

Turning Evaluation into Action: Strategies for Strengthening Home Visiting Programs

This resource builds on the MIECHV TARC resource, Using Evidence to Inform Home Visiting Practice, which explores opportunities for generating and using evidence.

Introduction

Turning evaluation findings into practical, actionable changes is essential for strengthening home visiting programs. What sets evaluation apart from research and performance metrics is its focus on real-world applicability. When programs translate evidence into practice, they can strengthen services based on the latest research and program data, leading to better outcomes for families. This process is especially important for the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program, which prioritizes continuous improvement as a core value.

Yet integrating evaluation findings into practice is not always easy. Research shows that it can take more than a decade for new knowledge to influence practice.¹ Without intentional

¹ Morris, Z. S., Wooding, S., & Grant, J. (2011). The answer is 17 years, what is the question: Understanding time lags in translational research. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 104(12), 510–520.



efforts to bridge this gap, programs risk missing valuable opportunities for learning and growth.

Below are three strategies for ensuring that evaluation efforts are both usable and used. These are appropriate for awardees and local implementing agencies (LIAs) that are either conducting an evaluation or considering one.

Strategy 1: Build Strong Evaluation-Practice Partnerships

When home visiting staff are involved in planning, implementing, and interpreting evaluations, findings are more likely to be relevant and actionable. Home visiting staff can provide valuable insight into evaluation findings, contextualizing and applying meaningful results to practice. In contrast, when home visitors are disconnected from evaluation processes, they may see data collection as a burden and miss opportunities for growth. In the process of building strong partnerships, it is essential that evaluators maintain objectivity and independence throughout the process to ensure that findings are credible, unbiased, and useful. Establishing strong partnerships does not mean compromising an evaluator's impartial role; rather, it fosters mutual respect, transparent communication, and a shared commitment to improvement. By establishing clear roles and maintaining professional boundaries, evaluators can preserve the integrity of their work while engaging program staff in meaningful ways.

Strong partnerships can be fostered in the following ways:

- » Implement regular touchpoints between evaluators and program staff, including evaluator participation in team meetings.
- » Encourage open dialogue and feedback loops between evaluators and practice staff to ensure consistent communication and shared learning opportunities.
- » Include home visitor perspectives during all phases of the evaluation process so that their priorities, expertise, and voices are reflected as appropriate.





Lessons from the Field: Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, the MIECHV awardee team has cultivated a strong, collaborative relationship among its staff and external evaluators. Regular touchpoints and a commitment to open dialogue have fostered a culture of open communication and shared purpose, built on mutual trust and a deep commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

Massachusetts integrates home visitors into every stage of the evaluation process, with staff offered a range of engagement opportunities based on their interests and availability. All home visitors are given the opportunity to provide feedback during the design and implementation phases of evaluation, including providing input on data collection tools, research questions, and evaluation approaches. A smaller group of interested staff (and families) are engaged in the evaluation working group, which has a higher level of involvement in evaluation planning and implementation. This approach helps to ensure that everyone, from frontline staff to program administrators, has a voice in shaping and applying evaluation findings.

Because of this high degree of trust and familiarity between evaluators and program staff, communication flows freely and meaningfully. Evaluation results are not only shared in a timely manner but are also rapidly integrated into practice through continuous quality improvement (CQI) initiatives and other improvement efforts. As a result, staff can see firsthand how data-driven decisions lead to tangible enhancements in service delivery.

This dynamic environment—rooted in trust, engagement, and a shared commitment to growth—enables the Massachusetts team to continuously apply evaluation insights to strengthen their home visiting practice.

One Massachusetts evaluator described it this way: “We could evaluate all we want, but if we didn’t have partners who are so interested and engaged and willing to take hard looks at themselves—at what they are doing and what they could improve—then nothing that we do would be particularly useful. It is about the partnership, and interest and willingness in learning from each other.”

Strategy 2: Cultivate a Culture of Inquiry

Evaluation findings are most likely to be used when generated in a culture that values learning, experimentation, and reflection. Programs that routinely use CQI to test new strategies—including those generated through evaluation—and that view failures as opportunities for learning, are better equipped to adapt and improve.

Practical strategies for building a culture of inquiry include the following:

- » Host monthly data or evaluation huddles during which teams review recent findings and discuss implications for improvement.
- » Encourage starting with ideas for small changes, even when they don't work as planned, to reinforce that learning is the goal.
- » Train staff to ask critical questions like "Do these findings match your experience?" or "What assumptions are we testing?" to build curiosity and ownership.
- » Create a safe environment for experimentation by highlighting lessons learned rather than focusing solely on outcomes.
- » Incorporate reflective supervision practices that encourage staff to think critically about what's working and why.



Lessons from the Field: Oklahoma

Oklahoma's CQI collaborative model exemplifies a strong culture of inquiry, where learning and adaptation are embedded in everyday practice. Local teams engage regularly in CQI efforts to address challenges that matter most to their programs—such as boosting developmental screening rates, increasing father engagement in home visiting, and improving referral tracking and follow-up.

At the heart of this model is a dynamic feedback loop between evaluation and CQI. Evaluators work closely with members of the collaborative, meeting monthly to share progress, exchange ideas, and drive collective learning. Evaluation findings aren't treated as end points or static reports—they're actively translated into change ideas that teams test, reflect on, and refine. Just as importantly, CQI insights ignite interest in evaluation topics and feed into ongoing evaluations, fostering a continuous cycle of learning. For example, some of Oklahoma's LIAs used CQI to improve on their documentation and communication with referral network partners. This inquiry ended up being the "early seedlings" of their innovation evaluation on care coordination.

This iterative process—through which evaluation informs CQI and CQI outcomes inform ongoing evaluation—reinforces staff curiosity, empowers teams to ask critical questions, and treats every test as a valuable learning opportunity. CQI serves as the bridge between data and action, helping programs translate findings into meaningful, sustained improvements in service delivery.

Strategy 3: Align Evaluation Efforts and Program Interests

Programs must use intentional strategies to ensure that evaluations explore meaningful questions for programs from the outset. Awardees who generate their evaluation questions through dialogue with home visiting staff are more likely to uncover findings that are useful and applicable to local practice.

Practical strategies for alignment include the following:

- » Develop a shared learning agenda that connects evaluation questions with CQI priorities and performance measures.
- » Include program staff, including CQI staff, on evaluation planning teams to ensure the relevance of evaluation questions and to consider the application of findings from the start.
- » Host joint evaluation-CQI planning sessions where staff can codevelop actionable learning goals and metrics.

Translating evaluation findings into practice is essential for ensuring that home visiting programs continuously improve and remain responsive to the needs of families and staff. CQI provides a structured, data-driven framework to do just that—turning abstract insights into tested, measurable improvements. But the success of this process depends on more than just tools and strategies. It requires strong partnerships, a culture of inquiry, and intentional alignment between evaluation and improvement efforts.



Works Consulted

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