Topics for Conversations: Systems-Oriented Evaluation in Light of Racial Equity and Community Engagement and Leadership

Encouraging conversations among evaluators and stakeholders about advances in the understanding of **complex systems** and the connection of **systems thinking** to **evaluation**

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Highlights

This paper is designed for evaluators to encourage conversations about topics that relate to systems-oriented evaluation. It seeks to deepen evaluators' understanding of complex systems and the connection of systems thinking to evaluation. As an evaluator, you may find that shifting to a systems orientation to evaluation involves making a shift from an inquiry approach that emphasized control, reductionism, and predetermined measurable results to an inquiry approach that puts greater focus on interconnections, multiple perspectives, and flexible patterns of interventions and results. Such shifts typically require considerable conversation and rethinking of one's evaluation practice. Thus this paper focuses on encouraging conversation rather than giving specific instructions for evaluation practice.

The paper addressed five topics with each topic followed by an example. The paper is framed with the priorities of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in mind— racial equity; community engagement and leadership; and young children and families. The topics can be applied to other situations as well.

Here are the five topics for conversation with a brief description of each.

- **ways of thinking about systems:** A system is a collection of entities that are "seen" by someone as interacting together to do something. The significance of the basic system structures (e.g., hierarchical or networked) and the multiple dynamics within systems is an important focus of conversation.
- **viewing culture as a system:** Culture is a critical issue to understand in evaluations. Viewing culture as a system can help to deepen one's understanding of how cultures function, change, and interact.
- **perspectives on system change:** It is important to not only understand systems but how they change. Of particular importance is distinguishing changes in systems due to a planned intervention from changes that are due to systems' internal dynamics or external influences that are not part of the intervention.
- **focus of evaluation:** For conversations about the focus on an evaluation, we consider here the differences between two approaches to a systems orientation to evaluation. One approach adds a systems focus to a program evaluation whereas the other focuses specifically on one or more systems. Other variations also exist.
- **evaluators' roles:** When taking a systems orientation to evaluation, the evaluator's role may shift based on a change in the distribution of time and resources. For example, the balance of the focus on systematic inquiry and the focus on determining merit, worth, and significance may shift. A broader range of roles for the evaluator may be appropriate to support the purpose of the evaluation and attention to sustainable results.

Introduction

This paper began as a revision of *Designing Initiative Evaluation: A Systems-Oriented Framework for Evaluating Social Change Efforts* published by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) in 2007. As the revision progressed, it became increasingly apparent that a revision of the Guidebook was not necessarily the most appropriate way to share the advances in the understanding of complex systems and the connection of systems thinking to evaluation. Instead, we need conversations among evaluators and stakeholders about topics that relate to systems-oriented evaluation. Thus, this paper is presented as topics for conversation rather than a guidebook on systems-oriented evaluation.

We have organized the paper to address five topics with each topic followed by an example. The examples draw on different facets of one evaluation situation which is described at the end of this Introduction. The paper is framed with the priorities of WKKF in mind— racial equity; community engagement and leadership; and young children and families. The topics can be applied to other situations as well.

The 2007 guidebook was written to assist external evaluators in conducting evaluations with a systems orientation. External evaluators are also the primary audience of this paper. A critically important role for external evaluators is that of interacting with multiple stakeholders at the early stages of developing evaluation plans. The interaction between evaluators and stakeholders ensures a shared understanding of key issues that shape the nature and value of an evaluation.

During the development of this paper, we talked with many evaluators about critical issues that arise when using a systems orientation to evaluation. In selecting topics for this paper, we have chosen ones that reflect contentious issues – issues where more conversations would benefit both the field and individual evaluations. We encourage the conversations to involve evaluators; the staff of foundations and other funders; program leaders of specially-funded initiatives; and a wide range of stakeholders engaged in initiatives funded by philanthropies.

Individuals tend to have a particular orientation to these topics based on assumptions that may not have been made explicit. Thus, the conversations can be confusing because some or all of the parties in the conversation fail to recognize the range of interpretations and assumptions being made by others in the conversation. The differences in the ways of thinking about these topics can easily lead to people talking past each other, assuming that the other parties to the conversation hold the same perspective.

Yet the topics here are central to conducting a useful systems-oriented evaluation. We put forward these viewpoints to spark conversations. No one viewpoint is best or better than

another generally but some may be more useful than others in a given situation and point in time.

Basic to any fruitful conversation is a common understanding of the language being used. So we have included a glossary of terms at the end of the paper. The first use of the term in the remainder of the paper is bolded to indicate that the term is in the glossary. The glossary contains a few additional terms relevant to systems-oriented **evaluation** that are not used in the paper but are likely to be found in materials in the reference list.

The five topics for conversation are:

- ways of thinking about systems;
- viewing culture as a system;
- perspectives on system change;
- focus of evaluation; and
- evaluators' roles.

Example

Setting

Imagine that you are a researcher in systems-oriented evaluation who is visiting partnerships around the country to learn how partnerships related to early childhood care and education have successfully applied **systems thinking** to their evaluations. You are seated with representatives of one such partnership in the conference room of a nonprofit community resource center in a culturally diverse mid-sized city surrounded by suburbs and agricultural land.

Five representatives of the partnership are present and have already introduced themselves to you. They are a Latino community organizer (Mario); an African American director of an NGO focused on family services and the partnership's chair (David); a white manager in the state department of public health (Cynthia); a white director in charge of the library's community outreach program (Gina); and an evaluator with expertise in systems-oriented evaluations whose team has been helping the partnership with evaluative activities since the partnership's inception; he is Native American, from a tribal nation in another part of the state (Paco).

You are posing six questions (in italics in the examples that follow) which correspond to the Introduction and five topics in the text. For each topic, one of the representatives of the partnership will give you a sense of how that topic was addressed in their situation. Please keep in mind that the example is not intended to be definitive. It's simply a way to ground the conversation in a setting.

Introduction

Thank you for your generosity in meeting with me today. I know that we're trying to cover a lot of ground so I'll jump right in with my first set of questions. What is important to understand about your situation so that we can have an informed conversation about the five topics we are interested in? For example, what are the demographics, geographic setting, economic conditions, and cultures that impact equitable early childhood care and education?

I'm David. I'm the executive director of a nonprofit family services center. I have the privilege of being the chair this year. It's our pleasure to talk with you today. To prepare for your visit, we've spent some time talking about where we started, what we've been able to achieve, and what we're excited to work on together in the future.

The partnership includes representatives from the various cultural, business, philanthropic, and governmental entities in the county; they work at different levels in their organizations. The members of this partnership have been engaged in learning about systems and systems thinking. We're very familiar now with these ideas and using the "language" of systems.

Our partnership started ten years when some of us here began to have informal conversations about early childhood care and education. We were aware of the significant socioeconomic disparity in the community and the reality that there was little mixing of people from different socioeconomic groups. Our children were suffering. There were significantly more premature births and higher infant mortality rates among immigrants and people of color than in the white population. Also, on average, there were more health and developmental problems among children of color that should have been addressed before they started school than among their white peers.

We formed the partnership to figure out how to change these racial inequities. Early on, we decided to take a strengths-based approach and establish a positive mindset about what we could achieve together. Taking that approach, we saw a gradual shift in how well the partnership members trusted each other and were able to work together. In the last several years, our efforts have started coalescing.

While we know that we needed to build a strong partnership first, we're proud that we didn't let our efforts stop there. What we're excited to talk about today is some of the tough issues the partnership has been able to work through in the last five years to achieve positive change and the role systems thinking and evaluation have played.

Topic 1

Ways of Thinking about Systems

A **system** is a collection of entities that are "seen" by someone as interacting together to do something (Open University, 2011). Important aspects of this definition are:

- A system involves multiple entities or elements. Many types of connected elements can be thought of as systems.
- The quotation marks around "seen" remind us that systems are most often conceptual models rather than physical entities. Different people may be seeing a different collection of entities interacting together.
- Once elements (or subsystems) start interacting, they produce interconnections and discernable dynamics that go beyond what the individual elements achieve. Their achievements are unique to the elements involved in the interconnections and the nature of the interconnections. An emphasis on investigating interconnections is a key concept that often differentiates systems-oriented evaluation models from traditional logic models.
- The interacting elements create results that are different than the results of the sum of the parts. The results can be changes in patterns within the structure and function of the systems as well as specific products. As structures and functions change, at least some of the results of the system will change.
- Systems create their own behavior and results based on their interconnected structures, which, in turn, are shaped by their underlying assumptions/paradigms. Systems tend to be resilient.

When we talk about systems generally, it includes both hierarchical and networked systems and many different combinations of the two types. Other types might also be described but, for our purposes here, we are concentrating on these two basically different structures. So when you begin a systems-oriented evaluation, we encourage you to look for the presence of these two basic system structures—hierarchical structures and network structures (see Parsons, Jessup, & Moore, 2016)

A hierarchical structure is a type of organization with top-down control and defined lines of authority. Part of a hierarchical system's purpose is to control and organize elements to keep a situation more stable. Our society is deeply rooted in thinking about systems as hierarchical

structures. When asked to give an example of a system, Americans often mention traditionally hierarchical social systems such as the public health system. Hierarchical structures bear a similarity to a factory/machine model.

A networked structure is a web of nodes and connectors. Networked structures include cultures, partnerships, and ecological systems such as a geographic areas that encompass multiple ecological systems. Sometimes people fail to recognize that these networked structures are also systems.

Complex systems are made up of entangled hierarchical and networked structures. Hierarchical and networked structures co-exist in complex systems. So, any program or other entity being evaluated exists within this complexity as well as within most systems.

System Dynamics

Once you have an idea about the kind of system structures that are present in situations you are investigating, consider a spectrum of dynamics from controlled to self-organizing. These dynamics help define the patterns of interconnections within the systems.

Hierarchical structures tend towards controlled dynamics: planned and predictable. (The dynamics tend to be fairly stable, but we can't make an assumption about stability without a close look at the particular entity.) Once a change is made, the controlled dynamic is important in stabilizing the new structure or process. Controlled dynamics help eliminate tension through standardization.

A networked structure is more congruent with the self-organizing dynamic: creative, flexible, adaptive, and unpredictable. The dynamics tend to be less stable than the controlled dynamics of hierarchical structures. "Self-organizing dynamics" does not refer to the choices of individual people acting alone but rather to the emergent patterns created by individuals interacting with others. (See Parsons, 2012, for further discussion of self-organizing dynamics.) Self-organizing dynamics help people embrace tension.

Self-organizing dynamics tend to dominate such networked structures as collaborations, partnerships, and informal groups within hierarchical organizations/systems. Thus, employees participate in informal **networks** based on friendships, activities, or community connections.

Note that most evaluators are unused to measuring self-organizing dynamics. Frequently, the statistical methods used in social science research and evaluation treat the unpredictable, uncontrolled self-organizing dynamic as random "noise." However, understanding these systems structures and dynamics expands the range of your research methods and may help you uncover the underlying assumptions of the methods.

Example

Please talk about the nature and balance of hierarchical and networked system structures in your work. What types of systems are you dealing with and what is the blend of hierarchical and networked structures involved? Also, what are the dynamics within the systems? In particular, please talk about some of the systems where the dynamics—patterns of movement—are fairly easy to describe (e.g., linear, cyclical) and are quite predictable. Are there ones that could better be described as primarily self-organizing dynamics? How does understanding system structures relate to your evaluation work?

Hi, I'm Mario. I'm the director of a faith-based community organizing group. As you may know, we community organizers like to be blunt. Until recently, my first response to questions like yours would be that they sound like a bunch of jargon.

We community organizers aren't used to think about systems the way you do. And we didn't want to learn a different way of talking. We just wanted to figure out ways to make a good impact on people's everyday lives.

Our evaluator Paco here is the one who got us thinking about the power in words and the importance of thinking in systems. So, now I can stand before you and answer your questions in your technical language.

I would say that the county is made up of many intertwined systems. We're the state capital so there are many **hierarchical systems**, like the state and county departments of health. Some networked systems too – like my community organizing group, which works in different churches, and a group of local businesses that tries to keep people spending their money in local stores.

Paco got us thinking about the importance of looking at how these different systems were connected. We saw that sometimes there weren't many connections. The state public health department had one set of rules; the county social services department had another set. Sometimes people looking for help just bounced between systems. Churches were trying to help out, but they didn't know how and some said it wasn't their job.

We decided to work as a partnership on the interconnections, to work across the systems. When the partnership started, the government agencies were pretty rule-bound. Their rules were predictable to the people on the inside, but they didn't mesh well with the rules of other agencies.

The government workers didn't know what the various agencies covered so they didn't refer people to other agencies for help. And they distrusted community organizers because we had an "agenda". Our partnership obtained grants to get experts in children's issues to work with the government agencies. We were building networked interconnections to get energy flowing for some creative solutions.

We also saw that children's education went wider and deeper than K-12 schools. We worked with the library, which has an intertwined hierarchical and networked structure, to get their community outreach activities to focus on children's issues. We also involved local businesses and nonprofits. We partnered with a community college (a hierarchical structure) that has outstanding education, social work, and medical services programs. All of those programs placed students in internships within the community. The networked structure of the interconnections among students, businesses, nonprofits, and governmental entities brought in the energy of self-organizing dynamics.

The evaluations embedded in our process indicated that love of family and love of culture are values shared among the residents of this county. Even though the cultures and the family dynamics may be vastly different, we saw the existence of these values as an opportunity for "socioeconomic mixing." As part of the data collection, evaluators talked with the Native American Tribal Elders, the hierarchical governing body for the separate Tribal Nation, and members of their committee on youth. Evaluators talked to the Latino parishioners and parish priest of Holy Family Catholic Church (hierarchical, controlled dynamics), which provides space for some amazing potlucks to celebrate various feast days (lots of networking between families based on self-organizing dynamics). Also community groups within the city met to talk about the city-wide celebrations that occur each year. The purpose of these conversations was to see if we could bring some cross-fertilization of cultures and get people to experience what they could appreciate about each other.

By distinguishing the nature of hierarchical structures and dynamics from those of networks with self-organizing dynamics, we had a better idea of how **systems change** could and would occur. We are using this understanding both in our planning and in or evaluation work. The two processes play back and forth with one another. That's one reason it's so important to have this partnership and have our evaluator as a member (but non-decisionmaking member) of our partnership.

Topic 2

Viewing Culture as a System

Thinking of culture as a system can help an evaluator gain greater insights into the situations being investigated by the evaluation. Culture is a ubiquitous system, a complex **self-organizing system**. Because culture is ever-present in our evaluation work, it is an excellent system to look at more closely.

What is the culture we are talking about it here? It's what people in a group or society experience as their everyday behaviors, beliefs, values, and customs. Individuals are shaped by their culture and they also shape it through their own actions and interactions with others. As people act in tune with their culture and also interact with others in appraising and interpreting their culture, they co-create new sets of everyday values and habits (see Thomas & Parsons, 2016).

People may inhabit various cultures in different parts of their lives. Knowing people's racial or ethnic background may not be enough to discern the culture that most informs their values and behaviors. Culture exists within families, businesses, communities, nations, and more.

Viewing culture as a complex system provides us with a way of sorting out ways of possibly influencing changes in complex systems; culture is a ubiquitous system that we all recognize as part of our lives but have a hard time getting a handle on. The systems-oriented approach given below can be applied in any systems-oriented evaluation to help us understand how complex systems can be influenced.

Another reason to focus on culture is because of the extensive amount of work that has been done in the field of evaluation in the development of **culturally responsive evaluation** (CRE) theory and practice. By bringing together the extensive work on CRE methods and theory with a systems orientation, we anticipate that much can be learned and developed that will advance the field of evaluation (see Thomas & Parsons, 2016).

Using Interrelationships, Boundaries, and Perspectives to Understand Culture as a System

Here is a useful way to understand systems. We can use three system conditions—perspectives, interrelationships, and boundaries—as a way to think about systems generally; here we look at culture in particular. (See Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2011, for more information on the three conditions.)

Perspectives include worldviews and purposes. Worldviews are paradigms that undergird social systems. Attending to multiple perspectives helps you notice who is making the decisions and whether they are listening to diverse points-of-view. With this knowledge, you are better able to understand the assumptions underlying the system and how those assumptions affect different stakeholders. (See Reynolds, 2007; Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2011.)

Interrelationships is the system condition that includes interconnections among the various system entities, agents, and stakeholders in the system. Here you're focusing on the nature of the interconnections. For example, you're moving beyond looking for single-directional exchanges to attending to exchanges that are multi-directional. The interrelationships in hierarchies and networks are generally different.

Boundaries define where one entity ends and another begins. For example, the boundaries of a project and an evaluation may not be the same. Also the entities exist as part of a larger system. Boundaries have varying degrees of permeability. Deciding on boundaries is a major choice.

These features are themselves interconnected and are illustrated in the example that follows. Appendix B for further discussion of these system conditions as well as other examples.

Example

How does the partnership view culture as a system? When you shift your attention to evaluation, are you finding it helpful to use the idea of the three conditions of systems—boundaries, interrelationships, and perspectives—to frame your evaluations?

Hi, I'm Cynthia, a manager in the state Department of Public Health. I was one of the first government workers to participate in the partnership. As Mario noted, we have quite a mix of socioeconomic groups within this county and we found that consciously trying to be culturally sensitive helped us function better as a partnership. It made us aware of the interconnections and the layering of the cultural systems. For example, I'm Catholic, from a rural part of the state, and I've worked at the hospital as a nurse, at the community college as an administrator, at the community organizing group that Mario heads as a regional leader, and now I'm heading the Public Health department that focuses on child and family health. It's been an odyssey that has taken me through many layers of the health care system and made me aware of the interconnections of overlapping cultures.

We've thought a lot about culture and toss the word around a lot in our community. Now that we've gotten familiar with both culturally responsive evaluation and the idea of seeing culture as a system, we have moved forward on sorting out a number of issues.

First of all, we are seeing that culture is not static. We are also seeing that parts of a culture may be changing while other parts are staying constant. We are also seeing that one culture can be imposed on another. For example, when certain legislators claimed that there wasn't enough money for social programs for children, the partnership countered that this was an example of a fixed mindset that promoted scarcity and isolation whereas our intent was to pursue a growth mindset that holds up the value of abundance and interdependence.

Thinking about culture as a system that is dynamic and changing helps us sort out what interventions in our early childhood networks can be most useful and which ones are likely to have a long-term effect and which are likely to be short term.

When we shift our attention to evaluation, we are finding it very useful to use the idea of the three conditions of systems—boundaries, interrelationships, and perspectives—to help us frame our evaluations. For example, take our focus on early childhood development. We looked at what boundaries exist among the various groups that provide early childhood services. We looked at how permeable those boundaries are, that is, how much do different parts of the community participate across these services. In regard to perspectives, we have focused on the different beliefs and world views about how young children should be raised and what types of parenting skills are present generally in different ethnic groups. We are also careful to remember that just because people belong to a particular ethnic group doesn't mean that they all share the same beliefs about parenting. The individuals are parts of other cultural systems that influence them.

Using open-ended approaches in our evaluations has helped us adapt each inquiry to the group being studied. We see the county's cultural diversity as one of our strengths as a community. We strive to stay aware of when and where people are making assumptions about differences in perspectives and checking our assumptions with others. Thinking through the intertwined nature of perspectives through multiple systems helps us zero in on likely places of **structural racism** that are going to need long-term attention.

As a partnership, we've found that it's important to make iterative data collection about cultural perspectives a part of the evaluation process.

All in all, by articulating these dimensions of boundaries, interrelationships, and perspectives, we are better able to determine who should be involved in various data collection activities and who to involve in sessions where we are making meaning from the data we have collected from multiple sources.

Topic 3

Perspectives on Systems Change

In *Topic 1: Ways of Thinking about Systems*, we focused on system structure and dynamics. Let's look more closely now at the notion of **systems *change***. Evaluators typically pay attention to the intended change. Yet the influence of an intervention depends on the existing dynamics and characteristics of the systems being affected. Most projects or initiatives are designed to bring about some type of change. That change may be in the results produced by a system or the change might be in a system's structure and/or its dynamics.

When designing an evaluation, we need to recognize changes that are different from those due to the interventions. Human systems are continually changing in and of themselves and through their connections with other systems. Complex living systems are continually changing based on their internal dynamics as well as outside influences. Inherent change happens independently of interventions simply due to the natural dynamics of living systems.

Broad societal changes are also continually occurring at the same time that specifically designed interventions are underway. It is important to acknowledge these changes so that they are not confused with the changes due to the intervention. And also recognize that the contextual changes may be ones that the intervention can leverage or may be ones that would undermine the intervention.

For example, consider the technological advances in the eight-year span of 2007-2015; we see the introduction of Siri, the iPad, and 3D holograms. Such inventions have changed the daily ways people interact with each other and the world. In evaluating an intervention, we need to be aware of the interaction of these societal systemic changes with the intervention.

Social system change is an ongoing process with fits and starts that are a mix of predictability and unpredictability. What is important for sustainable system change may be of a different length than a given funding period of an initiative or a project. It is also important to consider the depth and likely sustainability of a change that an intervention is intended to stimulate. Our understanding of how and why systems change influences how we approach an evaluation. Before planning the intervention, the stakeholders need to consider what it takes to change a system. As indicated in our discussion above about culture as a system, some

aspects of a system may be harder to change and yet, if they change, the change may be more sustainable and long lasting.

Donella Meadows (2008) identifies 12 places to intervene in systems to bring about change. Some interventions are likely to have more lasting or influential effects than others. Of the 12 possible levers for change, she says one of the most important levers is making changes in the underlying paradigms on which a system is built. An evaluation that is intended to bring about systems change pays attention to the various paradigms underlying the perspectives of various stakeholders.

Thus, when engaging in evaluation related to changing systems, be aware that the systems naturally are already in motion and changing. Note also that interventions may be changing the patterns of change that are already present in the systems. A change in pattern can be a very significant and important change. Also keep in mind that an intervention may be affecting more systems than those focused on by the intervenor. When evaluating an intervention in complex living systems, take into account the complexity of the interconnected systems, the unpredictability of patterns of change in these systems, and the sustainability of changes.

Example

What are some examples of how you are attending to changing systems in your setting? Please talk about natural inherent and contextual change as well as change due to interventions. Please give me examples of places where you're trying to intervene in systems to create change. How do you decide what will lead to a decent amount of system change?

I'm Gina. I'm the director in charge of the library's community outreach programs. I feel that the evaluators have helped me and other partnership members to think more evaluatively and systemically and to see change in a new light.

Some of the contextual changes we've seen recently include a long drought in our state which affects the availability of agricultural jobs. In the city, technology has reduced the number of clerical and mid-level jobs in government, one of the leading employers. Also, the recent recessions hurt many older workers' life savings, so they are staying in their jobs longer, blocking the advancement of younger workers. Some young people are leaving the state for other parts of the country where they hope to get better opportunities. We are seeing that these are long-term patterns of change that we need to acknowledge and work with—rather than just bemoan.

Through the evaluation process, we're hearing that long-time educators are concerned that they need to vary the way they engage students because children have shorter attention spans due to the technological changes in society. The partnership is working with some educators who are looking into ways to engage children in collaborative learning with the teacher in a coaching role. This is a new way of educating that fits these broader societal changes. We see engaging children in learning as the foundation of a thriving economy in the future. In this way, we are spotting contextual changes that are likely to continue and we're building our interventions to be congruent with the broader technological changes that we expect will continue.

We began to reframe how we conceived of social systems and developed different theories of change for different parts of the system. For example, an early project of the partnership was expanding an early intervention inter-agency referral process that had been pilot tested by the county social services and public health departments. The evaluation data had indicated that clients found the new process helped them access resources more quickly. This was a fairly straightforward project that didn't require fundamental changes in the hierarchical systems of the agencies. It was a matter of focusing on ensuring high quality implementation of a process that the agencies had already agreed to and was fairly easy to use.

We are also reframing the early childhood system to focus on community well-being factors that protect the well-being of children and families. We shifted the focus from individuals to communities and from risk factors to well-being factors. This is a much more challenging and complex systems change effort. Among other things, it involves understand the paradigms underlying the behavior of the different socioeconomic groups in our county and subgroups within and across agencies.

The evaluator's close working relationships with each of us partnership leaders has helped bring the partnership to a place where we could identify common ground and understand our differences. He has talked openly with us and leaders in the community about the effects of **implicit bias** on evaluations and about structural racism.

Through the library's outreach program, OneBook/OneCounty, we invited everyone in the county to read a book about how to prepare children for success in the 21st century. Then the partnership followed this up with a series of community cafes that brought people together to have conversations about what constitutes desired change.

This illustrates a very different way of thinking about systems change than the referral system. Here we're trying to work at the level of paradigm change. We're relying on the evaluative thinking we've embedded in the process to help us find the levers to pull to get to the kind of change that will be good for the community. Thanks to the evaluation team's work with us and our own learning and growth, we view our interventions as first steps in shifting deeply rooted underlying paradigms. We're more patient and strategic about the changes we are making.

Topic 4

Focus of Evaluation

If you have decided to use a systems-oriented evaluation approach, you have many options for how to do the evaluation. Here we present two general options to stimulate conversation about evaluation focus. One approach is to focus primarily on a program and then include its most direct connections with the relevant systems. The second approach is to select one or more defined systems and investigate those systems. There are many variations and combinations of these two general approaches. These two approaches represent different ends of the spectrum. Good conversations about the two approaches are likely to result in a healthy mashup of the two that is appropriate to the situation.

Program-Focused with Complementary Systems-Focused Evaluation

The most common type of evaluation is program evaluation. The focus is on determining if a particular program "works," that is, does it accomplish its intended outcomes for those served by the program? See the WKKF basic evaluation handbook (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2016) for extensive information on program evaluation and basic evaluation methods.

A program-focused evaluation often involves controlling conditions and variables. It assumes that there is a predictable link between the program and outcomes. This approach can work well when:

- Systems/context tend to be controllable.
- Systems tend toward stability and are grounded in assumptions that are congruent with those of the society they serve.
- Change tends to have a predictable pattern.
- The systems within which the projects are located are basically functioning well and parts need improvement/refinement rather than fundamental change.

Using the program-focused evaluation approach with an added systems orientation, you might emphasize the program itself while attending to a few strategic connections to the larger system of which the program is a part. When there are questions about how well the program aligns with the system, you might combine a program focus with greater attention to the interface with the system.

Primarily Systems-Focused Evaluation

Taking a primarily systems-focus in your evaluation (rather than a program focus) begins with considering the systems within which you are working. Conversations can help you avoid thinking too narrowly or too broadly about the appropriate systems. Go too narrow and you may miss interconnections among relevant hierarchical and/or networked systems. Go too broad and you might overwhelm yourself with the complexity of, say, regional, state, or national systems. Taking a middle ground, you would pay attention to the systems that you expect can be influenced in your situation. For example, you might focus on the systems represented in your partnership.

Using a focus on one or more systems will raise questions about the type of alignment you want to explore among systems. When you've thought through what the systems are like and the ways they function, you gain an appreciation for the interconnectedness: Change one aspect and the effects ripple through other systems or parts of larger systems.

The example below extends the conversation about how to use these approaches to focusing an evaluation.

Example

How have the evaluators applied systems thinking to the evaluation of the partnership's work? Please describe an evaluation that was program-focused with an added systems focus and one that was more focused on the interconnections among multiple systems.

Hi, it's Paco. I'm a member of the evaluation team that has been the evaluator for this partnership since the beginning. We have conducted multiple evaluations. When determining the focus of each evaluation, we talk a lot about whether the basic systems in place were working well for the children. We started our evaluation work by identifying several well-functioning daycare centers that parents from multiple ethnic groups liked. The partnership was exploring research on the adverse effect of trauma on brain development in young children. The research indicated that when young children are exposed to trauma, the children develop a tendency to favor safety over creativity and executive function.

The partnership decided to pilot test a professional development program that would introduce trauma-informed teaching to daycare staff in those three centers. The program which included a workshop-style professional development component as well as an opportunity for staff to apply what was learned in the daycare setting. The conclusions of our program-focused inquiry indicated that the trauma-informed

training program for daycare staff made a difference for children. We also looked at the relationship of the program to the way those daycare centers functioned generally to see what was important about the systemic nature of those centers.

When the partnership looked for implications for changes in the broader system to work for more of the daycare centers and related organizations, we proposed a systems-focused evaluation that would look at the implications for connections between the early childhood trauma-informed program and broader systems that included parents, community organizations, and schools. We set up an evaluation to test out the congruence of the core principles of the program (and the daycare centers where the program worked well) with other systems. In this case, we looked at the congruence of values represented in various faith-based and cultural organizations, the public health organizations, and the elementary schools. We convened evaluation focus groups from the schools, the public health professional community, faith-based organizations and culture-based organizations. In each case we have parents well represented. We looked into if and how these systems could support the core principles of the trauma-informed program started in daycare facilities. We looked at questions like: What changes in support and communications would be needed for long-term sustainability?

That systems-focused evaluation is ongoing. At the partnership meetings, the partnership reviews our findings and engages in conversations about the findings and what the partnership members individually and collectively do to keep building long term and community wide support for the well-being of children beginning with the practical experience of the trauma-informed program.

Topic 5

Evaluators' Roles

As you get more and more involved in taking a systems orientation to evaluation, you may find yourself considering changes in your role as an external evaluator.

Consider for a moment the definition of evaluation: systematic inquiry to determine merit (quality), worth (value), and significance (importance) about some entity or purpose. Often evaluators and program leaders view the technical task of systematic inquiry as the main role of evaluators. They assume (implicitly or explicitly) that the criteria for determining merit, worth, and/or significance have been predetermined and it is a straight-forward task to apply the criteria to the results of the inquiry.

Let's look at an example of the effect of emphasizing *systematic* inquiry of a program without a *systemic* orientation to the evaluative function. A new educational program has the desired outcome of increasing student learning on a predetermined set of tasks. The criteria for increased learning is built into the student assessment. The evaluator finds that the students' assessment scores have increased and assumes that merit has been sufficiently determined. The evaluator provides little or no input about how those not involved in the program and the systems connected to the program would judge the program's overall merit, worth, and significance as it relates to the overall impact of the program. Instead, the evaluator leaves further discussion about the merit, worth, and significance of the program to the programmatic decision-makers.

When taking a complex-systems orientation, the evaluator approaches the evaluation with a heightened awareness of the importance of bringing in various ways of thinking about merit, worth, and/or significance with attention to the various systems connected to the program. This heightened awareness opens up opportunities for evaluators to contribute more significantly—while maintaining an appropriate detachment from the intervention.[1]

Here are three examples of ways evaluators can use a systems orientation to evaluation to engage with the evaluation client to bring greater attention to a rich determination of merit, worth, and/or significance.

1 Note that other orientations also emphasize the focus on merit, worth, and significance. Our point here is that such an emphasis is especially important to consider when looking at complex systems.

1. Distinguish the allocation of time and resources to the two broad aspects of evaluation: (a) systematic inquiry and (b) determination of merit, worth, and/or significance. Of course, there are many subparts of both of these major aspects of evaluation as well as many interconnections. Yet focusing on these two major aspects of the evaluation provides a useful starting point for conversation. How much of the evaluation resources goes to each of these two aspects?
2. Address transparency of values. Make your own values transparent to the client and discuss the implications of how you see your "biases" (your values) as interacting with your evaluation work. For example, a major issue that is present in any evaluation is your orientation to social justice and how it is addressed in evaluation.
3. Consider the link of the evaluation you are conducting to past and future evaluations. See the bigger picture of the pattern of iterative evaluation, decision-making, and intentional change in dynamic systems over an extended period of time. Assist the client and other stakeholders in seeing that it takes time to establish new patterns of interactions and that the configuration of elements and changes in their interconnections in systems builds over time. It is important to remember that decisions about merit, worth, and significance made at one point in time or in one place may change at another time or place.

As systemic issues are addressed, evaluators are likely to see an overall shift in their roles. The shift is likely to result in more time and resources being devoted to evaluation facilitation and capacity building around **evaluative thinking** for stakeholders. With the allocation of time and resources to this type of capacity building, we expect that stakeholders' capacity for evaluative thinking will become long-lasting and embedded within the system.

Example

I'm getting the impression that an external evaluator's role is shifting as a complex-systems orientation is being taken. Paco, as the external evaluator, could you talk more about if and how your thinking and actions have shifted?

Yes, I would be happy to touch on this. And I would agree with you that my thinking has shifted. Let me illustrate with three aspects of the shift.

First, we have been rethinking how we allocate our evaluation resources, both time and money. When we started our work and were focused on individual programs, we didn't think much about the need for conversations about merit, worth, and significance. We assumed that if the participants in the program were achieving the results the program wanted, then that was all the evaluator needed to report on. We just wanted evidence that what was being done worked for the participants. However, as we went along and

thought more systemically, we realized that we needed to understand more about who was not benefiting by the way the program was set up.

Second, we began to realize how important it was to understand the values of the evaluators who are on our team. We've had several different evaluators involved over the past five years. Some were familiar primarily with education while others came more from the social services sector. Each of them had a different amount of knowledge and experience with different cultural groups. We started having conversations with them to help us understand what their biases (values) were.

At first, several of them said that they were neutral parties and their values were not important. But after some discussion, they realized that they had implicit biases that affected how they designed and carried out their evaluation. For example, one evaluator was so concerned about getting the voices of the rural citizens into the conversation that she didn't gather information from those in town. Another was so focused on health, that he didn't balance out attention to education and the economy. We needed to have conversations so we would all see what our biases were and how we could collectively shape the evaluation to contribute to the community-wide systemic decisions that needed to be made at that time.

Third, we are increasingly recognizing the importance of putting each evaluation we do into a bigger timeframe. We give any new evaluator the set of previous evaluations and give them the names of previous evaluators so they can talk with them to understand the bigger picture of our purpose and plans as well as those of the partnership. We let all evaluators know that when they prepare their evaluation reports they need to explain how the reports fit with previous evaluations and the partnership's overall long-term purpose of systems change to more equitable daycare and education for all the children in the community.

David: I would say that, overall, we expect our evaluators to be more engaged with us in thinking through how any new evaluation activities can support the overall systemic changes we are looking for. We want to ensure that, as we end an evaluation, we are already thinking through how it positions us for what to evaluate next. At one point, we hired an evaluator to facilitate a series of conversations with multiple stakeholders about patterns of relationships that were showing up in evaluations that had been done in different sectors—specifically health, education, and social services. We asked this evaluator not to engage in the usual systematic inquiry process that involved gathering new data. Instead, we wanted her efforts focused on the series of conversations. In that process, we had the evaluator work with several people from the community and the agencies to debrief what they had learned through these conversations. The debriefing helped them to prepare for the next conversation and to look at patterns that would need to be summarized at the end. The debriefing also helped build the capacity of those community and agency people to think more evaluatively and build that way of thinking into their work.

Concluding Comments

This paper was written to encourage conversations among stakeholders and evaluation about topics including:

- ways of thinking about systems;
- viewing culture as a system;
- perspectives on system change;
- focus of evaluation; and
- evaluators' roles.

Hopefully the information and examples above have illustrated the range of concepts and ways of thinking that are important to explore among stakeholders and evaluators. Such explorations and conversations help evaluators and those they serve to determine useful ways to move toward more sophisticated systems thinking. Such thinking directly affects both the evaluation and the work of the stakeholders as they learn and adjust to one another and the complex systems within which they work. It will hopefully support changes that bring benefits to families and young children (or the other beneficiaries of systems in which you are working) on a long term, sustained, and flexible basis.

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Appendix A

Glossary

This appendix contains a glossary of key terms used in this paper plus a few more that are likely to be found in other documents related to systems-oriented evaluation. Additionally, useful glossaries can be found in *Thinking in Systems* by Donella Meadows (2008) and *Edgeware* by Zimmerman, Lindberg, & Plsek (2001). A glossary of evaluation terminology can be found in *The Basics of Evaluation* by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2016).

Communities of Practice. The concept of community of practice stems from work related to the social nature of learning. It is often used in education in relation to teachers coming together as a community to further develop their professional practice. Wenger (2012) connects the community of practice concept with systems theory, noting that a "community of practice itself can be viewed as a simple social system. And a complex social system can be viewed as constituted by interrelated communities of practice. . . The concept of community of practice does not exist by itself. It is part of a broader conceptual framework for thinking about learning in its social dimensions. . . . in the relationship between the person and the world."

Complex Adaptive Systems. The concept of complex adaptive systems with self-organizing dynamics comes out of complexity science. Chan (2001) describes complex adaptive systems as "dynamic systems able to adapt in and evolve with a changing environment." In such systems, many agents act freely, adapting to one another and to their environment. Thus, change should be seen as co-evolution, resulting in the creation of influential system-wide patterns.

Complex Systems. Complex social systems are composed of massively entangled systems. They involve interconnected hierarchical, bureaucratic organizations, networks of small formal and informal groups, communities, family systems, and more. Not only are they entangled; they are also in motion with complex patterns." (Parsons, Jessup, & Moore, 2016)

Culturally Responsive Evaluation. Culturally responsive evaluation attends to issues of culture and context in both theory and practice, attending to culture, context, and diversity in every phase of the evaluation. Culture shapes individuals and individuals shape culture. Understanding individuals' cultures or everyday behaviors, beliefs, values, and customs is key to understanding individuals' attitudes, motivations and behavior. Culturally

responsive evaluation also asks evaluators to recognize their embedded culture of values, to disclose self-interest and be open about the purpose of the evaluation. Certain practices are essential: recognizing cultural identity; identifying power dynamics; and using appropriate, unbiased language (Thomas & Parsons, 2016).

Evaluation. Evaluation is defined differently by different people and for different situations. In this guide we focus on evaluation as systematic inquiry to determine merit (quality), worth (value) and significance (importance) about some entity or purpose, with attention to all humans having equal rights (Scriven, 2013).

The WKKF basic evaluation handbook (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2016) uses the following definition: "Evaluation is a process for collecting and summarizing evidence that lead to conclusions about the state of affairs, value, merit, worth, significance, or quality of a program, product, person, policy, proposal, or plan" (Mathison, 2005).

Evaluative Thinking. "Evaluative thinking, as does evaluation, involves determining merit, worth, and/or significance based on systematic inquiry." (Parsons et al, 2016)

"Evaluative thinking is a cognitive process, motivated by inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence, which involves identifying assumptions, posing thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and making informed decisions in preparation for action." (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2016)

Hierarchical Systems. "Hierarchical systems (e.g., the education system) are pervasive in government, business, and the non-profit organization worlds. These systems are based on the assumption that systems work well when activities and tasks are planned; planning is useful because there is a predictable relationship between activities and results. This type of system can work well when conditions are stable and predictable." (Parsons et al., 2016)

Implicit Bias. Implicit biases are "The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control." (Staats, et al., 2016)

Networks. A network is a series of points or nodes interconnected by communication paths. Networks can interconnect with other networks and contain subnetworks *(http://searchnetworking.techtarget.com/definition/network)*. A social network is composed of individuals or groups of individuals (serving as nodes) who are connected through family, friendship, work, geographic location, or other means. These connections may be face-to-face or via technology.

Self-organizing Systems. "In self-organizing systems, new, unexpected structures, patterns, properties, and/or processes can emerge as a consequence of the actions of a multiplicity of small occurrences within the system. The emergence of the new is not controlled by a single entity, but results from semi-independent interactions of many agents." (Parsons et al., 2016)

Structural racism. Structural racism expands our thinking about racism beyond instances between individuals. Structural racism looks "at our society as a complex system of organizations, institutions, individuals, processes, and policies" that "interact to create and perpetuate social/ economic/political arrangements that are harmful to people of color and to our society as a whole." (Staats, et al., 2016)

System. A system is a collection of entities that are 'seen' by someone as interacting together to do something. (Open University, 2016).

Systems Change. "Complex living systems are continually changing based on their internal dynamics as well as outside influences. The influence of an intervention depends on the existing dynamics and characteristics of the systems being affected. Programs, policies, people and other interventions influence the patterns of change that are already present in the systems." (Parsons et al., 2016)

Systems Thinking. "Systems thinking involves thinking in terms of systems rather than the parts and thinking about movement, dynamics, and patterns across time and locations." (Parsons et al., 2016)

Appendix B

Understanding Systems Conditions—Boundaries, Interrelationships and Perspective

Topic 2: *Viewing Culture as a System*, talked about using three system conditions—boundaries, interrelationships, and perspectives—as a way to deepen your understanding of complex social systems. This appendix provides further discussion and examples of these important concepts.

Understanding the Nature of Interrelationships

"Relationships" and "interrelationships" does not refer only to connections between people but also relationships between structures, policies, practices, norms, and more.

Let's consider two examples of interrelationships in complex systems.

First, consider structural racism. *Structural racism* is the interconnected web of social structures (institutional policies, norms, practices, infrastructures, and relationships) that repeatedly produces and re-produces cumulative race-based inequities (Powell & Heller, 2011).

The explicit race-based laws, policies, and practices under Jim Crow and de facto segregation focused on blocking the cumulative nature of building social, economic, and political capital in communities of color. Opportunities that were denied to racial and ethnic minorities at critical points in the nation's history have led to the disadvantaged circumstances that too many children of color are born into today. Explicit race-based laws of the past have morphed into seemingly race-neutral practices and policies that still create structural arrangements that wall off the flow of resources and opportunities to

communities of color, producing the racial disparities we see today—higher poverty rates, greater infant deaths and lower high school graduation rates.

Structural racism isn't about overt racist acts against people of color on an individual level. Instead, it is a *system* of racial hierarchy with white people at the top that gives them preferential treatment, unearned advantage, and power at the expense of Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab and other racially oppressed people. The term "structure," by definition, refers to relationships between entities or parts within a broader system. In contrast to prevailing conceptions of racism that focus on individual prejudice or incidents of discriminatory conduct, the structural racism framework explains how multiple institutions interact to reinforce and reproduce inequities between racial groups.

Second, consider the connections between social system dynamics and system structures.

The interrelationships within hierarchical social systems versus within social movements illustrates the difference between organized dynamics and self-organizing dynamics and the importance of considering these differences when seeking to investigate systems change.

Formal planned, controlled relationships such as in hierarchical organizations create the basic structure of many of society's social systems. They derived from the factory/machine model of systems. Hierarchical systems are based heavily on shaping relationship through planning and control, including strategic planning. Structural racism is a negative example of the planned, controlled relationship. Having a well-controlled payroll system that predictably provides monthly paychecks to employees is a positive example of this type of relationship.

Planned, controlled, predictable relationships (referred to as "organized system dynamics" in systems theory language) are not good or bad in and of themselves. It is how they are used and for what purposes. The underlying world views become woven into these structures through relationships among entities within the systems. They are systematically linked and controlled.

For the evaluator, a critically important point is to recognize that this is only one type of relationship (system dynamic). This is the type of system dynamic that has dominated much of the past attention to systems (if systems were addressed at all) in evaluation.

Contrast the interrelationships within hierarchies to those in informal systems that are dominated by self-organizing relationships and dynamics. In contrast to the planned, controlled relationships, some of the most powerful relationships are those that occur as people interact with one another and come together in unpredictable ways to form patterns of interactions that build on individual and collective beliefs, passions, and motivations. These interrelationships are built on a network structure (Parsons, Jessup, & Moore, 2016). In systems theory language, these are referred to as having *self-organizing dynamics*. This does not refer to the choices of individual people acting alone but rather how individuals

interact with others with whom they are in contact to form emergent patterns that are not necessarily predictable (see Parsons, 2012). They are moving and adjusting in response to other people's actions and perspectives while guided by their own mental processing and multiplicity of values.

Social movements are an excellent example of social systems that are built on a networked structure rather than hierarchical structure. Some of the greatest historical changes in racial equity like the end of segregation in the Deep South have grown out of community-initiated efforts that illustrate such self-organizing patterns. The primary civil rights strategy and its implementation were carried out by African American pastors and church-goers. It was everyday people who created a network of cars for ride sharing as they boycotted segregated busses in Selma, Alabama.

The legacy of the United Farmer Worker's Union, led by Dorothy Huerta and Cesar Chavez changed the experience of immigrant farm workers. A generation of youth activists is emerging today as leaders who continue to push back against social, political, and economic marginalization. An example is the efforts to address police violence in African American communities in Chicago, IL and Ferguson, MO. These emergent groups have been both within specific communities and connected nationally across communities through networks such as the *Black Lives Matter* movement .

There are similar leadership development efforts under way in Latino, First Nation and Southeast Asian communities across the country to address not only structural racism, but *"other –isms"* as well. The "other -isms" are *sexism*, *classism*, *able-ism*, *age-ism*, *xenophobia, and language discrimination,* to name a few. How inequity manifests itself is deeply connected to how racism interacts with the "other --isms" in a given community.

Understanding the Importance of Perspectives (World Views)

To illustrate the significance of underlying world views that undergird social systems and the complexity of social systems, let's go back to the issue of structural racism. Structural racism illustrates how systems can change, in this case, from explicit to implicit racism, and yet still produce racist results because the underlying paradigms have not changed.

Three well-established world views/perspectives are foundational mental models undergirding systemic racism:

- *Racial hierarchy* is the natural order with Europeans at the top (apartheid model with racial castes) and is to be maintained at all costs.
- *Whiteness* as skin color privilege overrides social or economic achievement by any person of color (whiteness comes with rights and opportunities that are treated as a result of a generational hard-work ethic).
- *Individualism* (versus collectivism) as primary social mental model.

The main point here is that you cannot engage in effective and accurate systems thinking and evaluation that attends to racism without taking into account the three core paradigms—racial hierarchy, whiteness, and individualism—that are embedded in American social, economic, and political systems.

Systems create their own behavior and results based on their interconnected structures, which in turn are shaped by their underlying assumptions/paradigms. Systems tend to be resilient. As Donella Meadows (2008), a highly regarded systems expert, states: "The most marvelous characteristics of some complex systems is their ability to learn, diversify, complexify, evolve." This can also be their most deeply problematic feature when that resilience means the systems hold on to the problematic world views as their foundation. Meadows identifies changing paradigms (i.e., worldviews or perspectives) as one of the most powerful ways to change a social system.

Understanding and Establishing Boundaries

Although systems thinkers and cultural thinkers include a focus on wholeness, they do not rigidly define the boundaries of what constitutes the "whole". The boundaries of a system or a culture are often permeable and ambiguous.

Boundaries become very important when determining who the stakeholders are in a given situation and how and when to bring together diverse groups and ideas and for what purposes. Defining who are stakeholders and what issues to address with each is a cultural boundary issue for an evaluator. See W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2016) for more information on identifying and working with stakeholders. Using a *culturally responsive systems* orientation, the evaluator identifies boundaries for purposes of determining what to focus on. Such evaluators still hold what is outside the boundaries in their peripheral vision and consider when to adjust their boundaries.

Appendix C

Applying a Systems Orientation to Four Example Situations

I. Areas of Focus for Systems Oriented Evaluations

A. Introduction

1. This appendix illustrates four evaluation areas of focus with different types of systems involved—a full community focus, project focus, formal social systems focus, and social movement focus. When conducting evaluations within community settings, there are various points of focus or entry for the evaluation depending on the nature of the work being implemented. In this appendix we describe four example situations for using a systems oriented evaluation. We address the evaluation focus, purpose, and process for each. Each example situation provides a way to consider the boundaries of the evaluation in order to focus on a key area for leveraging change in the complex social systems in which interventions are being implemented.

2. The examples here assume that the overall purpose of making changes in a situation is to support optimal child development.

B. Full Community Focus

1. Focus

a. Looking at the Full Community situation is one place to start an evaluation. It can provide the backdrop for determining where a specific initiative may be useful. It helps to determine focal points for action that are most appropriate for the setting.

b. A Full Community focused evaluation looks at the patterns and characteristics of the full community related to racial equity, community engagement and leadership, and optimal child development. This framework is used to step back—to zoom out—to see the many cultures, systems, activities, connections to the geography, histories, historical trends, and more of the community. It sets the support for optimal child development in this bigger context.

c. This broad look at the community is designed to both celebrate what is working well and give a picture of what changes are likely to be most useful at a given point in time for moving effectively toward conditions that support optimal child development. It points to if and when other aspects of the complex ecology may be a useful focus for either the initiative or the evaluation.

2. Evaluation Purpose and Use

a. The purpose of this evaluation focus is to assist community leaders across stakeholders, partnerships, and individuals and groups who are holders of the community culture and values to keep the focus on the overall goal, e.g., optimal development of children through educated kids, healthy kids, and secure families. Keeping the focus helps those involved to remain grounded in cultural values and ensure that they are thinking systemically about their work. It helps them think through and understand patterns that intersect around the nature of the community's agencies and organizations, various service-related projects that may be underway, and where the energy and momentum among residents is focused for change. It helps community leaders spot where new projects and additional intersections among agencies and organizations are needed, and what new opportunities for community movements for change are emerging.

b. The Full Community evaluation focus involves looking at the community as a whole to determine:

1) relevant population level outcomes/conditions, key stakeholders, community leaders, values, and status of optimal child development;

2) structural equity;

3) status of changes underway in service provision in the areas that affect education, kids' health, and secure families;

4) the pockets of energy for social change among community members;. and

5) an overall picture of key patterns within the full community related to equity, engagement and optimal child development.

c. The inquiry about the community as a whole does not begin with a blank slate. The community leaders already know a lot about the situation. The evaluative inquiry builds on and amplifies attention to the systemic nature of the situation. It provides information and connections that allow the community leaders to strengthen their strategy to find more powerful leverage points to move to a racially-equitable and culturally strong community. Although the community leaders may already have a general idea of the interventions they are considering to create this situation, the evaluation is intended to reveal interconnections, system boundaries, and elements that give deeper insight into how to structure the interventions to get at more powerful system levers for a given community.

d. On the other hand, if work is already well underway on specific changes, such as investigation of the structural racism embedded in multiple formal systems, projects to improve teachers' cultural understanding, or broad community movement to bring about

a policy change, there may be little interest in stepping back to look at the broader situation. It may be better to focus on those specific changes to gain insights into both those changes and the larger community situation. Then at a later point, the broader focus may be appropriate.

3. Evaluation Guiding Questions and Design
    a. The evaluators work closely with the community leaders to identify key questions to address through the evaluation. Core questions are likely to be some version of the following:
        1) What population level trends, conditions and results are occurring and how are they interconnected?
        2) What investments to date are moving the community toward sustainable equity, engagement, and optimal child development?
        3) What are the system dynamics and underlying system features that are at play across sectors and investments?
        4) Who are the stakeholders and what are their stakes in the various social systems?
        5) What ideas or plans already exist for making change and how do they fit with the overall assessment of the full community situation?
    b. The evaluation is designed to reveal the cultural and community-based practices, assets, and values that are the basis of strength and well-being in the community. It also makes clear who the stakeholders are and what their stakes are within the various social systems.
    c. It is useful to frame this exploration in terms of who benefits, who loses, and who is unaffected by the way the interconnected systems function. Benefits and losses may be in terms of power, privilege, resources, recognition, well-being and more.
4. Data Collection and Summary
    a. Considerable data typically already exists within community and state agencies or through national sources. Begin with this information before gathering more data. Disaggregate existing trend data for the community and/or broader social units as necessary.
    b. Summarize and display existing population level measures in ways that are useful to understand structural racism and multiple types of inequities relevant to the community.
    c. Use culturally responsive methods to interact with the full range of stakeholders (include partnership members and leaders across sectors and cultures of the community and individuals and groups who are holders of the community culture and values).
    d. The data collection is likely to include interviews with these diverse stakeholders. The interviews may, for example, identify possible linkages between specific investments that have been made and population level changes.

e. Include comparisons across time and use benchmarks from other settings as appropriate to increase understanding of the local community situation.

f. Look for patterns evident in the data.

5. Meaning Making

a. The evaluators do not make meaning from the data by themselves. Involve community leaders and the range of stakeholders and individuals and groups who hold the community culture and values in interpretation and meaning-making. Some boundaries need to be set on how many people can be involved. Do this very carefully with attention to the full range of stakeholders who exist in the community. It may also involve consideration of stakeholders outside the community who affect the community.

b. Use system dynamics and system complexity concepts to identify possible combinations of interventions (including ones already underway) to gain sufficient system impact on the inequities that are the result of a combination of subsystems and interconnections. In assessing the initial situation, the focus is on these intersecting systems and subsystems and how to find effective leverage points that can help untangle and redesign the web of interconnections.

c. The meaning-making processes may occur in group meetings, focus groups, one-on-one discussions, community summits, webinars, and/or a number of other formats.

d. The process involves reviewing displays of trend data of various types based on the evaluation questions used. Causal loop diagrams and other ways of displaying data can be helpful for making meaning of the data.

e. Patterns across time, sectors, and locations are especially important to investigate to understand systemic issues. Attend to patterns and cycles that repeatedly occur in systems. Patterns are similarities and differences that repeat themselves over time and space. They may involve patterns of dynamics, structures, results, and other entities and connections that are present/observed.

6. Shaping Practice

a. Although the stakeholders ultimately decide how they will change their practices, the evaluators can help them by engaging appropriate stakeholders in evaluation tasks, providing brief easy-to-use summaries of evaluation findings, developing ongoing means for tracking trends over time and across subgroups within the community, and providing illustrative case studies focused on systemic patterns.

b. The evaluators also adjust their evaluation designs and processes as fitting to what has been learned through the evaluation and what important questions lie ahead.

c. Evaluators may also help facilitate conversations among various stakeholders about merit (quality), worth (bang for the buck), and significance (importance) at a given point in time and place. Such evaluative conversations support people to think more evaluatively about their situations.

C. Project Focus

1. Focus

a. Endeavors that serve those in a given social system, (e.g., students served by the education system, parents served by a social service system, unemployed workers served through a training program) are some of the most commonly funded endeavors by foundations.

b. Evaluation of these endeavors focuses on one or more specific projects that has been designed to support a detailed look at the influence of a particular set of activities on desired outcomes for one or more group of people (e.g., students, teachers, police, and/or parents), who are providers or recipients of services. The projects are designed to better achieve certain outcomes for those who receive some type of service from specific agencies or organizations (e.g., children in schools, or families served by hospitals).

c. In one sense, this type of evaluation is very similar to a typical project evaluation. However, when done with a systems orientation, the focus is noticeably different.

1) The evaluation looks deeply into the underlying features of the project (e.g., the nature and patterns of relationships, boundaries, and perspectives) that relate to the desired outcomes for the recipient of services.

2) The evaluation views the project as part of larger social and/or natural systems and subsystems that affect the capacity of a project to contribute to systemic changes.

3) The focus is on learning enough from the specific example situation to be able to make judgments about how it informs the larger system change approaches as well as whether and how the particular project is of value in the community.

4) The focus is likely on multiple projects that will be undertaken either simultaneously or sequentially to support the deeper changes to which the project(s) are connected.

5) The project is not viewed as an end in itself or as isolated from the larger system(s) and assumptions/beliefs of which it is a part.

6) It is not assumed that the project is to be "perfected" and then incorporated in the same way in different situations.

7) The focus is on how visible activities and results of the project connect to deeper features of the system, rather than getting locked into just looking at the visible activities and results. For example, a project may involve shifting from a professional deciding what a parent needs to having the parent decide what he or she needs. Let's assume the project results in better outcomes for the parent. Rather than then assuming this project should be available to parents in a different setting, it may be more important to look at whether the other setting already has services that have this same underlying principle. Rather than adding the new project to the other situation, it may be better to look at how to redesign the service approaches already available to see what it would take to incorporate this underlying way of working with parents in these services.

2. Evaluation Purpose and Use

    a. This approach to the evaluation of projects assists project leaders, partnerships that link projects to other investments, and stakeholders most affected by projects to:

        - determine merit, worth, and significance of specific projects in leading to optimal child development and supporting services.
        - determine how to adjust existing services that share common features with the new project to better achieve optimal child development.
        - determine connection of project success to changes being made in other social systems or in system policies, infrastructures, norms, and practices.
        - determine other necessary projects to support equity and optimal child development.

3. Evaluation Questions and Design

    a. A systems-orientation to a project evaluation would address questions such as:

        - What results are achieved for which stakeholders through the project? (Consider desired and undesired results as well as expected and unanticipated results.)
        - What underlying relationships, boundaries, and perspectives of the project (as well as the specific activities of the project) are likely to be linked to the outcomes?
        - What conditions external to the project are especially important in shaping the project's impact?
        - How is the choice of evaluation methodology affecting what is being learned?

    b. This evaluation design keeps users of the evaluation well-grounded in what actually happens when changes are made in how and what services are available. It also promotes going below the surface of project activities and results—zooming in—for those being served.

4. Data Collection and Summary

    a. Many options exist for how data can be collected for a project evaluation of the type discussed here. However, it nearly always includes collecting a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. It is highly unlikely that an experimental design (e.g., randomized controlled trials) would be appropriate although quasi-experimental designs for data collection may be useful. They can provide contrasts that help understand the deeper dimensions of a project. However, the findings need to be carefully interpreted with attention to their limitations. The usual evaluation issues related to the selection of respondents to questions, the type of data collection methods (e.g., interviews, surveys, standardized or non-standardized questionnaires, and so on), the timing of data collection, and more all apply here. (See the WKKF Basic Evaluation Handbook.) The focus of data collection is on determining:

        - the nature of and changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, assumptions, and values among participating service providers and recipients and those immediately connected to providers and recipients.

- the degree and nature of implementation of project activities.
- the linkages among project activities, results, and underlying relationships, perspectives, and boundaries.

5. Meaning Making

   a. A wide variety of options exist for interacting with project leaders, partnerships that link projects to the other types of investments (e.g. changes in formal social systems), stakeholders most affected by the projects, and others to make meaning from the data as it relates to making systemic change. It involves:

      1) interpreting summarized data in light of the guiding questions and underlying paradigms about equity, community engagement and leadership, and optimal child development.

      2) exploring possible linkages between project activities, underlying assumptions and principles, and results.

      3) thinking in terms of both contribution and attribution regarding the project.

      4) building on project findings to deepen systemic change.

6. Shaping Practice

   a. In addition to the above interactions and connections with users of the evaluation, the evaluators can support users in shaping their practice by attending to ways of incorporating evaluation findings and processes into professional development, communities of practice, and other ways in which service providers can learn from the evaluation of the projects. Evaluators also can help users deepen their understanding of the link between theory, systems thinking, underlying paradigms and everyday actions. The evaluators rethink their evaluation approach for future projects in the community based on their experience with this project.

D. Formal Social Systems Focus

1. Focus

   a. This type of evaluation focuses on the patterns and characteristics within and across the formal agencies and organizations in the community related to racial equity, community engagement and leaders, and optimal child development. It may include government entities, nonprofit organizations, private agencies, and a wide array of businesses. It focuses on how these entities are affecting patterns of racial equity and/or community engagement and leadership (in either supportive or undermining ways). It focuses both within and across agencies and organizations.

   b. Making changes in the policies, infrastructures, norms, and habitual practices within agencies and organizations on a sustained basis may well be the toughest aspect of any of the foci discussed here. Such changes involve changes in who holds power or whose power is supported by the structures of hierarchical organizations. Hierarchical organizations are designed for control. Changes may well affect the daily practices that have shaped people's own sense of identity within the organizations and beyond.

c. To gain the community's trust and be in authentic partnership, formal social systems—agencies and non-profit organizations—have to revisit and reframe four key areas:

   1) Practices: Service-oriented organizations need to move away from deficit and paternalist approaches; a focus on individual assistance rather than community development/engagement; data gathered in communities without community involvement in what and how it is done; community members not involved in interpreting and using data; changes not in keeping with community members' culture; and dominance by formal organizations out of tune with community members' culture.

   2) Norms: They need to remove implicit biases that lead to differential respect for community members based on roles, social status, and economic status; lack of respect/attention to cultural values and assets; hierarchical decision-making by white culture; and lack of involvement of those receiving services in making choices about needs to address.

   3) Policies: They need to eliminate policies that formalize disrespect for communities' cultural values and norms; opportunity gaps created by lack of opportunities for community engagement and leadership in decision making; and give power to governmental and service organizations over community voice.

   4) Infrastructures: They need to remove infrastructures that create token involvement in decision-making; undermine access to opportunities for community engagement and leadership (e.g., lack of transportation systems that provide access to decision-making meetings); and disregard the cultural values and norms of the community.

d. Culture and system issues related to structural racism also need to be considered.

   1) Long standing social systems (or any system for that matter) are very resistant to change. The parts and relationships have been working together for a long time and producing a result that some group of people have benefited from and they may not be eager to give up the results that the system has been achieving.

   2) Structural racism[1] is the interconnected web of social structures (institutional policies, norms, practices, infrastructures, and relationships) that repeatedly produces and re-produces cumulative race-based inequities[2]. To interrupt racial inequity and create more racially equitable outcomes, the evaluator needs to investigate the systemic nature of seemingly neutral policies and practices that predictably generate racialized outcomes.

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1 Some theorists and writers (e.g., John Powell) distinguish between structural racism and structural racialization where structural racism refers to racism as manifest between individuals whereas structural racialization refers to "the dynamic process that creates cumulative and durable inequalities based on race" (Powell, 2011) The presence of structural racialization is evidenced by consistent differences in outcomes, whether you are looking at education attainment, family wealth, or life span, that correlate with the race of the community. WKKF is using the term structural racism to encompass both of these concepts.

2 This definition draws on the work of John Powell. (Powell, 2013).

3) For example, the explicit race-based laws, policies, and practices under Jim Crow and de facto segregation focused on blocking the cumulative nature of building social, economic, and political capital in communities of color. Opportunities that were denied to racial and ethnic minorities at critical points in the nation's history have led to the disadvantaged circumstances that too many children of color are born into today. Explicit race-based laws of the Jim Crow era have morphed into seemingly race-neutral practices and policies that create structural arrangements that wall off the flow of resources and opportunities to communities of color, producing the racial disparities we see today—higher poverty rates, greater infant deaths and lower high school graduation rates.

4) These disparate outcomes demonstrate the impact of structural racism on individual life options, even in the absence of intentional discrimination. Racial equity as a strategy isn't solely focused on pointing out inequities or talking about race relations. The strategy is aimed at interrupting patterns of structural racism through informed design of investments and their implementation that, in turn, reverse, or at least mitigate, the impact of negative social, economic, health, and education policies and practices. The strategy doesn't stop here. It involves changing the policies, practices, infrastructures, and norms that create the patterns of structural racism.

5) Structural racism has multiple places and ways in which it has been woven into the fabric—the infrastructure—within and across organizations. Thus it takes persistence and careful analysis to determine how to uproot it from the foundation of social organizations. Once established, hierarchical systems are very resistant to change and have multiple ways of snapping back to their former self.

6) Given the nature of structural racism, the interconnections among agencies and organizations in the community are especially important to focus on. The connections or lack thereof between these entities can be as significant as those within. The nature of a community's agencies and organizations and their interconnections have a powerful influence on a community. These entities also link to entities outside the community.

3. Evaluation Purpose and Use

   a. The purpose of using this evaluation focus is to assist top and mid-level personnel within agencies and organizations; partnerships of agencies and organizations; and stakeholders who hold agencies and organizations accountable to:

      1) determine the patterns of intertwined policies, infrastructures, practices, and norms within and across agencies and organizations.

      2) determine the most likely leverage points within these patterns to shift toward greater equity and desired results.

      3) track the nature and impact of changes in patterns and implications for learning and action.

4. Evaluation Questions and Design

    a. This evaluation focus is used to address questions such as:

        1) Where are the high leverage interconnections and elements of agencies and organizations that can shift these entities toward patterns of equity, community engagement and leadership, and optimal child development?

        2) What happens when changes are made within the patterns of the agencies and organizations?

        3) What theories are helpful in understanding the patterns?

    b. The evaluation explores patterns of power and privilege; flexibility and responsiveness; alignment with paradigms of equity and engagement; the nature of partnerships; degree and nature of mutual respect, trust, and caring among stakeholders; persistence in accomplishing equity and engagement, and optimal child development; and the capacity building opportunities for the full range of personnel in agencies and organizations.

5. Data Collection and Summary

    a. The data about population level results for children and families and patterns of interconnections of policies, infrastructures, norms, and habitual practices that are gathered for use in the an evaluation of the full community discussed above are also relevant here. They provide the basis for surfacing the connections between the web of agency and organization interrelationships and stakeholder results.

    b. To understand patterns and gain insight into what is happening in complex structural interconnections across the social systems usually requires that the evaluators use interviews, surveys, focus groups, and/or other means to gather qualitative and quantitative information from top and mid-level personnel within agencies and organizations; members of interagency collaborations and partnerships; service providers (front-line workers); those receiving services from the agencies and organizations; and stakeholders who hold agencies and organizations accountable.

    c. Rarely, if ever, would an evaluation of this type involve experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation designs.

    d. The task of the evaluators is also to organize and summarize these data in a way that evaluation users and other stakeholders can then make meaning from it for their situation.

6. Meaning Making

    a. At appropriate times, the evaluators review the data displays with top and mid-level personnel within agencies and organizations; agency- and organization-based partnerships; and other appropriate stakeholders.

    b. They explore underlying patterns related to policies, norms, infrastructures, practices, power and privilege, economic consequences, beliefs, and assumptions.

    c. They also look at patterns over time to determine shifts in patterns, and consequences of actions taken in one part of the complex web of organizations and agencies.

d. They pay special attention to whether changes are happening in people's awareness and use of values related to equity and community engagement in decision-making.

7. Shaping Practice

a. As the users of the evaluation shape their practice, evaluators can contribute by helping emphasize the importance of attention to racial healing and personal impacts of changes; providing meaningful stories of patterns of policies, norms, infrastructures, practices, power and privilege, economic consequences, beliefs, assumptions; and attending to connections beyond the boundaries of the community that need attention. The evaluators help zoom out from the community to see the bigger systems and ecology to which the community situation connects.

b. Evaluators also adjust their own practice to fit the next iteration of evaluation in the situation.

E. Social Movements Focus

1. Focus

a. Deeply embedded implicit and explicit biases such as racial inequities are not easily changed either on an individual or societal level. Often large groups of people need to mobilize to make change as evidenced by the Civil Rights Movement, the American Indian Movement, the Farmworkers Movement and more. These movements are likely to emerge from ordinary people and community leaders who are deeply aware of the inequities and ready to stand up for justice and well-being for all. What prompts these movements to occur at a particular time and place is often unpredictable although indicators that they may be forming might be evident. This evaluation focus draws attention to the importance of these organic community movements for change and what to look for to achieve the most benefit.

b. At some point within a community involved in changes to achieve racial equity, some type of social movement is likely to occur in which the public mobilizes to change particular policies, norms, habitual practices of certain parties, and/or infrastructures within and/or across formal social systems, or address values across differing cultures within the community.

c. An evaluation with this focus builds largely on the self-organizing dynamics of systems. This orientation recognizes that self-organizing (as contrasted with controlled change) emerges from the internal motivation of those involved, shifts as actors within the movement interact with one another, can go through major shifts in unexpected and unpredictable ways, and builds on creativity and diversity.

2. Evaluation Purpose and Use

a. The purpose of this evaluation focus is it to assist community residents, opinion leaders, and organizations (e.g. neighborhood associations) that are deeply rooted in the community's culture and values to:

1) determine where energy exists for community-driven action

2) follow patterns and consequences of community-driven movements

3) keep focused on goals of optimal child development and equity

4) watch for emergence and creativity and implications for continued movement in the desired direction.

3. Evaluation Guiding Questions and Design

   a. An evaluation focused primarily on community movements is designed differently than the evaluations for looking at formal social systems.

   b. This evaluation approach, like the phenomenon it is focused on, is emergent. It is opportunistic and takes advantage of multiple sources and times of data collection that may not be planned in advance. It often involves having a network of people who are positioned throughout the community who can serve as informants. It involves gathering information much like a news reporter does about:

      1) Where is the energy in the community for moving toward changes in policy or norms to support equity and optimal child development?

      2) What changes are happening as a result of community-driven action?

      3) What patterns are emerging and how are they related to the desired change?

      4) Where is creativity being generated and/or evidenced?

4. Data Collection and Summary

   a. The data collection may involve informal surveys and interviews in places where people hang out; short conversations with opinion leaders at strategic moments; following social media messages and looking for patterns; and following patterns of connection to other communities, social movements, and advocacy efforts. Various types of social network analysis can be especially helpful. Data are often summarized through displays of patterns that are emerging among people, across locations, and across time.

   b. Exploring multiple layers of networks and their patterns can be very informative to understand how perspectives are shifting, building, and/or dissipating.

5. Meaning Making

   a. The evaluators engage with community residents, opinion leaders, and supporting organizations individually and in group meetings (e.g., community gatherings) at spontaneous as well as planned times to interpret patterns, inform the users as they mobilize for action in the desired direction, and determine who else to involve to build the needed momentum for change.

6. Shaping Practice

   a. To assist the community residents and influencers of many types, the evaluators can contribute documents, news articles, memos, and other information that is part of the self-organizing that moves toward equity and optimal child development. High attention to politics and power are part of the needed approach of the evaluators.

Table 1. Summary of Example Situations

Features	Evaluation Focus			
	Full Community	**Project**	**Formal Social Systems**	**Social Movements**
Focus	Patterns and characteristics of the full community related to racial equity, community engagement & leaders, and optimal child development	Patterns and characteristics of service projects that are designed to better achieve certain outcomes for those who receive some type of service from specific agencies or organizations. ("Outcomes" include patterns of relationships as well as specific results for a stakeholder group.) The project is viewed as part of larger social and/or natural systems and subsystems that affect the capacity of a project to contribute to systemic changes.	Patterns and characteristics within and across formal agencies and organizations related to racial equity, community engagement & leaders, and optimal child development (includes governmental, nonprofit and private agencies, organizations and businesses)	Resident-based mobilization for changes in norms or policies related to equity.

Features	Evaluation Focus			
	Full Community	**Project**	**Formal Social Systems**	**Social Movements**
Evaluation Purpose & Use	Assist community leaders across stakeholders and individuals and groups who are holders of the community culture and values to: • keep the focus on the overall goal of optimal development of children through educated kids, healthy kids, and secure families • keep grounded in cultural values • understand patterns of intersections of the three other foci • determine need for new service projects • determine need for new areas of attention within and across agencies • determine need or opportunities for resident-based movements	Assist project leaders, partnerships that link projects to the other investment foci, and stakeholders most affected by projects to determine: • merit, worth, and significance of specific projects in leading to optimal child development and supporting services • how to adjust existing services to better achieve desired outcomes • the connection of project success to work related to other foci • other necessary projects to support equity and optimal child development	Assist agency/organization based partnerships; top and mid-level personnel within agencies and organizations; and stakeholders who hold agencies and organizations accountable to: • determine the patterns of interconnections of policies, infrastructures, practices, and norms within and across agencies and organizations. • determine the most likely leverage points within these patterns to shift toward greater equity and desired results • track nature and impact of changes in patterns and implications for learning and action	Assist community residents and opinion leaders to: • determine where energy exists for resident-based action • follow patterns and consequences of resident-based movements • keep focused on goals of optimal child development and equity • watch for emergence and creativity and implications for continued movement

Features	Evaluation Focus			
	Full Community	**Project**	**Formal Social Systems**	**Social Movements**
Evaluation Questions	• What population level trends, conditions and results are occurring and how are they interconnected? • What investments to date are moving the community toward sustainable equity and engagement, and optimal child development? • What are the system dynamics and underlying system features that are at play across sectors and investments? • Who are the stakeholders and what are their stakes in the various social systems? • What ideas or plans already exist for making change and how do they fit with the overall assessment of the full community situation?	• What results are achieved for which stakeholders through the project? (Consider both desired and undesired; expected and unanticipated.) • What underlying relationships, boundaries, and perspectives of the project (as well as the specific activities of the project) are likely to be linked to the outcomes? • What conditions external to the project are especially important in shaping project's impact? • How is the choice of evaluation methodology affecting what is being learned?	• Where are the high leverage interconnections and elements of agencies and organizations that can shift these entities toward patterns of equity, community engagement and leadership, and optimal child development? • What happens when changes are made within the patterns of the agencies and organizations? • What theories are helpful in understanding the patterns?	• Where is the energy in the community for moving toward changes in policy or norms to support equity and optimal child development? • What changes are happening as a result of resident-based movements? • Where is creativity being generated and/or evidenced? • What patterns are emerging and how are they related to the desired change?

Features	Evaluation Focus			
	Full Community	**Project**	**Formal Social Systems**	**Social Movements**
Evaluation Design	• Reveals the cultural and community-based practices, assets, and values that are the basis of strength and well-being in the community. • Clarifies the stakeholders and their stakes in the social systems. • Considers who benefits, who loses, and who is unaffected by the way the interconnected systems function	• Keeps users of the evaluation well-grounded in what actually happens when changes are made in services. • Zooms in to go below the surface of project activities and results for those being served	• Tracks nature and impact of changes in formal systems • Explores patterns of power and privilege; flexibility and responsiveness; alignment with paradigms of equity and engagement; the nature of partnerships; degree and nature of mutual respect, trust, and caring among stakeholders; persistence in accomplishing equity and engagement, and optimal child development; and the capacity building opportunities for the full range of personnel in agencies and organizations.	• Is emergent, opportunistic and takes advantage of multiple sources and times of data collection that may not be planned in advance • Often involves having a network of people who are positioned throughout the community who can serve as informants • Involves gathering information like a news reporter

Features	Evaluation Focus			
	Full Community	**Project**	**Formal Social Systems**	**Social Movements**
Data Collection & Summary ***(What?)***	• Summarize and display existing population level measures • Interview diverse stakeholders (include partnership members and leaders across the three foci and individuals and groups who are holders of the community culture and values) • Identify linkages between specific investments and population level changes • Provide comparisons across time • Provide comparisons with benchmarks, other settings for learning purposes • Look for patterns in the data	• Use mix of qualitative and quantitative data • Use quasi-experimental designs where possible with attention to their limitations • Determine nature of and changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, assumptions, and values among participating service providers and recipients and those immediately connected to providers and recipients • Determine degree and nature of implementation of project activities • Determine linkages between project activities and results and underlying relationships, perspectives, and boundaries	• Interviews, surveys, focus groups with agency and organization-based partnerships; top and mid-level personnel within agencies and organizations; and stakeholders who hold agencies and organizations accountable • Gather/Review data about current results for stakeholders • Gather/Review data about interconnections of policies, infrastructures, norms, and habitual practices beliefs, assumptions regarding equity, engagement, leadership and stakeholder results (include nature of partnerships	• Informal surveys and interviews in places where people hang out • Conversations with opinion leaders • Follow social media messages • Follow patterns of connection to other communities, social movements, advocacy • Display patterns from data

Features	Evaluation Focus			
	Full Community	**Project**	**Formal Social Systems**	**Social Movements**
Making Meaning from Data ***(So what?)***	Interact, in various formats, with community leaders across stakeholders and individuals and groups who are holders of the community culture and values to: • review displays of trend data • review displays of patterns of change • determine their interpretations of the patterns Participate in community summits to present findings that can inform community choices	Interact with project leaders, partnerships that link projects to the other investment foci, and stakeholders most affected by projects to: • interpret summarized data in light of guiding questions, underlying paradigms about equity, community engagement and leadership, and optimal child development • explore possible linkages between project activities, underlying assumptions and principles, and results • think in terms of both contribution and attribution • build on project findings to deepen systemic change	Interact with agency/organization based partnerships; top and mid-level personnel within agencies and organizations; and stakeholders who hold agencies and organizations accountable to: • review data displays • explore underlying patterns related to policies, norms, infrastructures, practices, power and privilege, economic consequences, beliefs, assumptions Attend to shifts in, awareness of, and use of values in decision-making	Engage with community residents and opinion leaders individually and in group meetings (e.g., community gatherings) to: • interpret patterns • mobilize for action in the desired direction • determine who else to involve
Shaping Practice ***(Now what?)***	• Engage stakeholder in evaluation tasks • Provide brief easy-to-use summaries of evaluation findings • Develop ongoing means for tracking trends over time and across subgroups within the community • Provide illustrative case studies focused on systemic patterns	• Attend to ways of incorporating evaluation findings and processes into professional development, communities of practice, • Help users deepen their understanding of the link between theory, systems thinking, underlying paradigms and everyday actions	• Attend to racial healing and personal impacts of changes • Provide meaningful stories of patterns of policies, norms, infrastructures, practices, power and privilege, economic consequences, beliefs, assumptions • Attend to connections beyond the boundaries of the community that need attention	• Contribute documents, news articles, memos, other information that supports self-organizing for equity direction and optimal child development

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