



## Utilization-Focused Evaluation for the Quality Improvement Center for Early Childhood

InSites is conducting the cross-site evaluations and the evaluation of the QIC-EC as a whole, using participatory and utilization-focused evaluation. Understanding how to take action in a complex system is filled with nuances. We believe that understanding is promoted through active, well-chosen participation in the evaluation with clarity about the evaluation's intended uses and users. To garner a sense of this evaluative approach, we have included here excerpts from the work of Michael Patton, the father of utilization-focused evaluation.

Michael Patton states<sup>1</sup>:

Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) begins with the premise that **evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use**; therefore, evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful consideration of how everything that is done, from beginning to end, will affect use.

Use concerns how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experience the evaluation process. Therefore, **the focus in utilization-focused evaluation is on intended use by intended users**. Since no evaluation can be value-free, utilization-focused evaluation answers the question of whose values will frame the evaluation by working with clearly identified, primary intended users who have responsibility to apply evaluation findings and implement recommendations.

**Utilization-focused evaluation is highly personal and situational.** The evaluation facilitator develops a working relationship with intended users to help them determine what kind of valuation they need. This requires negotiation in which the evaluator offers a menu of possibilities within the framework of established evaluation standards and principles.

**Utilization-focused evaluation does not advocate any particular evaluation content, model, method, theory, or even use.** Rather, it is a process for helping primary intended users select the most appropriate content, model, methods, theory, and uses for their particular situation. **Situational responsiveness guides the interactive process between evaluator and primary intended users.** A utilization-focused evaluation can include any evaluative purpose (formative, summative, developmental), any kind of data (quantitative, qualitative, mixed), any kind of design (e.g., naturalistic, experimental), and any kind of focus (processes, outcomes, impacts, costs, and cost-benefit, among many possibilities). Utilization-focused evaluation is a process for **making decisions about these issues in collaboration with an identified group of primary users** focusing on their intended uses of evaluation.

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*The ideas from complexity sciences and their application to evaluation are discussed in more detail in two documents available on the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) website. The names of the documents are (a) An Overview: Designing Initiative Evaluation and (b) Designing Initiative Evaluation: A Systems-orientated Framework for Evaluating Social Change Efforts. Go to <http://www.wkkf.org/default.aspx?tabid=100&CID=281&CatID=281&NID=211&LanguageID=0> where you will find them at the beginning of the list of WKKF publications.*

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1 Patton, M. (2002). "Utilization-focused Evaluation (U-FE) Checklist". Evaluation Checklists Project. Western Michigan University. [www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists](http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists). Emphases added by InSites.

A psychology of use undergirds and informs utilization-focused evaluation: **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.

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