



# IMPACTS2022

## EVALUATION CAPACITY NETWORK: working with communities to **BUILD EVALUATION CAPACITY** and mobilize knowledge for community wellbeing



### The story of the ECN

The **Evaluation Capacity Network (ECN)** was founded in 2014 in response to the CUP Steering Committee identifying a growing need for evaluation capacity among CUP's regional partners in the early childhood sector. Early stakeholder focus groups revealed a desire for a centralized hub of meaningful, community-driven, and action-oriented evaluation resources and supports.

Since 2014, the ECN has grown into a partnership of academic institutions, government agencies, community organizations, professional associations, and consulting groups across Canada and the United States. The network's scope has also expanded beyond early childhood to include the broader social services sector.

The ECN was born out of CUP, is one of the largest projects housed within CUP, and is able to grow and thrive thanks to the foundation created by CUP's extensive community and stakeholder networks.

### The need for an evaluation network

"Evaluation" is a systematic approach to collecting and using information to improve programs, policies, and practices. Once considered a task organizations must complete to satisfy funders, evaluation is increasingly seen as key to an organization's growth and success. However, community organizations often lack the capacity to perform their own evaluations, and Canada's changing demographics are challenging the social sector to develop culturally responsive and equity-driven evaluation models.

### Evaluation capacity building

"Evaluation capacity building (ECB) is an intentional process to increase individual motivation, knowledge, and skills, and to enhance a group or organization's ability to conduct or use evaluation" (**Labin et al, 2002**).

### The ECN's core principles

- 1. Community-driven and culturally responsive.** ECN members think critically about existing evaluation practices, draw from culturally responsive frameworks, and work closely with partners to create evaluation practices tailored to a community's unique needs.
- 2. Dedicated to equity.** The ECN seeks to address gaps leading to inequity in the social sector, provide accessible and low-cost opportunities for evaluation education and capacity building, and work toward social justice and sustainability.
- 3. Action-oriented.** The ECN exists to enact real-world change. Knowledge and evidence emerging from the network should help people and organizations tangibly improve their practices and policies to better serve communities.

“ These principles are the heartbeat of the partnership. ”

- Yvonne Chiu, Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative (key ECN partner)



There are four ways to get involved with the ECN:

## 1. Get connected

to a network of peers, colleagues, and mentors to support evaluation work

Connecting with the ECN is the first step in improving evaluation capacity. Join the Network by signing up on the [ECN's Homepage](#). The ECN invites new partnerships with community organizations, government and funding agencies, academics, and evaluation practitioners.

The ECN brokers practicums and internships for students, connecting them with partner organizations for placements and learning opportunities. The ECN also puts out frequent calls for community researchers, organizations, and government partners to pair up with evaluation students at the University of Alberta and Queen's University.

The ECN also runs regular events, webinars, and focus groups for individuals to network around evaluation.

### The ECN and AVIRT: a successful connection

Recently, the ECN connected with the **Alberta Vulnerable Infant Response Team (AVIRT)**—a collaboration between Children's Services, the Edmonton Police Service, and Alberta Health Services—to help strategize improvements to service delivery. The ECN connected AVIRT to a fall evaluation course (see "Learn Together") to create an evaluation framework and continues to provide practicum students to support AVIRT's evaluation initiatives.

## 2. Learn together

with ECN members to build individual and organizational evaluation capacity

The ECN offers a growing portfolio of experiential and community-based learning opportunities that give participants hands-on experiences and resources to build evaluation capacity.

### Experiential and for-credit learning

**UEval** is a one-week evaluation institute first piloted in spring 2019. Taught by ECN's in-house evaluation experts, the course brings together students (undergraduate or graduate) and representatives of community organizations ("key informants") to gain evaluation competencies and apply knowledge to real-world evaluation cases in the community. In 2021, the ECN launched a sister course, **QEval**, at Queen's University in Ontario.

**SPH 504** and **SPH 631** are courses on program evaluation offered through the University of Alberta's School of Public Health and co-instructed by ECN director Dr. Rebecca Gokiert and postdoctoral fellow Dr. Pieter de Vos. These courses follow an experiential and case-based learning approach in partnership with community organizations.

The **Manitoba Northern & Rural Institute in Program Evaluation (MBNRI)**, launched by ECN partners in 2021, provides evaluation capacity-building opportunities at the University of Manitoba for rural or northern Manitoba residents.

### Community-based learning

**LaboÉval**, launched by ECN partners in 2019, is a French-language evaluation capacity-building initiative for non-profits.

**EvalLab**, first offered in winter 2018 in partnership with the **Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations** and the Government of Alberta, is a co-learning space for non-profit representatives to explore, test, and adapt evaluation knowledge in real-life settings.

**E-Eval** is a 6-month online evaluation learning and coaching initiative offered in collaboration with the **Alberta Mentoring Partnership**. A supplementary 8-part webinar series called **Pre-Eval** launched in Fall 2022.

### Hear from a UEval participant

You can **hear more about the UEval experience** from a representative of **Spirit North**, a non-profit serving Indigenous youth, who participated as a key informant in 2020.

### 3. Create knowledge

#### through collaborative research and evaluation projects

The ECN works with students, academics, and community partners to discover and test approaches to evaluation to inform practice, programs, and policy. These efforts take many forms, reflecting the diversity of evaluation needs within community spaces.

In 2020, for example, CUP and ECN researchers supported the steering committee of the **New Canadian Health Centre (NCHC)** in developing a principles-based and culturally responsive evaluation framework. The ECN has since connected the NCHC to graduate students who continue to support the NCHC with its evaluation needs.

The ECN is partnering with the **Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative (MCHB)** and the **Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care** on a research project exploring the needs of cultural minority families accessing early learning and childcare programs in Edmonton. The project aims to generate rich information about lived experiences and provide families a space to voice aspirations and shape solutions.

The ECN also has an ongoing knowledge-building relationship with the **All in for Youth (AIFY)** program, having supported AIFY in evaluation processes for the past six years, from the pilot phase to a full-scale program serving eight Edmonton schools.

#### Hear how ECN researchers and partners create knowledge

ECN director Dr. Rebecca Gokiert and other ECN members delivered two lunch and learn sessions in May 2022.

- ECN hosted an international panel where Drs. Ayesha Boyce, Jill Chouinard, and Yvonne Chiu shared their experiences and expertise with **culturally responsive evaluation practices**.
- Representatives of seven ongoing ECN projects gathered to discuss **community-driven evaluation and capacity building**.

### 4. Share, access, and use

#### a rich repository of resources to move evidence to action

The ECN and its partners continuously create and share academic and non-academic resources related to evaluation, including articles, blogs, webinars, lectures, and digital tools. Most of these resources are freely available online.

In 2022, the ECN launched the **Evaluation Repository**, a centralized hub of articles, digital tools, textbooks, and more covering evaluation practice and theory. The repository is built and maintained by expert evaluation researchers.

In partnership with the **Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR)** in Ontario, the ECN also ran **Eval4Refugee**, a suite of workshops and live webinars aimed at filling evaluation capacity gaps among refugee-serving organizations. Based on unique resources created for this initiative, the ECN also developed **five self-paced online modules** about evaluation in the early child development sector.



# Impacts

## Partners

- To date, the ECN has responded to over 100 requests for partnership from community representatives and organizations, resulting in initiatives to improve child and family outcomes, support Indigenous language revitalization, create models for teen housing, and more.
- As of June 2022, the ECN has 405 network members, with 93 joining in the past year.

## Community learners

- The ECN's for-credit evaluation courses (offered through UAlberta, UManitoba, and Queen's) have engaged 292 undergraduate, graduate, and community learners and responded to 66 community case studies.
- The ECN's community-based learning opportunities (LabEval, E-Eval, EvalLab, and Eval4Refugee) have engaged around 400 community participants in 7 provinces and supported over 50 organizations.
- In 2022, 15 community organizations participated in SPH 504/631 to develop evaluation frameworks alongside university students.

## Students

- Since 2019, the ECN has supported 57 trainees in practicums, thesis projects, research assistantships, and postdoctoral fellowships across 10 institutions in Canada and the U.S.
- As of June 2022, 9 students have completed or are completing a thesis in partnership with community organizations.

## Workshops & presentations

- Eval4Refugees resulted in 13 workshops with 320 participants, 5 webinars, and 7 live events.
- The ECN's panel on culturally responsive evaluation on May 16, 2022, drew 254 online participants.
- The ECN's panel on community-driven evaluation on May 26, which featured the work of 7 ECN projects, drew 101 online participants.

## Looking ahead

In June 2022, the ECN held a strategic partnership meeting to identify key challenges and opportunities for the next four years. Going forward, the ECN plans to:

- continue focusing on **culturally responsive evaluation** and helping funders and partners sustain equitable practices,
- continue to **raise awareness** about the value of evaluation, work with partners to create **evaluation capacity-building strategies**, and help organizations embed evaluative thinking into their culture,
- rise to a growing demand among network partners for **evaluation from an Indigenous perspective** and work with partners to explore methods for **decolonizing evaluation**,
- apply the network's expertise toward addressing **issues in the wider evaluation sector**, such as rising demand from funders for evaluation, low capacity for evaluation among non-profits, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information  
please contact us at:



**Community-University Partnership**  
for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families

cup@ualberta.ca | 780-492-6177 | [www.uab.ca/cup](http://www.uab.ca/cup)