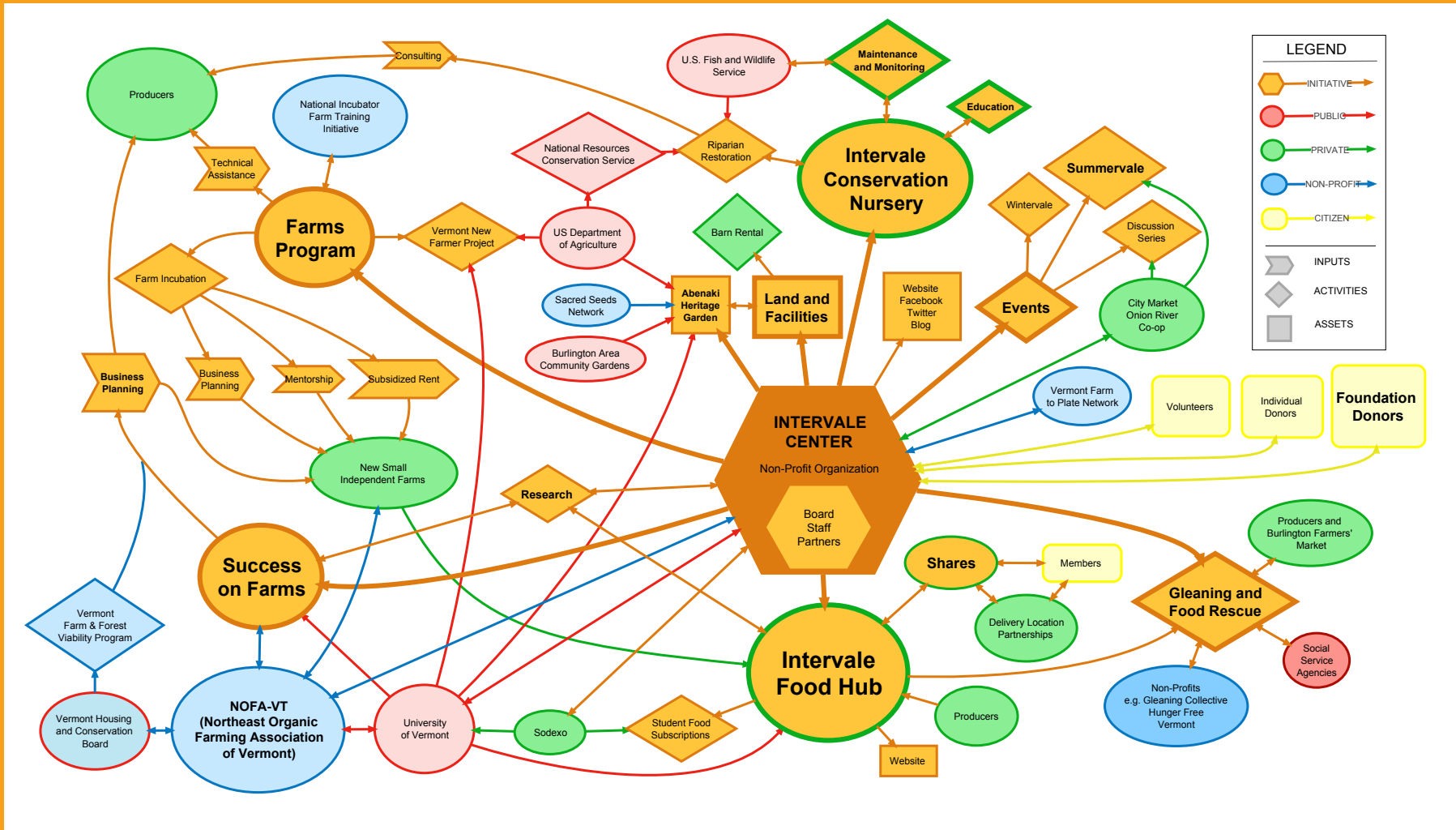


# Evaluating Community Food Hubs: A Practical Guide

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Visual representation of the Intervale Center, a community food hub located in Burlington, Vermont (developed with VUE software, Tufts University)

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The first section of the guide outlines some of the main reasons for doing evaluation work and offers an evaluation summary. Section 2 then focuses on a number of key questions that are useful to consider in preparation for evaluating your community food hub. Section 3 offers some specific suggestions and resources designed to facilitate the process of conducting an evaluation – including a number of suggested indicators to measure progress in terms of both process and outcomes. Section 4 covers some of the common ways that results may be used. This is followed by a list of additional resources and references that might be useful.

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# INTRODUCTION

Across Ontario – and in other parts of the world – the number of community food hubs (CFHs) is growing rapidly. Responding to growing interest in local and sustainable foods, these businesses and organizations offer a range of programs and services focused on helping the local, sustainable food sector thrive. Evaluating the impacts of CFHs can be challenging for a number of reasons – including lack of time and resources, insufficient knowledge and expertise about evaluation methods, and the complex nature of many CFH operations. However, as the

number of food hubs increases, and the scope of their work expands, finding ways to do effective evaluation work is increasingly important.

This guide is designed to make it easier for CFHs to evaluate the many impacts of their work. The information and suggestions provided are based largely on conversations with people from CFHs that have proven track-records of success – both in terms of their overall operations, and in implementing effective evaluation strategies. The insights

provided by these experts in the field are complemented by information from the literature available on evaluation.

Throughout the document, references are provided to resources that can help you with specific aspects of an evaluation, or guide you in a step-by-step way through a particular approach. You'll find these resource references, including weblinks, in the light blue boxes. The dark blue boxes provide examples of evaluation work being done by leading CFHs.

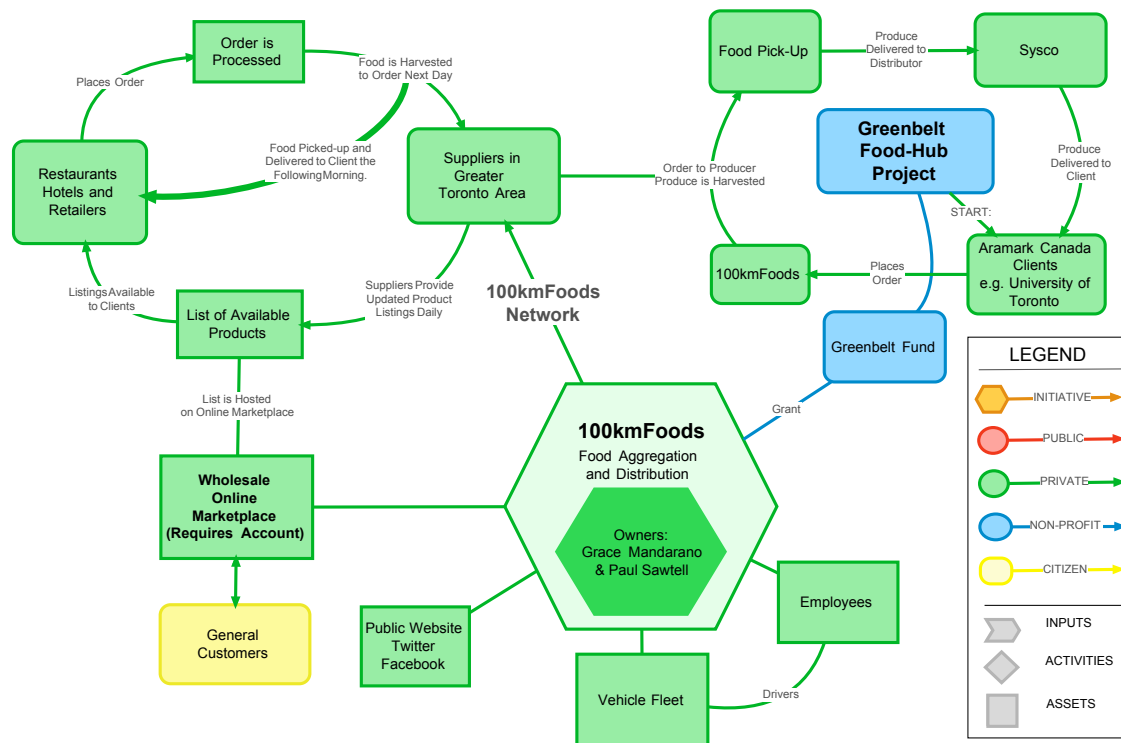


Figure 1: Visual map of 100km Foods Inc.

Note: The legend categories used in the VUE diagrams are a good guide for developing your own evaluation categories. The maps presented were created using VUE (Visual Understanding Environment) open source software, available at <https://vue.tufts.edu/index.cfm>.

# INTRODUCTION

## WHO IS THE GUIDE FOR?

Many different CFH models exist, and this resource is intended to support the evaluation efforts of businesses and organizations across a wide spectrum of operations. It can be used by hubs that 1) have different *structures*, 2) operate at different *scales*, 3) are in different *stages of development*, 4) focus on different *goals and priorities*, and 5) have different *levels of complexity* in their programs and activities (see table, right).

Regardless of where your CFH falls within each category, developing effective plans and processes for evaluation is important. Where necessary, the guide will highlight issues that are of special importance, or could be less relevant, to hubs with particular characteristics.

**It is important that your goals are clearly expressed and shared with all stakeholders.**

## WHAT CHARACTERIZES YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB?

1	STRUCTURES	CFHs can be non-profit organizations, businesses, social enterprises, or cooperatives, or can operate using some combination of these structures.
2	SCALES	Some CFHs employ many people and volunteers while others work with minimal human resources. Similarly, a hub may move large quantities of food and operate with significant amounts of land and other resources, or it could function on a much smaller scale.
3	STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT	Because the sector is growing so quickly, many CFHs are in relatively early stages of development. The evaluation priorities and capacities of these hubs can, to some extent, be different from the priorities and capacities of a more mature hub that has been operating for a longer time.
4	GOALS AND PRIORITIES	In some cases, a CFH may focus almost exclusively on aggregating and distributing local food. Other hubs place emphasis on training and education, food access and social justice, or environmental concerns. It is very common for CFHs to work on some combination of these and other goals.
5	LEVELS OF COMPLEXITY	CFHs that focus on a relatively narrow set of priorities may offer a relatively narrow range of programs and/or services. For hubs that focus on a combination of goals, the suite of programs, services and activities offered can be highly complex, as can the range of partners that contribute to the hub's work. In many cases, more complex organizations are also more mature. As a result, although evaluating impacts across multiple priority areas may be more challenging, there may also be greater organizational capacity to undertake evaluation work.

# INTRODUCTION

## VISUALIZING DIFFERENT KINDS OF CFHs

The two visual maps represent two very different CFH models. 100km Foods Inc. (Figure 1, p.1) is a for-profit business focused primarily on aggregation and distribution of local food in the Greater Toronto Area. Everdale Organic Farm and Environmental Learning Centre (Figure 2, below) is a non-profit agency that, with sites in Toronto and Hillsburgh, engages in a wide range of food programming (including production, farmer training, and

public education). These hubs demonstrate the varying levels of complexity, and different balances of public and private actors that a food hub may have. The process of developing this kind of visual representation will be discussed in the section on evaluation tools.

*The visual representations in this document were prepared by Scott Cafarella, and draw on the work of Mount and Andree (2013).*

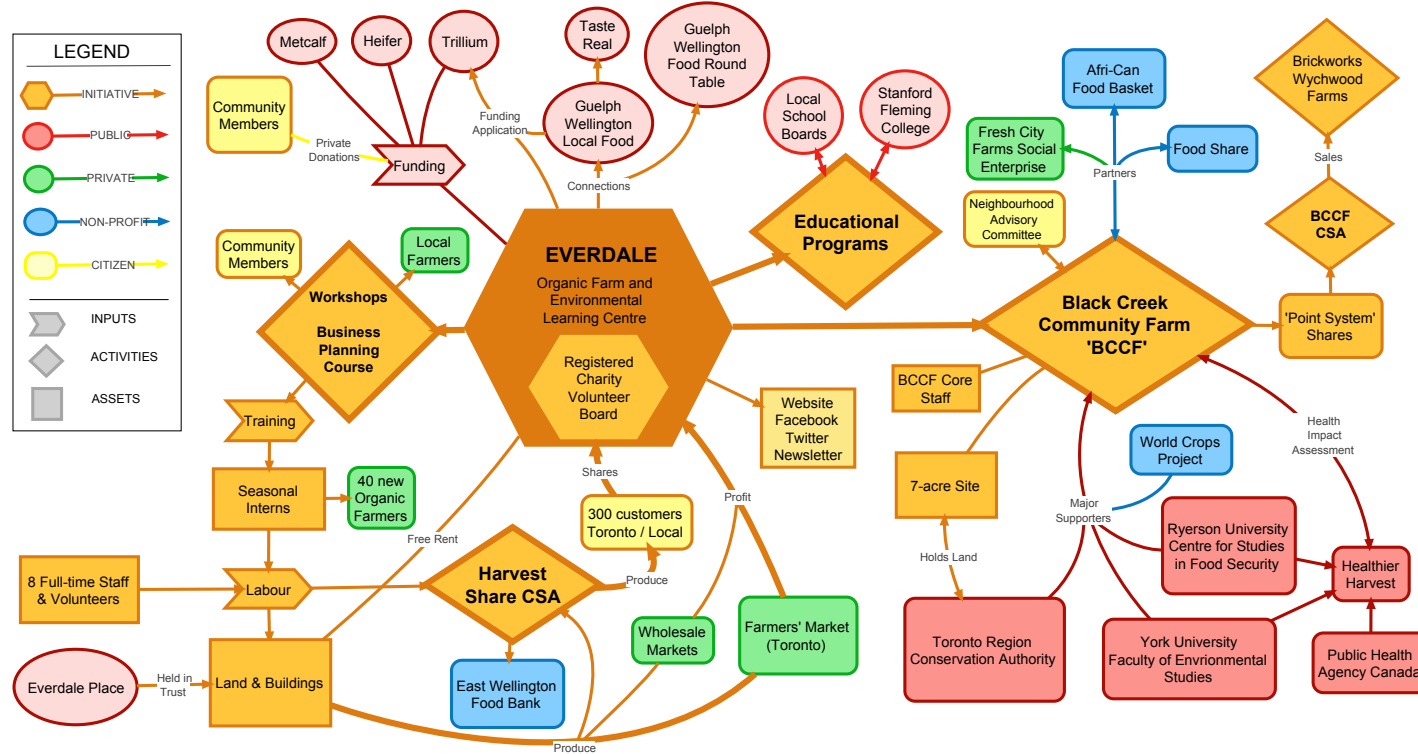


Figure 2: Visual map of Everdale Organic Farm and Environmental Learning Centre

# INTRODUCTION

## WHY IS EVALUATION IMPORTANT?

1

### EVALUATION HELPS YOU TELL YOUR STORY TO OTHERS

“ One big benefit is sharing your success. I share our work with a lot of other organizations, so having some synthesis of what we do is super helpful in being able to outline what our impacts are. ”  
– CFH staff member

Stakeholder groups are important to a CFH's success. Doing even very basic evaluation work makes it much easier to tell your story to these people, who include customers, business partners, government officials, program participants, community members, and the general public. Telling your story effectively can help cement existing support and attract new partners, clients, and advocates for a CFH.

2

### FUNDERS GENERALLY WANT TO SEE EVALUATION RESULTS

Increasingly, CFHs are finding that they need to provide existing and prospective funders with solid information about the impacts of their work. This is especially important for hubs that rely heavily on grant funding.

“ I like feeling confident. I like going into a meeting with a funder, or writing something, and knowing that I'm accurately representing the work we're doing. I like being confident that the impact we can demonstrate is real, and measurable, and repeatable. That helps me feel good about doing my job. ”  
– CFH staff member

3

### EVALUATION HELPS YOU UNDERSTAND AND IMPROVE YOUR WORK

“ Evaluating is really about how do I improve the process, and how do I get enough information so that I can make decisions grounded in a good assessment of what's really going on. ”  
– CFH staff member

While demonstrating impacts to an external audience is important, evaluation is also an essential tool for understanding and improving the internal functioning of a business or organization. It can be thought of as a map-making exercise that can make it easier to see exactly where you are, what your surroundings look like, where your destination is, and the best route to get there. While this does require some investment of time and energy, it is an essential part of making sure a CFH is successful over the long term.

## EVALUATION SUMMARY

It should be clear from this guide that there is no one-size-fits-all way to carry out an evaluation of your CFH. Rather, developing an effective evaluation strategy is something that takes time, and your evaluation efforts will almost certainly evolve as your organization

matures. That said, thinking through the considerations presented in this guide, and taking advantage of some of the suggestions and resources that provided, can be a useful starting point. Good luck, and hopefully you enjoy the evaluation journey!





# READINESS FOR EVALUATION

Before deciding on an evaluation strategy, it can be very helpful to think through some key considerations. Even if evaluation work is already underway, it may be a good idea to revisit some of these questions to make sure the process you are using is as effective as possible.

## WHY DO YOU WANT TO DO EVALUATION WORK?

Be as clear as possible about the reasons for evaluation to make it clear to everyone involved – particularly the staff and/or volunteers doing the work – why it is worth the time and effort. Demonstrate the value of your CFH work to current and potential funders. Tell your story to other audiences, including community members and policy-makers. Make sure that your food hub is functioning as effectively as possible, and stay true to its mission and objectives. In many cases, there are multiple, overlapping reasons for doing evaluation. Being explicit about these reasons is important, as it will have an impact on the evaluation processes you use, the kind of information you gather, and the way you use results.

## WHAT ARE YOUR KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS?

Once you have a sense of why you want to do evaluation work, it is important to think carefully about what key questions you hope that this work will answer. **It can be easy to make an overly ambitious evaluation plan and collect large amounts of data that will be difficult to use effectively.** Defining a

- few broad evaluation questions at the outset
- will help ensure your evaluation plan has
- a manageable scope, and will also inform
- decisions about what information to collect,
- how to collect it, and how to use results.

## WHAT EVALUATION EFFORTS ARE ALREADY UNDERWAY?

- It is not uncommon for a CFH to conduct
- some kind of evaluation work without explicitly
- labeling it as such. Before designing a more
- intentional evaluation strategy, it is useful to
- list any and all existing activities that could be
- incorporated in some way into that strategy.
- For example, are you tracking any information
- about program users or clients? Does this
- include information about their experiences or
- opinions about your programs and services?
- Does your hub have any mechanisms in place,
- even informal ones, for checking in with staff
- about what they think is working well and what
- is not?

- Part of the purpose of this guide is to help
- CFHs translate some of these activities
- that may already be underway into a more
- cohesive and intentional evaluation plan.

## WHAT TYPE OF EVALUATION IS MOST APPROPRIATE?

- There are many ways to do evaluation work. In
- general, approaches to evaluation fall into two
- broad categories: 1) process evaluation and
- 2) outcome evaluation. The two approaches
- are not mutually exclusive, and your evaluation
- work can easily incorporate elements of both.
- Thinking about them separately can be helpful,
- as it can help you make decisions about the
- kinds of information you want to collect and
- how you will use it.

## BETTEREVALUATION.ORG

An excellent place to go as you start thinking about how to approach your evaluation work is the website <http://betterevaluation.org>. This comprehensive, user-friendly site offers a wealth of information about a range of evaluation approaches and methods. Its “Rainbow Framework” is a particularly useful tool that can help you manage your evaluation strategy from start to finish.

# READINESS FOR EVALUATION

Although the two categories are not mutually exclusive, generally process evaluation involves tracking basic information (e.g., numbers of clients or program participants), whereas outcome evaluation involves collecting information that can demonstrate change (e.g., numbers collected over time for comparison, or stories about changes in people’s lives). For CFHs, it is very common to focus on tracking basic information in the first few years. This information can still be used to tell important stories about the impacts of your work. It will also provide you with strong baseline data that can be used in later years to help demonstrate outcomes. More details on the kinds of information that is collected through process and outcome evaluation, and the ways that information can be used, will be provided later on in this guide.

## PROCESS EVALUATION

Process evaluation focuses on how programs and *processes within* an organization are running. This kind of evaluation is designed to help you answer questions related to whether or not your business or organization is functioning as effectively as possible. If you are interested in evaluating a program or activity that is ongoing, or in the process of being created, you will want to take a process-oriented approach as the results can be used to improve the design and implementation of your work. Process evaluation can be particularly useful for newer organizations whose programs are in relatively early stages of development.

VS

## OUTCOME EVALUATION

Evaluations that take an outcome-oriented approach focus on the *results* that an organization has achieved through its programs and services. These outcomes can be short-term, medium-term, or long-term. This kind of evaluation may not be possible if your CFH is very new, because it can take time to demonstrate outcomes. However, planning for the kind of outcomes you want to measure from the very beginning will make future evaluation much easier.

***It can take 7-10 years for a CFH to really begin to demonstrate the achievement of outcomes. Until then, focusing more heavily on process evaluation is normal.***

“ ***Don’t start a community engagement program without making sure the evaluation is an important part in the planning. Think, when you’re planning, about what might be measures of success and how you’ll capture them. When you’re in that early stage of things...you’re just thinking about attendance, and return attendees...It takes a while to have the luxury to look at other impacts...In the beginning, the surveys were about how can we make an event that people will like and will come to. Now we’ve figured out that formula, so it’s become about how is this changing your life, or what role does this play in your life.*** ”

– CFH staff member

## COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

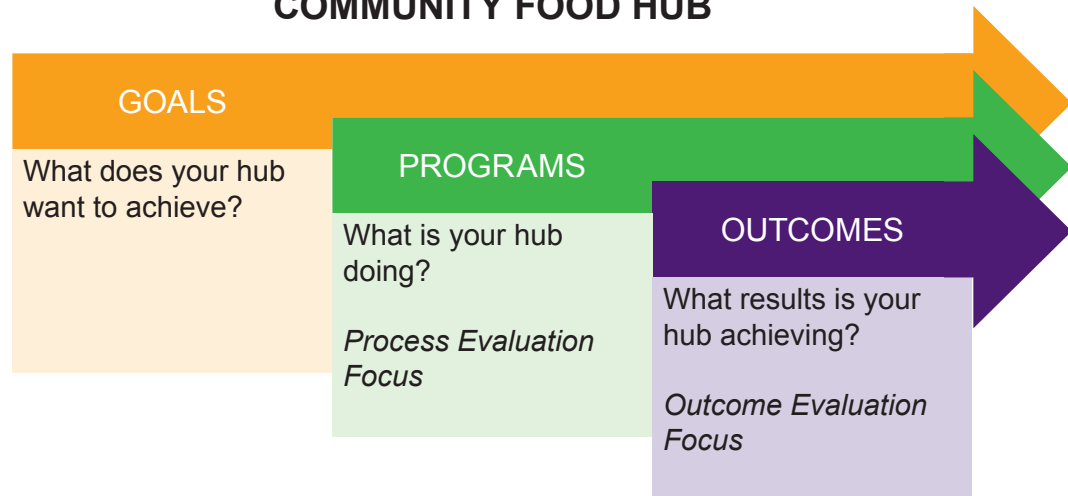


Figure 3: The relationship between goals, programs, and outcomes is at the heart of any evaluation.

# READINESS FOR EVALUATION

## WHO IS GOING TO DO THE WORK?

In some cases, CFHs hire an external consultant or researcher to do evaluation work. While that can be useful, it may also be expensive which can make it difficult to keep doing evaluation work on an ongoing basis. This guide is intended to make it easier for CFHs to do their own evaluation work without the need to hire an external evaluator.

Ideally, an evaluation strategy should be simple enough that it can be integrated into regular operating procedures and carried out by food hub staff or, in some cases, volunteers. Integrating evaluation in this way helps to make sure that it happens on a regular basis and people directly involved in the organization take ownership of the process. The more ownership people have over the processes of evaluation, the more effectively results will be used.

## U-FE: EVALUATION AS A DECISION MAKING TOOL

Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) is, above all, intended to help organizations make effective decisions. As an evaluation approach, it focuses on the people who will use the results of an evaluation, and aims to engage them as actively as possible in all steps of the evaluation process. It is most effectively applied when those same people have the freedom to make decisions about evaluation work and about their organization or program. An excellent step-by-step guide to carrying out this style of evaluation is available at <http://evaluationandcommunicationinpractice.net/primer> (Ramírez and Brodhead, 2013).

## 4 TIPS FOR GETTING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN EVALUATION

(Adapted from [Evaluating Outcomes of Community Food Actions: A Guide](#), prepared by Andrew Taylor and Jason Newberry.

- 1** Start out with more informal, exploratory evaluation; then move to more structured evaluation as people become more engaged. Sometimes even an informal chat over coffee with frontline staff or volunteers can be a way to get people thinking about the results their programs are trying to achieve, and the extent to which they are doing so.
- 2** Form an evaluation advisory committee that includes a few staff members, program participants, board members, and representatives from other stakeholder groups. This committee may meet regularly throughout the course of an evaluation process, or may just come together two or three times.
- 3** Take things you know some people may be dissatisfied with and use them as a starting point for developing more formal evaluation questions. People will generally be more interested in being involved in an evaluation if they believe it will help to address a specific issue or issues they care about.
- 4** Remember that time spent exploring the idea of evaluation is not time wasted. Often, the process of agreeing on outcomes or sorting out evaluation questions is challenging and time consuming. However, this effort often yields results even before evaluation data is collected. Stakeholders understand one another better, and feel affirmed. Great ideas about how to improve your organization may start to emerge almost immediately.

# READINESS FOR EVALUATION

## STRATEGIC PLANNING & THEORY OF CHANGE

“ *It's really important to...draw a line from where you are to where you want to be, and try to stay on that path as much as possible.* ”  
– CFH staff member

The more clarity an organization has about its vision, mission, and goals, the easier it is to evaluate how effectively it is working towards those goals and the extent to which it is achieving them. Although strategic planning can be time-consuming, investing that time upfront is an invaluable way to draw that line from where you are to where you want to be. There are lots of resources available that can help guide a strategic planning process, including this OMAFRA fact sheet: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/facts/89-173.htm>.

Developing a Theory of Change is one specific method that can be a very useful part of any strategic planning efforts, and can lay the groundwork for effective evaluation. Resources on the Theory of Change method are available at: <http://www.theoryofchange.org>.

## COMMON AUDIENCES

- A Board of Directors
- Staff and volunteers
- Funders
- The media
- Community members
- Policy-makers (municipal, provincial, and national)
- Other community food hubs
- Others associated with your hub (clients, food suppliers, program participants)

## WHO WILL THE AUDIENCE(S) FOR THE RESULTS BE?

This is one of the most important questions to think through before undertaking evaluation work, because the last thing you want to do is spend time collecting information that no one wants to see! It is helpful to be as explicit as possible about the different audiences who will want to see your evaluation results, and what presentation format would be most appropriate for them. You will know best who the appropriate audiences are for your evaluation results. The above lists present some common audiences and potentially relevant presentation formats.

## COMMON PRESENTATION FORMS

- Annual Report
- Shorter reports (pamphlets, 1-pagers)
- Reports based on funder templates
- Posters
- Infographics
- Word clouds
- Social media (tweets, blogs, and Facebook posts)
- PowerPoint presentations
- Video documentation

## HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

Another essential consideration for an evaluation strategy is how the results will be used. While this may sound obvious, it is not uncommon for organizations to collect lots of information that may seem interesting or important, without thinking through in detail how it will be used. Therefore, it is worth spending some time outlining, in as much detail as possible, the different ways you imagine using the results of your evaluation.

Knowing your audiences is a good starting point for this planning, as is having ideas about presentation formats. It can be useful to take this planning a step further, and think specifically about how you will convert information collected into the formats you want, and what exactly you will need to do to share the results with the people with whom you want to communicate.

# EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

Essentially, evaluation is about being able to demonstrate that the activities in which your CFH is engaged are having the intended effects, and are helping you reach your short- medium- and long-term goals. In order to do this, it is important to think explicitly about the relationship between your food hub's goals and the programs and services it offers, and about specific ways you can demonstrate the impacts of those programs and services.

Because there are so many different types of CFHs, each one will have its own unique sets of activities, desired outcomes, and indicators for demonstrating that those outcomes are being achieved. Thinking through each of those categories, and how they relate to each other, is

also a valuable part of the evaluation process. This can help make sure that the people involved in the evaluation take ownership over it and are more likely to use the results. This section of the guide, therefore, is not meant to be viewed as a template. Instead, the clusters of activities, outcomes, and indicators are meant to provide some idea about the kinds of things that are commonly relevant for CFH evaluation.

**You should feel free to take the information here that makes sense for your business or organization, leave what does not apply, and add anything that you find missing.**

## COMMON CFH ACTIVITIES

These activity areas, and the specific examples of activities listed within each cluster, are common for CFHs. They do not, by any means, represent an exhaustive list of potential activities, and the areas are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Feel free to take this as a starting point and develop an activity list that makes sense for your food hub.



Figure 4: Common themes for organizing CFH outcomes

# EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

## CONSUMER EDUCATION & OUTREACH

- Community kitchen
- Community garden
- Nutrition education
- Food processing training
- Food skills & literacy programs targeted at children and youth
- Food budgeting support
- Marketing healthy local foods

## FOOD AGGREGATION & DISTRIBUTION

- Farm pick-ups
- Food storage
- Food processing
- Food packing
- Sales to retailers
- Sales to institutions
- Preparation, distribution and sale of food boxes
- Virtual food hub

## FARMING AND FARMER TRAINING & SUPPORT

- Food production
- Food processing
- Land stewardship
- Farm Incubation program
- Farmer business training
- Farm internships
- Micro-credit program
- Land access program

## COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & ADVOCACY

- Food access program
- Community events
- Workshops
- Volunteer opportunities
- Community meals
- Policy work
- Speaker series
- Community-based research

# EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

## SAMPLE PROCESS EVALUATION MEASURES

As described earlier, process evaluation focuses on assessing the extent to which the activities you are engaged in are working the way you want them to. Process evaluation can help you determine if any changes need to be made to the programs and services you are offering in order to make them more effective, and ensure that they will actually lead to the outcomes you are hoping to achieve. It is a particularly useful form of evaluation for newer organizations that may not yet have well-established programs, and have not been operating long enough to be able to show clear outcomes.

The following tables offer some sample measures that could be used in process evaluation of various CFH activities. It is common for process evaluation measures to involve tracking numbers to describe the scale and scope of activities and how that might change over time.

### FOOD AGGREGATION & DISTRIBUTION

ACTIVITY	SAMPLE PROCESS EVALUATION MEASURES
Food Storage	<input type="checkbox"/> Amount of food stored
Food Processing	<input type="checkbox"/> Amount of food processed <input type="checkbox"/> Number of different products processed
Sales to Retailers	<input type="checkbox"/> Amount of food sold (by weight) <input type="checkbox"/> Food sales in dollars <input type="checkbox"/> Number of retailers supplied <input type="checkbox"/> Geographic location of retailers supplied
Food Box Delivery Program	<input type="checkbox"/> Amount of food distributed (by weight) <input type="checkbox"/> Number of food suppliers <input type="checkbox"/> Number of distribution points <input type="checkbox"/> Number of clients <input type="checkbox"/> Client demographics (e.g., age, occupation, income bracket) <input type="checkbox"/> Client retention <input type="checkbox"/> Client satisfaction (e.g., feedback survey)

### FARMING AND FARMER TRAINING & SUPPORT

ACTIVITY	SAMPLE PROCESS EVALUATION MEASURES
Food Production	<input type="checkbox"/> Amount of land in production <input type="checkbox"/> Number of crops and varieties grown <input type="checkbox"/> Amount of food produced (by weight)
Farm Incubation Program	<input type="checkbox"/> Number of program participants <input type="checkbox"/> Participant demographic information <input type="checkbox"/> Participant satisfaction with program components <input type="checkbox"/> Participant suggestions for improvement
Farmer Business Training	<input type="checkbox"/> Number of program participants <input type="checkbox"/> Participant demographic information <input type="checkbox"/> Participant satisfaction with program components <input type="checkbox"/> Participant suggestions for improvement
Micro-credit Program	<input type="checkbox"/> Number of loans <input type="checkbox"/> Amount of money loaned <input type="checkbox"/> Demographics of people receiving loans <input type="checkbox"/> Length of time for loan repayment <input type="checkbox"/> Loan uses

# EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

In addition to providing information about how programs and services might be improved, data collected through process evaluation is often used as a starting point for telling a story about the kinds of outcomes that might be likely given how your activities are functioning. Making this link between information collected about how your programs and services work, to the kinds of outcomes that they should achieve will inevitably involve some assumptions; it is important to be clear and transparent about what these are.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & ADVOCACY

ACTIVITY	SAMPLE PROCESS EVALUATION MEASURES
Food Access Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of program participants</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Amount of food distributed (by weight)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of food donors</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of volunteers and volunteer hours</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Program participant suggestions for improvement</li> </ul>
Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of attendees</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Attendee demographics (e.g., age, postal code)</li> </ul>
Volunteer Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of volunteers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer demographics</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of volunteer hours</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer satisfaction with experience</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Skills learned through volunteering</li> </ul>
Policy Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of communication opportunities with politicians and decision-makers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of policy briefs published</li> </ul>

## CONSUMER EDUCATION & OUTREACH

ACTIVITY	SAMPLE PROCESS EVALUATION MEASURES
Community Kitchen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of people using the kitchen</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demographic details of kitchen users</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of community meals &amp; attendees</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of volunteers and volunteer hours</li> </ul>
Nutrition Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of program participants</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participant demographics</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participant satisfaction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of volunteers and volunteer hours</li> </ul>
Youth Food Skills Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of program participants</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participant demographics</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participant satisfaction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of volunteers and volunteer hours</li> </ul>
Marketing Healthy Local Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Dollars spent on marketing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of advertisements (print ads, posters, radio spots)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Social media statistics (number of Facebook likes, Twitter followers, re-tweets)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Geographic reach of marketing efforts</li> </ul>



# EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

## DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION: EVALUATING INNOVATIONS IN A COMPLEX, RAPIDLY CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

A type of evaluation that focuses heavily on an organization's internal processes – though is different from traditional process evaluation – is developmental evaluation. This method is especially appropriate when an organization is placing significant emphasis on developing innovations to address highly complex issues, and wants to track the progress of those innovations. Doing a developmental evaluation does not replace process or outcome evaluations, but can be a useful complement to that work.

If you think a developmental evaluation might be useful for your organization, you can download a primer published by the McConnell Foundation at <http://www.mcconnellfoundation.ca/en/resources/publication/a-developmental-evaluation-primer>. The primer includes information designed to help you assess whether or not conditions are right for a developmental evaluation, and also provides tools to help you conduct one.

## PROCESS EVALUATION IN ACTION: EVERDALE'S BLACK CREEK COMMUNITY FARM WORKSHOPS

Everdale Organic Farm and Environmental Learning Centre has many different evaluation activities underway at its original site in Hillsburgh, Ontario, as well as at its new Black Creek Community Farm in Toronto's Jane-Finch neighbourhood. Because programming at Black Creek is still in its early days, evaluation is primarily process-oriented and involves tracking basic information about program activities and participants. Examples of information being tracked include: the number of visitors to the farm; the postal codes and birthplace of each visitor (to determine if target groups are being engaged); the number of tours offered; the number of varieties grown at the farm; the amount of food sold; and how much of what is sold goes to lower income people at a discounted rate. Everdale Board Chair Wally Seccombe

stressed that collecting this information needs to be quick and simple, so that it can be easily incorporated into the regular activities of busy staff and volunteers. That means thinking very strategically about what information needs to be collected and making tough decisions about what to leave out. Although the data from this kind of process evaluation does not directly establish the extent to which Everdale is achieving the outcomes it strives for, it does allow for certain inferences to be made about, for example, the potential for programming to contribute to improved health for vulnerable populations. The organization's plan is to start thinking about measuring outcomes in the coming years, and the results of the process evaluation will provide a solid foundation for that work.

## PROCESS EVALUATION IN ACTION: FRESH CITY FARMS FARM INCUBATION PROGRAM

An evaluation does not necessarily require a formal structure in order to be useful, and some organizations may be doing effective evaluation work without recognizing it as such. In the case of Fresh City Farms, a relatively informal evaluation strategy has provided valuable insights into the functioning of its farm incubation program, and facilitated program improvement. Farm Manager Phil Collins explained that the process involved relatively informal meetings with participating farmers that included brainstorming about the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Topics of conversation included: whether or not farmers felt they were gaining

enough experience and knowledge to be confident going into the next growing season; how comfortable they felt being able to teach new farmers; how they felt about the financial success of their farm; what amount of land would be ideal for program participants; and how effective the program staff and workshop structure were. Much of the information gathered after these discussions was incorporated immediately into the farm incubation program - for example, by informing decisions about the next year's workshop content and the size of parcels offered to member farmers.

# EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

## COMMON OUTCOMES THAT CFHs WANT TO ACHIEVE

The importance of taking time to explicitly think through the outcomes that your CFH wants to achieve cannot be overstated. These outcomes clarify what your business or organization wants to achieve in the short-medium- and long-term. In addition to ranging in time scale, outcomes also range in scope and can include impacts that occur at the individual, organizational, community, and systems level.

The outcome areas presented here, and the specific examples listed within each cluster, represent common areas of focus for CFHs. Many of the activities listed in the previous section could lead to outcomes in multiple areas. For example, activities related to farmer training and support may lead to outcomes that fall under each of the four themes provided here. You may find all of the outcomes your hub is hoping to achieve listed here; some will almost certainly not apply, while others may be missing. Taking the time to decide as an organization exactly what you want your outcomes to be is a very valuable part of the evaluation process.

**As you go through the process of identifying desired outcomes, it is helpful to keep the amount you are planning to track and measure to a manageable number (e.g., 3 to 5 outcomes per category).**



Figure 5: Common themes for organizing CFH outcomes

# EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & VIABILITY

- Increased farm/business revenue
- Jobs created
- Improved business management
- Increased market access for small- and medium-scale businesses
- Increased community economic development
- Increased investment in local food businesses
- Increased access to financing
- Increased connections to other businesses and organizations
- Increased access to services
- Increased diversity of customer base

## ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Increased biodiversity
- Reduced pest and weed problems
- Increased use of cover crops
- Improved soil quality
- Increased use of renewable energy
- Decreased presence of invasive species
- Increased number of trees
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions

## COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

## ACCESS TO, & DEMAND FOR, HEALTHY LOCAL FOOD

- Increased awareness of healthy local food and its benefits
- Increased purchases of healthy, local food
- Increased storage potential for local food
- Increased food skills and literacy
- Increased number of outlets supplying healthy local foods
- Increased diversity of healthy local foods available
- Increased diversity of healthy local food customers
- Increased access for marginalized groups

## PERSONAL & COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

- Improved health
- Improved emotional well-being
- Improved self confidence in decision-making
- Increased engagement in community activities
- Increased social connections & relationships
- Improved quality of life
- Implementation of policies supportive of sustainable local foods

# EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

## SAMPLE OUTCOME EVALUATION MEASURES

“ You’ve got to pick 3-5 things, because if you have hundreds of things you’re never going to get the data you want. And you have to stick by your decisions, so if someone asks you ‘how many x’, and you’re not measuring ‘x’, you can be open in that conversation, and say why you did the evaluation the way you did and why you don’t have that data. You can offer to get it if it might be useful, but you need to know why you’d get it.”

– CFH staff member

The following tables provide examples of indicators that can be used to track information and demonstrate progress towards achieving outcomes. Some indicators are more quantitative and can best be tracked as numbers, while others could be better addressed through qualitative information including personal stories. In some cases, an indicator could be measured using a combination of both numbers and stories.

*Note: When looking at economic development and viability, it can be easy to think about outcomes primarily in terms of a profit-to-loss ratio. According to the Intervale Center’s Finance Manager, Jonathan Guy, in some cases a more useful way to conceptualize success can be to focus instead on the ratio of investment-to-impact. This involves careful measurement of the resources invested into a program against the impacts achieved. Developing a solid logic model can help with this process (see page 19).*

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & VIABILITY

OUTCOME	SAMPLE INDICATORS
Increased revenue	<input type="checkbox"/> Total revenue compared to previous years
Jobs created	<input type="checkbox"/> Number of new staff (full and part time) hired by businesses participating in a program or supplying a CFH
Improved business management	<input type="checkbox"/> Increases in accounting skills (decreased reliance on external bookkeepers) <input type="checkbox"/> Increased confidence in business decision-making <input type="checkbox"/> Increased knowledge regarding how to access support when needed (e.g., credit, technical assistance)
Increased market access for small- and medium-scale businesses	<input type="checkbox"/> Increase in number of sales outlets (distributors, retailers, direct customers) for small- and medium-scale businesses <input type="checkbox"/> Increase in quantity of products sold
Increased community economic development	<input type="checkbox"/> Ken Meter’s economic multiplier calculation (multiply by 1.4 in areas dominated by large-scale farming, and by 2.6 in areas dominated by small-scale farming, or by a number within this range) to estimate the extra dollars that will circulate in the local economy as a result of local food sales.

### ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

OUTCOME	SAMPLE INDICATORS
Increased biodiversity	<input type="checkbox"/> Number of crops (and varieties) grown on site <input type="checkbox"/> Number of plant and animal species identified on site <input type="checkbox"/> Number of new species (plant and animal) identified on site <input type="checkbox"/> Number of tree species planted (and number of trees)
Increasing use of cover crops	<input type="checkbox"/> Amount of land dedicated to cover crops (tracking changes over time) <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge regarding effective cover crop use
Improved soil quality	<input type="checkbox"/> Technical indicators including soil pH, percentage of organic matter, micronutrient presence, etc.
Increased use of renewable energy	<input type="checkbox"/> Number of kilowatts sourced from renewable energy <input type="checkbox"/> Tracking the installation of renewable energy sources (e.g., solar panels, wind turbines)
Reduced greenhouse gas emissions	<input type="checkbox"/> The US Environmental Protection Agency provides a calculator to clarify how reductions in gasoline and energy use translate into reduced emissions. The tool is available at <a href="http://www.epa.gov/cleanenergy/energy-resources/calculator.html">http://www.epa.gov/cleanenergy/energy-resources/calculator.html</a>

# EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

## OUTCOME-ORIENTED EVALUATION IN ACTION

One of the longest-running CFH in North America, Burlington Vermont's Intervale Centre operates a wide range of programs and has a solid history of conducting both process and outcome evaluation. An example of a more outcome-oriented evaluation is its work to track the impacts of its farmer business-training program, which it runs on behalf of the US Department of Agriculture. Done with support from the University of Vermont, the evaluation involves a number of data collection activities that are carried out on a regular basis and designed to gather information that matches the benchmark program outcomes established by the USDA. Three of the main evaluation components are: 1) charts used to regularly track the progress of program participants towards a number of goals, including increases in knowledge, skills and confidence, improved decision-making capability, and changes made to farm operations; 2) an annual survey of program participants that addresses many of the same questions as well as issues of profitability; and 3) information collected through interviews about farmer opinions of the program, including why it is valuable and why they believe it should be funded. Although the emphasis of the farmer business-training program evaluation is to demonstrate outcomes that can be reported to the USDA, process-oriented information about how to improve the program is inevitably collected as well. This is a good example of how the same tools (i.e., tracking charts, surveys, and interviews) can contribute to both process- and outcome-oriented evaluation.

### PERSONAL & COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

OUTCOME	SAMPLE INDICATORS
Improved health	<input type="checkbox"/> Program participants' opinions regarding health improvements
Improved self confidence in decision-making	<input type="checkbox"/> Program participants' opinions regarding improvements in confidence
Increased social connections	<input type="checkbox"/> Number of new relationships formed through program participation or involvement with organization
Increased feeling of community belonging	<input type="checkbox"/> Stories regarding sense of belonging from program participants <input type="checkbox"/> Number of participants indicating an increased sense of belonging
Implementation of policies supportive of sustainable local foods	<input type="checkbox"/> Documentation of new policy initiatives that support sustainable local foods

### ACCESS TO, & DEMAND FOR, HEALTHY LOCAL FOOD

OUTCOME	SAMPLE INDICATORS
Increased awareness of healthy local food and its benefits	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased consumer knowledge about where to purchase local food <input type="checkbox"/> Increased consumer knowledge about local food benefits <input type="checkbox"/> Increased willingness to pay a premium for local foods
Increased purchases of healthy, local food	<input type="checkbox"/> Sales numbers for local food, especially fruits, vegetables and other non-processed foods
Increased access for marginalized groups	<input type="checkbox"/> Diversity of client or program participant population <input type="checkbox"/> Amount of food sold or distributed at reduced rates for low income populations
Increased storage potential for local food	<input type="checkbox"/> Square footage available at local food storage centres <input type="checkbox"/> Square footage of refrigerated storage space
Increased food skills and literacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased knowledge regarding food skills (e.g., canning) <input type="checkbox"/> Increased knowledge about nutrition

# EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

## LOGIC MODELS AND RESULTS BASED ACCOUNTABILITY

Increasingly, funders are requiring organizations to adopt a Results Based Accountability (RBA) approach, which involves collecting data in a systematic way to measure outcomes. One of the most common tools used as part of RBA is the logic model. Like a Theory of Change, a logic model is a way to clearly articulate the linkages between an organization's activities and outcomes. Typically, a logic model includes a list of: 1) inputs required to run a program;

2) program activities; 3) outputs produced through a program; and 4) impacts resulting from a program. These four elements are plotted out in a logical flow that helps illustrate how each one contributes to the next. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has a very thorough guide to developing a logic model available at <https://www.wkcf.org/resource-directory/resource/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide>.

## THINKING BEYOND YOUR INDIVIDUAL ORGANIZATION: THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT APPROACH

Although this guide is focused on supporting individual food hub organizations with their evaluation work, often the broader impacts food hubs are striving for are not achieved by one organization alone, but rather by the collective efforts of multiple actors. The concept of collective impact provides a useful framework for evaluating the impacts of collaborative networks – the kind within which many CFHs participate. For an excellent primer on the basics of the collective impact approach, the Collective Impact Forum offers this short video: <http://collectiveimpactforum.org/resources/tackling-complex-social-problems-through-collective-impact>.

A wealth of other resources are also available on their website. To see an example of how collective impact is being used specifically within a food systems context, check out Vermont's Farm-to-Plate network at: <http://www.vtfarmtoplate.com>. The site documents the development of collective goals for strengthening Vermont's food system, outlines indicators to measure progress towards those goals, and highlights how that progress can be measured at the level of an individual organization as well as collectively.

## EVALUATION "MAGIC"

One of the trickiest things about evaluation is effectively making connections between the activities or services your organization is offering, the outcomes being achieved, and the broader societal changes you are striving for, which could be quite lofty. For example, a CFH may have a big picture vision that includes increasing food system sustainability and contributing to the development of more vibrant, resilient communities. These kinds of targets are not only difficult to achieve, but it can be almost impossible to prove that your work is directly responsible for progress towards them. Identifying clear outcomes and collecting data to show how they are being achieved is part of that work, but experienced evaluators representing a number of community food hubs also point to the importance of a little bit of "magic". What they mean when they talk about evaluation magic is that it is up to you to take data about your outcomes and use it to tell a broader story, or paint a picture, that demonstrates in a convincing way how and why your programs and services are contributing to positive societal change. One thing that can help is to use available research and literature. For example, Everdale Board Chair Wally Secombe explains: "If we can show that there are more fresh vegetables being consumed, I don't have to show that there are health benefits because the research is already there to show that eating more vegetables has health benefits." Linking your evaluation results to existing research can make the story of your work especially compelling.

# EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

## COMMON TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

There are many different tools commonly used to collect evaluation data. Often, similar tools – or even the same one – can be used for both process and outcome evaluations. One thing that is essential to keep in mind when developing tools for data gathering is that they should be as simple as possible. Ideally, program staff or volunteers should be able to collect much of the information as part of their regular activities. That said, more intermittent evaluation tools – such as an annual survey – can also be useful. Regardless of specific tools you choose to employ, it is important to take into account the kinds of ethical standards that should apply to any process of collecting and using information from people. [http://betterevaluation.org/plan/manage\\_evaluation/ethical\\_evaluation](http://betterevaluation.org/plan/manage_evaluation/ethical_evaluation).

The following list outlines data collection methods commonly used for CFH evaluations. This list should by no means be considered exhaustive. Whatever tools you decide to use, it is important to make sure that they fit into your overall evaluation strategy. In other words, they need to meet your specific evaluation goals, be aligned with your capacity in terms of time and resources, and be designed to produce products that will be relevant to the audiences you want to reach.

## 9 DATA COLLECTION METHODS COMMONLY USED FOR CFH EVALUATIONS

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | TRACKING SHEETS                              |
| 2 | PRE-AND-POST SURVEYS                         |
| 3 | ANNUAL SURVEYS                               |
| 4 | WORKSHOPS                                    |
| 5 | FOCUS GROUPS                                 |
| 6 | INTERVIEWS                                   |
| 7 | SURVEYS AND/OR STORY COLLECTION AT EVENTS    |
| 8 | STORIES COLLECTED VIA E-MAIL OR SOCIAL MEDIA |
| 9 | MAPPING YOUR CFH                             |

**1 Tracking sheets** tend to focus on recording basic information about program participants or event attendees. They generally include a list of simple questions that can be filled in quickly, either on a one-time basis (in the case of events) or at regular intervals. They can be used to collect information about the extent to which target populations are being reached, demographic changes over time, and other changes that occur in program participants' lives. Ideally, information can be easily transferred into digital form (e.g., an Excel spreadsheet).

**2 Pre- and post-surveys** are a way to establish what changes occur after someone has participated in a program or event. Using this tool requires the development of survey questions focused on what the program aims to achieve (e.g., level of knowledge about certain topics, level of skill in different areas, level of confidence, and awareness of issues). Using the same survey, data is collected both before and after people have participated in a program or event. This data can then be compared to assess the changes resulting from participation.

**3 Annual surveys**, although requiring more time and effort than some of the simpler evaluation tools, can be a useful way to collect larger amounts of data on a wide range of topics related to both how your programs are running and the

# EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

extent to which your desired outcomes are being achieved. A number of steps need to be considered in order to effectively conduct an annual survey, including: 1) what questions will get you the information you need; 2) who do you want to fill out the survey; 3) how will you distribute the survey; 4) how will you record and analyze results; 5) how will you ensure confidentiality for respondents; and 6) how will you report on results. Having a staff person who can coordinate all of this is very important.

**4 Workshops** dedicated to gathering evaluation information through facilitated discussion and activities can be a good opportunity to brainstorm ideas about program effectiveness and discuss outcomes. Although they may take time to organize and carry out, workshops can be a very useful part of building the foundation for good evaluation. For example, they can be used to help develop a strategic plan, Theory of Change, or logic model. Participants can include community food hub staff, volunteers, program participants, clients, and even funders.

**5 Focus group** discussions can be an excellent way to collect comments and stories from program staff and participants. They can be organized as formal events but can also be very informal - for example, a lunchtime dedicated to discussing a particular

evaluation question. Regardless of how formal or informal a focus group is, it is useful to have someone facilitate discussion so that conversation sticks to key themes or questions, and someone taking notes to ensure that the information is documented.

**6 Interviews**, like focus groups, can be formal or informal and are a good way to collect comments and stories about how programs are functioning and about outcomes. Common questions for both interviews and focus groups can include: What do you feel is the best part about this program? What do you think could be improved? Has your life changed at all as a result of participating in this program? If so, how?

**7 Surveys and/or story collection at events** organized by your CFH can be good opportunities to collect evaluation information. For example, you can ask attendees to fill out a quick survey with some basic personal information, details about why they are attending the event, and other opinions about the work of your organization. Ideally, if asking people to do this at an event, the conduct informal interviews at an event and gather stories about why people are there and why they feel your organization is important in the community.

**8 Stories collected via e-mail or social media** can make a useful contribution to your evaluation strategy since it is common for program participants, clients, staff or volunteers to send e-mails, tweet, or post on Facebook about some of the ways your CFH impacts their lives. Before collecting these comments you will want to check with people before using any of the information they provided. Similarly, you can ask specific questions via your own social media accounts to try to gather information about a particular evaluation question.

**9 Mapping your CFH** is an exercise that can be a useful part of an evaluation strategy, creating visuals similar to the ones presented earlier in this guide. Creating these maps can spark discussion about a variety of topics relevant to evaluation, including how your core programs are connected to each other and how your hub is connected (or not) to other actors. The maps presented were created using VUE (Visual Understanding Environment) open source software, available at <https://vue.tufts.edu/index.cfm>.



# USING EVALUATION RESULTS

Ideally, you will have a clear idea about how you want to use the results of your evaluation before you begin collecting and analyzing information. These uses will reflect the reasons why you decided to undertake evaluation work in the first place. This section recaps some common motivations for CFH evaluation, and provides some tips that can help maximize the effective use of your results. To review ideas about audiences for evaluation results as well as formats for presentation, see the chart on p. 8 of this guide.

## SHARING YOUR STORY

A main benefit of doing evaluation work is that it can help effectively share the story of your CFH and convey its value to a wider audience. Sharing information about the impacts of your work can be an excellent way to increase numbers of clients, program participants or volunteers; educate people about the issues your organization is addressing; and build overall support for the work you do.

## A PICTURE CAN BE WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

Using images can be a very compelling way to present some of your evaluation results. One strategy for turning evaluation data into images can be to develop infographics. Community Food Centres Canada has some excellent examples of infographics designed to demonstrate program goals and impacts. They are available for downloading at <http://cfccanada.ca/evaluation-strategy>. A number of user-friendly websites can help you translate your own evaluation results into infographics. For example, check out <http://piktochart.com> or <https://infogr.am>.

## 4 CONSIDERATIONS FOR SHARING EVALUATION RESULTS WITH MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

- 1** Think carefully about the specific audiences you want to reach and what the most appropriate strategy will be for each group. For example, an annual report might be a good way to communicate with a Board of Directors, but many people will not take the time to read through this document. Having a variety of formats for presenting your results is important for ensuring that you can reach different target groups.
- 2** Combine numbers and stories when presenting your evaluation results. Quantitative information (e.g., numbers of program participants, amount of food sold, dollars earned) can be brought to life by embedding it within a compelling narrative (e.g., the story of how one person's life has been impacted by participation in your hub).
- 3** Try to be both concise and creative when developing materials to share your evaluation results. Take the time to figure out what the main messages are that you want to convey, and put some thought into how to do that in a creative, engaging manner. It is often helpful to use photos, video, infographics, and other visuals to illustrate your results. If possible, you may want to consider working with a designer so that your products are as visually appealing as possible.
- 4** Take advantage of social media. While Facebook and Twitter are certainly not the only way to share information, learning to use them effectively can help you spread the word about your CFH's impacts in a quick, engaging, and wide-reaching way.

# USING EVALUATION RESULTS

## COMMUNICATING WITH EXISTING & POTENTIAL FUNDERS

Often, evaluation work is motivated at least in part by a need to meet requirements of existing funders and/or a desire to collect information that can be used in applications for future funding. Here are a few things that can be useful to keep in mind when thinking about presenting evaluation results to funders:

- 1 What are the goals or thematic priorities of the funding agency, and does the information you are presenting match them?** It is important to highlight results that will be most relevant to a particular funding source.
- 2 Are you presenting your results using a format and tone that suits the funding source?** Some funders will have a specific template for reporting results. If that is not the case, it is still a good idea to look carefully at the kind of language and style they use in their materials and match that to some extent.
- 3 Are you presenting only the necessary information, in an easy-to-digest way, and getting right to the point?** Funding agencies can be bombarded with reports from projects that have or are seeking financing. It is helpful to make sure that the most impactful information you have is clearly and concisely presented so that funders can avoid sifting through excessive text to see the value of your work.

## IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PROGRAMS & SERVICES

Finally, although evaluation often tends to focus on demonstrating the value of your work to others, it also provides an excellent opportunity for self-reflection, and the information gathered can be vital for improving the quality of your programs and services, and ensuring that those programs and services will help you achieve your goals. Some tips that can help you translate evaluation results into improved CFH operations include:

- 1 Make sure that the evaluation process actively involves staff and volunteers from the outset.** The more that people have participated in the development and implementation of an evaluation strategy, the more ownership they will feel over the results. This tends to translate into increased willingness to act on any recommendations for change.

**2 Make a concerted effort to be honest when collecting information and interpreting results.** It can be tempting to gloss over and ignore uncomfortable evaluation results. Just like any personal self-evaluation at the individual level, however, CFH evaluation will only be effective if the results represent a true reflection of what is happening (or not).

**3 Do not be afraid to make changes to your programs and services.** Evaluation work may be intimidating due to people's fear of receiving negative or critical feedback on programs and services that they feel passionate about and are working hard to implement. While finding out that a program may not be working the way you want it to can be difficult, the CFH experts who contributed to the development of this guide all agreed that a willingness to listen and adapt to changing circumstances is a key ingredient for long term success.

# LIST OF REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

## COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION RESOURCE

- ❑ Better Evaluation Website <http://betterevaluation.org>

## GUIDES TO SPECIFIC KINDS OF EVALUATION

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## RESOURCES FOR EVALUATION STRATEGIES

- ❑ Center for Theory of Change website: <http://www.theoryofchange.org>
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- ❑ USDA website: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateA&navID=WholesaleandFarmersMarkets&leftNav=WholesaleandFarmersMarkets&page=WholesaleAndFarmersMarkets>
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