflects this agenda setting.

Since the evaluation took place, this study found evaluation influenced agenda setting at the agency in three ways. First, evaluation findings brought to light changes that could be made to the employment program. Leadership members have prioritized discussions (added these discussions to upcoming board meeting agendas) around these changes and what is within the scope of the agency. Second, the evaluation process highlighted improvements that need to be made to the practices the agency uses to collect data. Some of these changes include an improved client intake form and intake process, an increased focus on timely and accurate case note completion, and ongoing focus on data collection activities at board meetings. Finally, the evaluation surfaced the need to better define the agency's programs/services and to be clear in describing the agency's role in supporting clients within the network of other agencies that support clients in the community.

Brewster et al. (2015) described the essential role evaluation can play in improving services by enabling learning to be shared to more effectively address client’s unmet needs. This study highlighted the ways that evaluation can help an agency learn about the impact their service interventions have on the people they serve, and which service components contribute to positive client outcomes. In this study the evaluation helped stakeholders learn which services of the employment program participants found to be most helpful, specifically help with resume building and technological support. This demonstrated how evaluation can help provide important links to understanding an agency’s efforts/interventions and the theory underlying their model as described by authors such as Steckler and Linnan (2002) and Brewster et al. (2015).

The study did not see diffusion (i.e., the adoption of policy, program, or practices in a jurisdiction outside the one in which the evaluation was conducted) as a result of the evaluation (Henry & Mark, 2003a). Due to the time constraints of this research study, long-term impacts of the evaluation and its extended influence were not able to be studied.  At the time of the post-evaluation interviews with participants, diffusion had not occurred. That is, the agency's employment program, practices, and/or policies had not been adopted by an agency outside of the one in which the evaluation was conducted (Henry & Mark, 2003a). Similarly, larger agency policy changes had not yet occurred at the agency at the point of the post-evaluation interviews.  Again, this could be due to the time constraints of this study, as interviews took place promptly following the evaluation as findings were presented and discussed by teams.

**Lesson Learned: Participating in an Evaluation Does Influence Stakeholders' Attitudes Towards Evaluation.** This study found that participating in an evaluation does influence stakeholders' attitudes towards evaluation.  This finding reflects the concept of attitude change in Henry and Mark's (2003a) theory of influence. Most participants held positive assumptions and beliefs of the potential use and purpose evaluation could play in their agency prior to engaging in the evaluation in this study even though they had not participated in an evaluation to know these attitudes/experiences firsthand.  Following this evaluation, participants reported that the experience confirmed their positively held ideas/attitudes about evaluation and in some cases influenced participants to adopt a positive attitude of evaluation after previously holding a neutral opinion of evaluation.  Participants changing attitudes might be attributed to their involvement in the evaluation process as several studies have demonstrated that evaluators who encouraged stakeholder participation are better able to facilitate knowledge production and promote positive reactions to evaluation findings (Cousins, 1995; Greene, 1988a; Mason & Azzam, 2019; Shulha & Cousins, 1997).

In addition, participating in the evaluation influenced the importance participants placed on evaluation activities, data collection, and specific activities of the employment program. This changing level of importance reflects the concept of salience (the importance of an underlying issue as judged by an individual) Henry and Mark (2003) present at the individual level. Many staff and leadership members were able to describe the importance they placed on learning new skills in the evaluation scoping meeting and in implementing evaluation activities. These participants discussed thinking about how they would replicate the evaluation in different service areas offered at the agency, noting that it would be helpful to gain similar insights in other service areas, such as learning who accesses their programs, how they access the programs, what services within the programs they found to be most helpful, and what impact the programs have on participants. For these participants the importance they saw in the employment program evaluation findings would also be important in the agency's other service areas.

Finally, participating in the evaluation impacted how frequently participants reported thinking about evaluation and data collection activities, reflecting the concept of elaboration (how much an individual thinks about an issue) presented in Henry and Mark's theory of influence (2003). One board member described the importance of intentionally revisiting the findings of the evaluation and continuing the conversation in the future. Other board members noted that the findings of this evaluation only demonstrate one moment in time but that the benefit is in continuing to add 'data points' to show how their service delivery changes over time. One support staff member discussed increasing the frequency in which she pulls program data. Rather than just pulling information during fundraising campaigns, she described a plan to pull program data (numbers of how many people have been served and who has been served) on a routine basis to see how their service access and delivery changes throughout the year.

Several authors have discussed factors that may have contributed to stakeholders' changing attitudes towards evaluation and their use of evaluation (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986; Johnson et al., 2009; Shulha & Cousins, 1997). Alkin and King (2017) categorized the evaluation use factors into four categories including: (1) user factors, (2) evaluator factors, (3) evaluation factors, and (4) agency/social context factors. These factors need to be considered when thinking through the finding of changing attitudes towards evaluation. Users' predispositions about evaluation color their interest in evaluation (Alkin et al., 1979). In this case, most of the participants reported positive ideas about how evaluation could impact their work before beginning the evaluation in this study. Their positive-learning predispositions may have contributed to the importance they placed on evaluation and the frequency in which they thought about evaluation afterwards. This is supported by Patton et al. (1997), who identified these personal factors as important elements in determining whether evaluations were used and valued.

Similarly, evaluator factors as identified by Alkin et al. (1979) need to be considered when thinking through stakeholders' changing attitudes towards evaluation. The evaluator in this study spent considerable time building relationships with the participants to involve them in the evaluation. This may have contributed to developing stakeholders' positive attitudes towards evaluation. Involving potential users in various aspects of the evaluation and developing good working relationships, has been identified in the literature as important actions to promote evaluation use (Johnson et al., 2009).

Both the evaluation process and contextual factors (e.g., stakeholders' openness to participate in the evaluation, stakeholder involvement in the development of evaluation questions, timing of the evaluation to connect to the larger strategic planning efforts, etc.) may have contributed to stakeholders' changing attitudes towards evaluation. One evaluation factor is 'relevance' or the extent to which the information needs of stakeholders are met (Alkin & King, 2017; Yarbrough et al., 2011). Stakeholders in this study were involved in designing the evaluation to answer specific questions regarding the employment program. By having stakeholders identify and reach consensus on questions and methods for collecting information, the likelihood of using this information in program planning and improvement increased. Contextual factors may have also impacted stakeholders' changing attitudes towards evaluation. Factors such as agency characteristics of the program and the community in which the program operates can impact the way and extent to which evaluations are used (Johnson et al., 2009). The agency that this study took place in was small. This may have contributed to a collective, shared value of evaluation that impacted stakeholders' attitudes towards evaluation and the frequency in which it was thought about.

**Lesson Learned: Evaluation is Important in Facilitating Communication.** The evaluation findings helped to broaden leadership and direct-service staff collective views on the use of these findings in facilitating communication both internally and externally. This study highlighted the ways in which evaluation can be used as a tool to: (1) facilitate communication amongst internal teams, (2) to build insight into programs and services and their impact on client outcomes, (4) identify potentially new areas of program development needed, and (3) ways to improve current programs and services.

Board members described how they used the evaluation findings to have a conversation with the Executive Director about how the agency could add greater value in the community by sharing information and aligning services with other agencies. The board members valued the findings of the evaluation and saw the potential value the findings could have if shared with the community. Staff members described how participating in the evaluation process helped engage staff across the agency to come together and share their diverse perspectives. They noted that the process of the evaluation facilitated their internal conversations by bringing people together to brainstorm, share differing perspectives, and engage others in the process who otherwise might be more removed from the program. This form of quality communication between internal teams was frequently cited in the literature as both a key factor in creating meaningful use of evaluations by facilitating learning and creating shared understanding (Bober & Bartlett, 2004; Cousins, 2003; Forss et al., 1994) and as an outcome of successful evaluations (Cai, 1996).

Participants also described how the evaluation findings can be used to communicate with other agencies and prospective clients to better market the employment program. Board members and staff described how the evaluation provided language they can use when communicating about the work happening at the agency including data about their service offerings, program impact statements, and client success stories. External communications can be used to build collaborative partnerships (work/client support), secure funding, advocate for policy improvements, build knowledge, etc. (Baxter & Braverman, 2004). In this study, participants used the evaluation findings to communicate to external agencies the work that is happening at the agency mainly for building collaborative partnerships with other agencies working with the same population. Participants in this study also used the evaluation findings to communicate to the larger community the work that is happening at the agency as well as to current and potential funders when seeking donations.

**Lesson Learned: Evaluation Influences Future Evaluation Activities.** Finally, this study highlighted the way participating in an evaluation influences the way participants think about future evaluation activities at the agency and what is possible. Participating in the evaluation process impacted the way participants in this study thought through daily workflows and how processes could be improved to collect better data in the future. The evaluation process inspired participants to start to think evaluatively and ask questions about other programs offered at the agency. Some staff and board members described how this evaluation helped them identify assumptions they were making about their service delivery and model and that it taught them how to ask different questions to identify assumptions. By participating in the evaluation of one program, participants were able to think through how to use the processes and skills they learned during this evaluation in activities within their different roles and programs at the agency. Staff and board members shared that this evaluation gave them ideas of the types of questions they might ask, how they might map out the theories underlying their other programs, and an idea of different types of methods they can use to collect data.

By encouraging participation throughout the evaluation process, this study attempted to increase evaluation use by increasing stakeholders' capacity to continue implementing evaluation activities in the future through evaluation capacity building. Evaluation capacity building involves "increasing individual motivation, knowledge, and skills, to enhance a group's ability to conduct or use evaluation" (Labin et al., 2012, p. 12). While most participants described an interest in continuing evaluation efforts in the future, a couple board members noted in post-evaluation interviews that they will need further support from an evaluation 'expert' as they start to build their evaluation activities at the agency.  Participants noted they were able to use the evaluation in this study as a model for future evaluation work at the agency but recognized further consultations with an evaluator would help them as they continue to build their confidence beyond just thinking evaluatively to the actual design and implementation of the evaluation, data collection, and analysis.

## Study Implications and Limitations

The results of this study have several implications for both evaluation practice and future research.  Implications for practice center on how evaluators can encourage individuals and agencies to value, use, and sustain evaluation practices on an ongoing basis.  The discussion of implications for future research builds on the findings of this study and offers suggestions on other types of studies focused on evaluation influence and use.

### *Implications for Practice*

This study highlights several implications for evaluation practice: (1) carefully organized evaluations can influence stakeholders' attitudes and actions in positive ways toward evaluation; (2) evaluators need to clarify their role with stakeholders; and (3) participatory evaluation practices can help maximize the ways evaluations are valued and used.   Each implication is discussed in further detail.

**Carefully Organized Evaluations Can Influence Stakeholders' Attitudes and Actions Toward Evaluation in Positive Ways.** This study demonstrated the ways in which an evaluation intentionally designed for use can influence individual staff roles, team, and interpersonal interactions, and in the collective work of agencies. Evaluators should be conscious of the impact they can have on stakeholders when they design an evaluation, focus on the type of influence they want the evaluation to have, and tailor their efforts to encourage these outcomes. This highlights the importance of evaluators deliberately planning for evaluation use during the evaluation process as described by Forss et al. (2002). When approaching an evaluation project, evaluators should intentionally plan for the use of evaluation findings at all stages of the evaluation process, from evaluation planning to the sharing of evaluation findings at the conclusion of the evaluation project. This finding is reflected in Patton's (2008) Utilization-Focused Evaluation, which describes the importance of engaging stakeholders in the entirety of the evaluation process and conducting evaluations in ways that will help enhance the utilization of evaluation findings to inform decisions at an agency. By facilitating evaluations that lead to use that is valued by the involved stakeholders, evaluators will be more likely to positively influence stakeholders' attitudes towards evaluation.

**Evaluators Need to Assess and Clarify Their Role with Stakeholders.** Shifting from traditional theories of evaluation use (results-based use) to influence places a greater emphasis on process-use, or the learning that happens as a result of participating in the evaluation. Evaluators focusing on evaluation influence will need to pay attention to process use and act accordingly (Cummings, 2002). This may mean that evaluators have to redefine their role in the evaluation process by placing a greater emphasis on educating stakeholders about evaluation methods, processes, and impacts to help increase the value stakeholders attribute to evaluation. It may mean evaluators take on a capacity building role by helping stakeholders develop skills necessary to continue data collection and analysis efforts following the completion of a program evaluation. Realizing that evaluation is an opportunity for participant growth and development may shift evaluators' role to focus more on learning, professional development, and building competencies and opportunities for evaluation capacity in the future. Evaluators identifying as planned change consultants is an increasingly common conception in the literature, especially in literature around fostering process-use and developing agency learning (Cousins & Earl, 1995; Owen & Lambert, 1995; Preskill, 1994; Shulha & Cousins, 1997). These evaluators who prioritize stakeholder participation must give control to participants on decisions that require program and contextual knowledge while in some instances maintaining control over the technical aspects of the evaluation (Cousins & Earl, 1992) and in others, relinquishing control over the technical aspects—and acting primarily as a facilitator of the process (Fetterman, 1994).

However they choose to define their role, evaluators focusing on influence will need to prioritize greater participation and interaction with stakeholders and shift to view evaluation as an opportunity for teaching, learning, changing attitudes towards evaluation, and education rather than an assessment activity that is done onto an agency (Cummings, 2002). This will require evaluators to develop strong communication and people skills (Ayers, 1987) to enable them to build rapport with stakeholders. Evaluators will also need to build skills around teaching, training, and facilitation (Fetterman, 1994) as they shift their role to include educating as a primary activity in the evaluation process.

By expanding roles and skills, evaluators may be able to have a greater impact on changing the value stakeholders attribute to evaluation by building stakeholders' buy-in, involvement, and confidence to engage in evaluation activities.

**Participatory Evaluation Practices Can Help Maximize the Ways Evaluations Are Valued and Used.** In this study, an intentional effort was made to engage both leadership (decision-makers) and staff (program implementers). This allowed for diverse perspectives to be shared and included in the evaluation process and in drafting recommendations. Participatory approaches have been shown to be effective in agency learning (Cousins & Earl, 1995), empowerment (Fetterman, 1994), and capacity building (Shulha & Cousins, 1997). Actively involving stakeholders in this study was an intentional strategy meant to encourage stakeholders to feel ownership of the evaluation process and findings, thus increasing the likelihood of using the evaluation results. This strategy is reflected in Patton's (2008) Utilization Focused Evaluation which states that by actively involving primary intended users, the evaluator is preparing the groundwork for use. Other authors have found that encouraging stakeholder participation in the evaluation helps build stakeholders' confidence in the quality of the findings, confidence in their ability to use the findings, and ownership of the results and their application (Cousins, 1995; Greene, 1988a).

Participatory evaluations strive for more equitable power relationships between evaluators and stakeholders leading to jointly negotiated decision and meaning making (Shulha & Cousins, 1997). This study found that stakeholders need to be active participants throughout the entirety of the evaluation process, from brainstorming evaluation questions to thinking through and implementing evaluation methods as consultants in the analysis process and in brainstorming recommendations and next steps. This was reflected in Cummings' (2002) analysis of Kirkhart's (2000) integrated theory of influence when he wrote, "for influence, it is not enough to do an evaluation for an agency, rather stakeholders need to be active participants in the evaluation process to facilitate use of evaluation findings beyond the report" (p. 6). Evaluators should make extra efforts to encourage stakeholder participation from the beginning of the process to encourage evaluation influence to occur.

***Limitations and Implications for Future Research***

**Implications for Future Research.** This study only begins to explore the ways in which being involved in an evaluation influences stakeholders' attitudes and actions towards evaluation. The methods, limitations, and findings can help inform future research efforts directed toward expanding the knowledge base on evaluation influence and use. Four implications for future research can be considered, including: 1) exploring the pathways involved in the influence process; 2) researching evaluation influence over time; 3) further researching distinctions between the three levels of influence; and 4) exploring how different evaluation forms affect the way evaluation influences stakeholders.

***Exploring the Pathways Involved in the Influence Process.*** Authors have previously noted that more attention needs to be given to exploring the underlying processes that mediate the effects of evaluation on attitude and action (Henry, 2000). To respond to this critique, Henry and Mark (2004) defined a framework to capture the mechanisms of action in evaluation. While this study focused on exploring the outcomes of evaluation influence at the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels, more research needs to be done to understand how outcomes at one level can mediate or impact the influences happening at other levels (e.g., how does a change in an individual's attitude [cognitive influence] affect their actions [behavioral influence] at the interpersonal level?). Henry and Mark (2003a) argue that "specific outcomes will often be connected with each other, like the links in a causal chain" (p. 305). This study highlighted changes in attitudes and actions of individuals at the agency, but future research could study how these individual level changes impact the way participants work/interact with the rest of their team, or how interpersonal or collective level changes can be traced back to individual level influences. By thinking about the pathways of evaluation influence, future researchers can build a better understanding of "when and why some end-state evaluation use occurs and when and why it does not" (Henry & Mark, 2003a, p. 306).

***Need to Research Evaluation Influence Over Time.*** A key dimension of Kirkhart's (2000) integrated theory of evaluation influence is the concept of time, or the "chronological or developmental periods in which evaluation influence emerges, exists, or continues" (p. 14). Kirkhart (2000) asserts that evaluation influence can happen immediately (the influence that occurs concurrent with the evaluation process), at the end-of-cycle (the influence that occurs at the end of an evaluation period and results from both the evaluation products [reports] and the process of sharing the results), or long-term (effects that evolve over time into extended impacts). Studying evaluation influence over time is important because it "is an area that has been absent in past research and in traditional conceptions of use" (Cummings, 2002, p. 4). Although this study was able to capture influence immediately following the completion of the evaluation, it was not possible to capture the longer-term influence of the evaluation on stakeholder attitudes. Studying the longer-term influence of evaluation is important to better understand the impacts of evaluation that occur well-beyond the time an evaluation ends as well as understanding the impacts of evaluation over time. Kirkhart (2000) points out that evaluation influence can be delayed (e.g., if changes are not made/recommendations not implemented immediately after an evaluation takes place) and/or long-lasting (e.g., results may exert ongoing influence that dates back to the evaluation process). By studying the long-term influence of evaluation, future research will be able to contribute to a more robust understanding of the evolving impact of evaluation over time. Specifically, studying influence over time will allow future research to explore the path of influence, or how immediate influences lead to, or impact, end of cycle influences, and how both immediate and end of cycle influences impact long-term evaluation influence at the individual, interpersonal, and agency level.

***Need to Explore Distinctions in Each Level of Influence.*** As noted throughout this discussion, Henry and Mark's (2003a) three levels of evaluation influence - individual, interpersonal, and collective - were challenging to clearly identify in this analysis. While this study highlighted changes brought about in each level, it was difficult to disentangle all three levels of influence. For example, some of the collective level influences observed in this study could have actually been categorized as interpersonal level changes. The three levels are not individually discrete. Overlap was noted between the levels and this was a challenge through the development of the themes. The decision most challenging was to disentangle respondent comments between the interpersonal and collective levels. This could be due, in part, to the small size of the agency and limited number of board and staff available to participate. That is, staff in this type of setting have concurrent interests in interpersonal and well as collective discussion, planning and decision making on behalf of clients and the agency as a whole. Future research will benefit from studying the three levels of influence within larger agencies where roles and responsibilities can be more clearly distinguished between the three levels. Further research in studying ways to better define and operationalize each level will benefit researchers in further testing applications of Henry and Mark's (2003a) conceptual model of influence.

***Exploring How Different Evaluation Designs and Methods Affect the Way Evaluation Influences Stakeholders***. Future research may benefit from studying how different evaluation designs, methods and strategies affect the way influence is likely to develop or be received (Cummins, 2002; Owens, 1993). The evaluation in this study was formative, focusing on programs and services at the agency. What remains unknown is if the same results (evaluation influence) would have occurred had another evaluation method been used (e.g., how might have the evaluation influenced those participating in the study differently if the evaluation were an impact evaluation or an economic evaluation (cost analysis) rather than a formative evaluation?). Future research should ask how other evaluation forms affect the way the evaluation influences individuals, teams, and agencies. Much of the existing research on influence has focused on understanding evaluations' impact on individual and agency learning. What has become necessary for future research to develop a way to track the learnings of how particular evaluation designs and practices lead to learning, focusing on the degree to which they occur (Shulha & Cousins, 1997). This insight could be important for evaluators pursuing specific types of evaluation influence (e.g., policy change) to know what forms of evaluation may be most likely to lead to desired outcomes. Evaluators could then be more intentional in designing evaluation opportunities to promote specific types of evaluation influence.

**Limitations.** There were several limitations associated with this study. First, limitations exist in using a single case study approach. Case studies are often criticized for lacking scientific rigor, providing little basis for scientific generalization, and often resulting in massive, unreadable documents (Simons, 2012; Yin, 2003) as well as producing narratives that over-persuade (Simons, 2012). Further, some authors note that case studies are hard to implement and the skills necessary for doing good case studies have not yet been defined (Yin, 2003). Second, the limitations of qualitative approaches more generally include the intense engagement of the researcher with the participants and context being studied (Staller, 2012). As such, the subjectivity of the researcher is an inevitable part of the design and must be monitored in understanding and interpreting the data. However, too much personal involvement can be a problem as it may lead to bias and challenges to researcher objectivity (Simons, 2012). This study design required the researcher to facilitate and conduct the evaluation that served as the basis for the pre- and post-evaluation interviews. This made it difficult to reduce bias and separate the researcher from the evaluator. Future studies should allow for the opportunity to research/study an evaluation that is conducted by a third party.

Limitations that are not specific to the approach, but rather this study, also exist. One such limitation was the small sample size of participants. Helping Hopkins is a small agency comprising only four staff members, the Executive Director, and a twelve-member Board of Directors. All members were invited to be involved in the study—and, even if all chose to participate, the sample size would still be considered small.

A second limitation specific to this study is that participants were selected by convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling in which people are sampled because they are 'convenient' sources of data for researchers (Lavrakas, 2008). While convenience sampling can be easy to obtain, it can also come at the cost of bias. Results cannot be generalized as convenience sampling does not allow the researcher to have a sense of what population is represented by the sample and many may be under-represented in the sample in comparison to a larger population (Lavrakas, 2008).

***Additional COVID-19 Context.*** In addition to the limitations of the study design, another significant limitation exists for this study. The evaluation concluded at the same time as the initial lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred in the United States. Due to this, modifications had to be made to the way post-evaluation interviews were conducted with agency board members and staff in terms of generating recommendations from the evaluation findings. Instead of being held in person, these findings discussions were held over zoom, which limited the debriefing activities that could take place and the level of participation in the meetings.

COVID-19 also changed the ways in which the evaluation findings were used and their meaning to the employment program. The nature of the employment program, the needs of clients, and the delivery of services all changed when the pandemic began and work moved from in-person to remote settings. While the findings of this evaluation, and the recommendations participants collaborated to create reflect the work that was happening pre-COVID, the data on who was being served, the demographics of the population, and their employment needs changed drastically after the beginning of the pandemic. Due to COVID-19, more people started losing their jobs because of layoffs and less jobs were available for clients to apply for. Direct staff at the agency had to shift their model and deliver services over the phone which changed who was able to access services and the level of support in employment-related activities that the agency was able to provide. While COVID-19 and the timing of the pandemic did not impact this study or its findings directly, it did impact the meaning and fit of the evaluation findings to the changing context and the community's needs.

**Conclusions**

Use has a long history in evaluation and has been examined through several different theoretical lenses, all of which together create a more complete understanding of the various ways in which evaluations can be used by and impact agencies and individuals (Alkin, 2013; Leeuw & Donaldson, 2015). While each theory of use provides insight into the different ways in which evaluation can take its effect, it is important to recognize the more comprehensive understanding of evaluation impacts that evaluation influence can provide (Shulha & Cousins, 1997). The work by Kirkhart (2000) and Henry and Mark (2003a) have helped create theories describing evaluation influence and its mechanisms, however, less attention has been paid to studying influence in real life settings and practice.

Researching evaluation influence is an important endeavor that can lead to more efficient and effective programming while also contributing to the knowledge base necessary to advance the field of evaluation. Studying evaluation influence in real life contexts can provide insight into evaluation practices that support evaluation influence and the mechanisms through which influence occurs in real life settings. Evaluation practitioners may incorporate these findings and others into their practice to increase the likelihood their evaluations will be used by those with whom they work and influence those that are involved in the process. By continuing to research evaluation influence in real life settings, the field can broaden the knowledge and understanding of evaluation influence to include more complexities and nuances, leading to a more complete understanding of the ways in which evaluation can impact people, groups, and communities.

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# Appendixes

## Appendix A: Pre-Evaluation Interview Questions

(Past involvement with evaluation)
To begin, can you tell me about your previous experience with any evaluation projects either at Helping Hopkins or another agency, and this can include projects that you directly participated in or saw reported on?

- If past experience: probe into …
    - In what ways did this evaluation work influence …..
        - You and your work *(individual level)* probe: and this can include the way you do your work, the way you think about programming,
        - Your working groups *(interpersonal level) probe:* and this can include how your work in groups and teams, the process of developing and implementing strategic plans, the way you prioritize community needs, etc.
        - Your organization *(collective level)* probe: and this can include how evaluation influence the organization overall, in terms of tailoring programming to community needs, social norms, policy, and your relationships with community partners.

Next, I want to ask about the role of evaluation at Helping Hopkins specifically.

*Agency (collective level) and Interpersonal influence:*
In what ways, if any, is evaluation currently being used at Helping Hopkins?

How has evaluation been used at Helping Hopkins in the past?

In what ways is evaluation important to the work being done at Helping Hopkins?

In what ways has evaluation work influenced policy change within Helping Hopkins?

How has evaluation work influenced programming at Helping Hopkins?

In what ways has evaluation work influenced strategic planning and agenda setting at Helping Hopkins?

How has evaluation work changed social norms at Helping Hopkins?

In what ways has evaluation work influenced the way teams work together?

Next, I want to ask about how evaluation impacts your work, specifically.
<u>Individual level influence</u>:

How useful, if at all, do you find evaluation to be to your work?

- If useful, in what ways do you find evaluation to be useful to your work?
- If not, why not?

How important do you think evaluation is to your work?

- If important, In what ways do you find evaluation to be important to your agency's work?
- If not, why not?

How often do you think about evaluation in your work at Helping Hopkins?

- In what ways do you think about evaluation in your work or have you thought about your work in the past?

In what ways, if any, do you see evaluation being used as a tool for learning?

In what ways, if any, do you see evaluation influencing your behavior and workflow at Helping Hopkins?

Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know about your past experience with evaluation?

## Appendix B: Post-Evaluation Interview Questions

To begin, I want you to reflect on the findings of the evaluation- including the group meeting where we went over the findings together, your individual learnings, and how you are using the findings both in your role and in the larger work of Helping Hopkins.

Results-based use

1. What are the biggest takeaways or lessons you have learned from the evaluation findings?
2. In what ways have you applied what you learned from the evaluation findings to the employment program?
3. How have the findings of the evaluation been useful in your role, specifically?
4. How might you continue to use what you learned about the employment program or what plans do you have for continued use of the findings in the future?

Next, I want you to reflect back on your involvement in the entire evaluation process. This includes the evaluation planning meeting, the back and forth drafting of evaluation materials (e.g the program logic model, data collection tools, survey questions, etc.), data collection, analysis and reporting drafts, and the shared discussion around the final evaluation report/findings.

Process-based use

5. What are your biggest takeaways or lessons learned from participating in the evaluation process?
    a. Did you develop any new understandings about evaluation?
        i. If so, what did you learn about evaluation throughout the process?
    b. Did you develop any new skills related to evaluation?
        i. If yes, what new skills did you develop?
        ii. How confident do you feel in your ability to continue to use these skills?
    c. Are you using anything of what you learned about evaluation in your role now?
        i. Have you incorporated anything you learned about evaluation into your role?
        ii. Do you plan to continue to include these new learnings in your work?
6. What plans do you have for future evaluation activities at the organization?
7. What lessons/skills/ideas can you apply to future evaluation projects?

Finally, I want to ask a couple questions about your personal opinion of evaluation.

Attitudes towards evaluation

8. How, if at all, has your opinion of evaluation changed since being involved in this evaluation?
9. How likely are you to continue using evaluation at the agency? In your role?

10. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experience in the evaluation process or things we have not discussed that you would like to share?

## Appendix C: Evaluation Timeline

September 2019

- The Executive Director of Helping Hopkins sent an announcement to the Helping Hopkins board and staff introducing the study and providing notice that the researcher would be contacting them in the next month.

October 2019

- The researcher sent out communications to board members and staff inviting them to participate in the study and schedule pre-evaluation interviews (see appendix D for communication)
- Pre-evaluation interviews were held with board members and staff October 7th-18th (see appendix A for interview protocol)
- On October 21st an all team evaluation planning meeting was held with the Executive Director, a member of the board, and all staff members. During this meeting, the team worked to describe the employment program (the focus of the evaluation), drafted a preliminary program logic model, brainstormed and prioritized questions, and began initial discussions about what methods could be used to collect data to answer the evaluation questions (see appendix E).

November 2019

- The working team and researcher worked back and forth to finalize the evaluation plan The finalized plan was agreed upon on November 4th, 2019
- During the first week of the month, the working team and the researcher worked collaboratively to create the survey instrument that would be used to collect employment program participant information from the electronic database and during client phone interviews.
- The interview instrument was piloted the week of 11/25/2019 with five employment program participants. The working team and researcher then worked together to revise the instrument.

December 2019

- The revised survey instrument was finalized the first week of December.
- Helping Hopkins staff worked to collect data from the client electronic database and completed interview phone calls with employment program participants throughout the duration of the month of December 2019.
- Helping Hopkins staff input necessary data into the shared electronic form used for this project.
- Met to talk about deliverables and clarify expectations around reporting

January-February 2020

- At the start of the year, the researcher and the small team met to clarify expectations around deliverables and reporting.
- The researcher conducted a preliminary analysis of the data and brought the initial findings back to the working team for feedback. A finalized report was created based on the working teams' feedback, drafted recommendations, and suggested revisions.

March 2020

- The findings of the report were shared during two meetings. The first meeting was held with the entire board of directors (including those members who had not been involved in the evaluation process through its entirety). The second meeting was held with staff members, all of whom had been involved throughout the duration of the evaluation.
- During these meetings teams worked collaboratively to prioritize recommendations and draft next steps to be taken to move the recommendations forward.

## Appendix D: Pre and Post Study Communication

**<u>Invitation email (pre)</u>**

Subject Line: Upcoming Helping Hopkins Evaluation Project- Study Invitation

Good morning Helping Hopkins team!

Earlier this week you heard from Tarrah about the upcoming evaluation work and dissertation study that will be happening at Helping Hopkins. I wanted to take a minute now to introduce myself and explain a bit more about the study before inviting you to participate.

My name is Lindsay Anderson and I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Minnesota. I am studying Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development, emphasizing in Evaluation Studies. As the capstone to my program I am working to complete my dissertation work, studying Evaluation Influence and Use in a social services agency. With a background in social work and current work in evaluation I am hoping to build further understanding around evaluation use theories while giving back to the field that continues to drive my career pursuits.

For the study I will be working with you and the rest of the Helping Hopkins team to complete an evaluation at your agency that helps to inform future programming. This is an excellent opportunity for contributors at all levels of the organization to come together to collaborate and your participation throughout the process will make all the difference.

Before we hold an in-person evaluation planning meeting I am asking you to participate in a 45-minute phone interview. During the pre-evaluation interview I will ask about your previous experience with evaluation, how evaluation is currently being used at Helping Hopkins and about your attitudes towards evaluation. The information collected in the pre-evaluation interview will be used to inform both the evaluation at Helping Hopkins as well as my larger dissertation study around evaluation influence and use.

If you agree to participate in the pre-evaluation interview, please use the link below to schedule a 45-minute block of time for a phone call that is convenient for your schedule. Upon scheduling a time for the phone interview, I will send along a copy of the interview questions for your review.

Pre-Evaluation Scheduling Tool

Your participation in this study is voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential. The more perspectives we have participating in the conversations the more informed our evaluation work will be. If you have any questions, concerns, or want to talk through any other details of the evaluation or my study, please do not hesitate to reach out by email: and02205@umn.edu or phone: 952-201-3656.

Thank you so much for your participation. I am eager to begin this work with you.

Best,

Lindsay

**Invitation email (post)**

Subject line: Post-Evaluation Interview- Study Invitation

Hello Helping Hopkins team,

Thank you everyone for your participation in the evaluation work at Helping Hopkins. I appreciated your contributions, open-minds, and motivation to implement the evaluation findings moving forward.

To complete my dissertation study, and close out the evaluation, I am asking for your participation in a 45-minute phone interview. During the interview we will revisit questions from the pre-evaluation interview and also focus on questions related to your experience participating in the evaluation process at Helping Hopkins. This is an opportunity to contribute to my larger dissertation study and provide feedback on how the evaluation process could be improved and continued to be used at Helping Hopkins in the future.

If you agree to participate in the post-evaluation interview, please use this link to schedule a 45-minute block of time for a phone call that is convenient for your schedule. Upon scheduling a time for the phone interview, I will send along a copy of the interview questions for your review.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential. If you have any questions, concerns, or want to talk through any other details of the evaluation or my study, please do not hesitate to reach out by email: and02205@umn.edu or phone: 952-201-3656.

Thank you so much for your participation.

## Appendix E: Evaluation Planning Meeting Agenda and Notes

Evaluation Planning and Scoping Meeting
Monday, October 21st
2:30-4p

| | |
|---|---|
| 2:30p | Introductions |
| 2:40p | Overview of Meeting |
| 2:45p | Program Description and Theory of Change<br>● What is a theory of change?<br>● TOC Activity<br>● TOC template |
| 3:10p | Evaluation Overview<br>● Types of evaluation |
| 3:20p | Defining Purpose<br>● 6-word response activity |
| 3:30p | Identifying Key Questions<br>● Post-it activity<br>● Categorizing questions<br>● Prioritizing questions |
| 3:45p | Data Collection- Methods Discussion |
| 3:50p | What's Next?<br>● Timeline<br>● Deliverables<br>● Roles and responsibilities<br>● Close |

Meeting purpose:
To scope the evaluation of the employment program.

Goals:
1. Map employment program theory of change
2. Define evaluation purpose
3. Identify / prioritize key questions
4. Discuss possible data collection methods

Meeting Summary

TOC ACTIVITY

- Logic Model

<u>Evaluation purpose activity responses:</u>

- Are people employed? What services helped those who accessed the program?
- Are we efficiently helping potential clients?
- What do we do vs. what do other agencies in the community do to serve our community?
- Who are we serving and what are their needs?
- What changes should we implement?
- Are participants' terms of employment improving over time? Independent yet connected?

<u>Evaluation Questions Per Component</u>

- What we do
    - Can we increase the number of people we serve?
    - What percentage of the people we serve get help?
    - Are we missing people that we could be serving?
    - How many resumes, cover letters, and applications are completed in our employment program?
    - What level of technology knowledge do participants have and what other programming can we offer to assist?
    - What activities in the employment program do participants say are most helpful?
    - Between applications, resumes, and finding the right job fit, is there an area that is the trickiest to complete with participants?
- Who we reach
    - “Who” of the “who” do we need more of to better support participants?
    - Can we partner with other organizations and provide more resources in partnership?
    - What community partners can we form partnerships with to meet clients' employment needs?
    - How do we connect with different employers or educate our clients about different hiring processes?
    - How do we connect and educate different employers about hiring clients who are facing barriers?
    - How do we partner with other groups to provide info? (i.e. career force)
    - How do we best establish relationships with employers?
    - How can we engage volunteers to help clients?
- Short-term
- Intermediate
    - What does stable employment look like?
    - Next what happened:
        - Does the client have secure employment?

        - Do clients have increased awareness of the tools and community resources available for them related to employment?
        - Is the participant currently employed?
        - What skills have improved after connecting with RW?
        - Do we follow-up to ask clients about jobs? pay? hours? title? over time?
        - How do we track who we have helped and their employment success?
        - Are participants becoming employed or increasing employment hours or wages?
        - Are participants one more step along in their understanding of "job hunting"?
    - Client needs:
        - How can we better assist clients facing barriers?
        - What employment industry would participants like to have more information about?
        - How can we better serve multiple people at once? classes? training?
        - What types of employment are available to participants with limited work history in the US or with limited English? How to better assist.
        - What certificates or knowledge do participants want?
- Impact
    - Category 1:
        - Has participant income increased over time?
        - Does the participant currently have stable housing?
        - How do we stay connected to individuals we've helped to see long-term impacts?
        - Has the client's lifestyle stabilized after working with HH?
        - Have educational goals been met or achieved? Are they being pursued?
        - What is the percentage of rent to income ratio of participants served by the employment program at HH?
        - Does the client have a job a year after working with HH?
    - Category 2:
        - Can we convince potential donors that we are effectively helping our community?
        - Have institutions evaluated their own hiring practices based on their relationship with RW?
        - What systems changes have there been with local hiring partners??

<u>Questions and purpose of this evaluation</u>

- What are we doing?
    - Monitoring and tracking activities of the employment program.
- Who are we serving? What are their needs?

    - Demographics of who is coming in and accessing the employment program.
    - Intake form on what employment resources they are seeking.
- What happened next?
    - Where are clients after receiving services of the employment program?