

# THE STATE OF EVALUATION

MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION PRACTICES  
IN ONTARIO'S NONPROFIT SECTOR



ONTARIO NONPROFIT NETWORK



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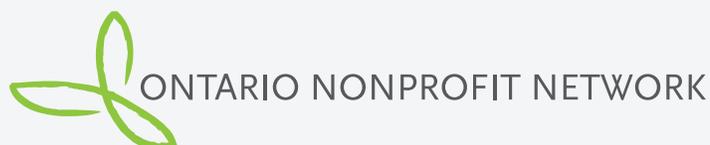
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# INTRODUCTION



Ontario's nonprofit sector is made up of tens of thousands of organizations driven to build thriving communities and a dynamic province. They bring people together to address the social, cultural, and economic issues that act as obstacles to this vision. To succeed, public benefit organizations must be capable of responding to changing circumstances quickly and redirecting resources where they can help the most people or have the greatest benefit. This is why evaluation work is so important to the nonprofit sector.

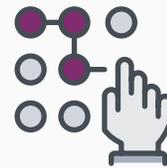
Though it is important, evaluation work isn't always easy. It can be time consuming, expensive, technically difficult and stressful. Over the last several years, we have sought to better understand how evaluation is practiced by Ontario's public benefit nonprofits, and to identify strategies to make evaluation more efficient, more meaningful and more action oriented. We have learned that evaluation is often most useful when it is designed from the ground up in a collaborative way that creates safe spaces for discussion and informs deep learning. We have learned that there are many different approaches to evaluation, each useful under the right circumstances (and much less useful under the wrong circumstances). We have learned that there is quite a lot of evaluation work going on, but insufficient discussion of the intended purpose of this work. We don't talk enough about whether evaluation efforts are delivering on their promise to create a sector that is more informed, more responsive, and more impactful.

Our discussion about how to improve evaluation practice has been limited, to date, by the lack of detailed information about current practice. We know nonprofits spend significant time and resources on evaluation, but we have not known exactly how much. While we know that some evaluation projects are much more useful than others, we have not known what proportion of evaluation reports get used across the province, by whom, or for what purpose. While we know that the evaluation function is often under-resourced, we have not known how often this is true, who pays for evaluation work, or who most commonly carries it out. The fact that we do not have a clear picture of how evaluation is practiced across the province may itself be an indication that our sector has not been as strategic as it needs to be in approaching this essential component of our work. Together, all of these issues have contributed to a dynamic that has sometimes led to an emphasis on accountability over learning and a missed opportunity to strengthen relationships across the sector and communities.

For these reasons, we are very excited to share with you the first-ever 'State of Evaluation' report for Ontario. This is the first detailed picture of how evaluation is practiced across our province, and how the findings of evaluation work are being translated into action. Our sincere hope is that this report sparks a rich discussion about improving evaluation practice and develop a strong, responsive, impactful nonprofit sector.

# OVERVIEW

Through the State of Evaluation survey, we have learned:



**Organizations draw on a rich mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods and resources to evaluate their work.**

Quantitative resources such as administrative data and statistical compilations of services delivered are most common, particularly when evaluating outputs. Organizations evaluating their outcomes tend to add key qualitative approaches, such as case studies, interviews and focus groups. When evaluating impact or return on investment, a handful of rarer approaches such as experimental studies, standardized assessment tools, or case studies are also drawn upon.



**94% of Ontario organizations evaluate their work in some way.**

Organizations most commonly evaluate their outputs, outcomes and quality - when they evaluate their impact or return on investment, it is almost always in addition to evaluating these three more common aspects of their work.



**Organizations use evaluation findings in many different ways.**

The most common of these relate to reporting (to Boards of directors and funders) and to tracking, developing and learning about program objectives and outcomes. Organizations using findings for these purposes tend to focus on evaluating their outputs and outcomes using more common methods and resources.



**External funding plays a major role in evaluation.**

Organizations receiving some form of external funding tend to allocate more spending to evaluation and they are more likely to use some more specialized and labour-intensive methods, including surveys, interviews and focus groups. However, dedicated funding for evaluation is comparatively uncommon – just 28% of externally-funded organizations said their funding included money specifically dedicated to evaluation.



**A number of key enablers or barriers affect evaluation capacity.**

The most potent enablers appear to be support from organizational leadership and buy-in from staff. The most potent barriers are lack of time and financial resources. Other factors, such as staff skills, knowledge, and tools or funder support are more likely to function as either enablers or barriers depending on the specific circumstances.

**26% of organizations are involved in some type of formal or informal group, network or association related to evaluation.**

The range of relationships is extremely diverse, but tend not to be focused exclusively on evaluation. However, organizations are drawing on these networks for a range of evaluation supports, most commonly tools and training.



**Overall, organizations have quite favourable opinions about evaluation.**

Strong majorities see a need for evaluation and believe that it provides a good return for the time and resources invested. Most organizations view their evaluation efforts as being internally driven, but a minority believe there is too much external pressure to evaluate their work. A minority also highlight potential evaluation-related challenges to their relationships with the people they serve and a strong majority of organizations believe they could be making better use of the information they gather.

**14% of Ontario organizations have at least one staff member primarily dedicated to evaluation work.**

For 86% of organizations, evaluation is an additional responsibility – most commonly involving program staff, the Executive Director / CEO or Board members. Organizations with staff that can focus on evaluation have significantly higher evaluation capacity in a range of areas.

**19% of Ontario organizations worked with an external evaluation consultant or organization in some capacity over the previous year.**

Higher capacity organizations are more likely to work with external consultants, though lack of time and money is clearly a barrier. Overwhelmingly, organizations are happy about their experiences with external consultants.

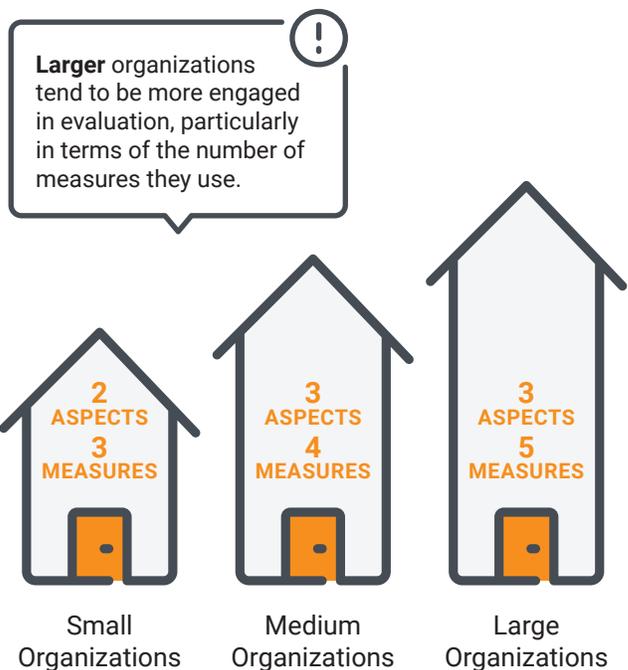
# WHAT IS BEING EVALUATED AND HOW IS IT BEING MEASURED?

Because we knew many survey respondents might not be familiar with the formal terminology of evaluation (e.g., formative vs. summative evaluations), we instead asked respondents whether their organization measures or evaluates specific commonly recognized aspects of its work (e.g., outputs, outcomes, impact, etc.)<sup>1</sup>, what methods or resources it draws on to do this and how it uses the results. Organizations evaluating at least one aspect of their work or using at least one identifiable method or resource are defined as being engaged in some form of evaluation.

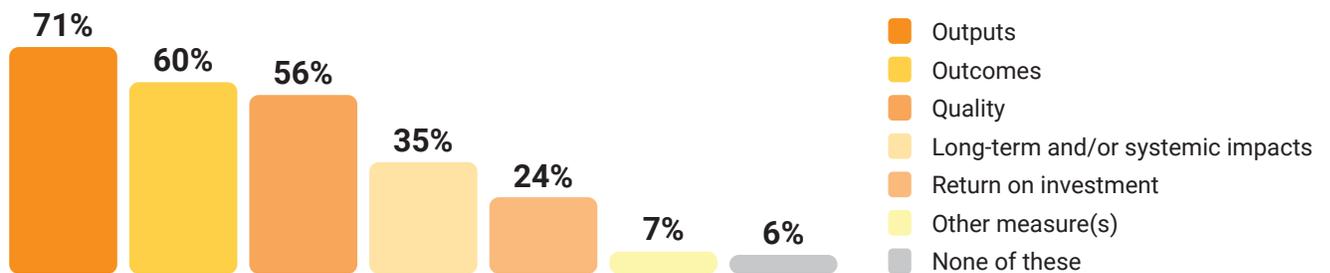
By this measure, **94% of Ontario organizations are engaged in evaluation.** A very small number (3%) are only minimally involved (i.e., they report only a single aspect or measurement method). Most are more heavily invested – the typical organization uses three or more measurement methods and evaluates at least two aspects of their work.

Looking first at the aspects of their work they evaluate, organizations are most likely to focus on evaluating their outputs, outcomes, and quality. When organizations evaluate their impact or return on investment, it is usually as a supplement to these three more common types of evaluation. Approximately nine tenths of organizations measuring their impact or return on investment evaluated at least one of the three more common aspects and more than two thirds of them measured all three.

## LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT IN EVALUATION BY ORGANIZATION SIZE<sup>2</sup>



## ASPECTS MEASURED



<sup>1</sup>Outputs were defined as how much the organization did (e.g., the number of clients served, beds provided, workshops conducted, etc.), outcomes as the direct effects of the organization's work on the people or cause it serves, quality as how well the organization carried out its work, impact as broader long-term or systemic effects of the organization's work beyond those directly served, and return on investment as comparison of the social or economic value of the organization's work with its costs.

<sup>2</sup>In this report, small organizations are defined as those with annual revenues of less than \$150,000; medium organizations as those with revenues between \$150,000 and less than \$5 million, and large organizations as those with revenues of \$5 million or more.



In this report, coloured figures with arrows show how responses of a sub-group differ from the populations as a whole. For example (18% ↓17) indicates that 18% of the sub-group being discussed gave a particular response, and that this was 17 percentage points lower than the population response of 35%.

Health organizations are more likely and Education organizations less likely than average to evaluate the outputs, quality and outcomes of their work. Sports & recreation organizations (18% ↓17) and Social services (26% ↓9) organizations are less likely than average to evaluate their impact. Grantmaking, fundraising & voluntarism organizations are more likely (40% ↑16) and Education organizations less likely (14% ↓10) to evaluate the return on investment of their work.



### ASPECTS MEASURED BY ORGANIZATION SIZE

	Small	Medium	Large
Outputs	65%	76%	95%
Outcomes	54%	68%	71%
Quality	53%	57%	81%
Long-term and/or systemic impacts	33%	36%	47%
Return on investment	22%	25%	39%
Other measure(s)	7%	7%	4%

Looking at how organizations measure their work, quantitative methods or resources are more common than qualitative<sup>3</sup>. **83% of organizations use at least one quantitative measure and 60% at least one qualitative measure.** Almost all (91%) organizations using qualitative measures use them together with quantitative measures. In contrast, about a third of organizations using quantitative measures **do not** use qualitative measures.

### QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE MEASURES BY ORGANIZATION SIZE

Use of both quantitative and qualitative measures increases with organization size.



Small Organizations	77% quantitative	54% qualitative
Medium Organizations	90% quantitative	65% qualitative
Large Organizations	98% quantitative	91% qualitative

The methods and resources organizations use appear to be linked to the aspects of their work they evaluate. Organizations evaluating their outputs are substantially more likely to draw on some quantitative measures, including statistical compilations (70% ↑14), administrative data (69% ↑11) and web statistics (47% ↑7). Organizations evaluating the outcomes of their work are about as likely as other organizations to use these measures, but tend to also layer on qualitative approaches such as case studies (25% ↑8), interviews (60% ↑14), focus groups (42% ↑11) and logic models / theories of change (28% ↑7). Organizations evaluating impact are more likely than others to draw on experimental studies (16% ↑7) and case studies (31% ↑14), while organizations evaluating their return on investment are more likely to draw on standardized assessment tools (25% ↑14), experimental studies (21% ↑12), interviews (67% ↑21), and administrative data (79% ↑21).

Measures used also tend to vary with organizational characteristics. Larger organizations are more likely than smaller organizations to use substantially all measures. Organizations working in some sub-sectors also seem to have associations with specific measures. For instance, Education organizations tend to use administrative data (70% ↑12) rather than statistical compilations (34% ↓22) and are much more likely to use surveys (82% ↑27) than other organizations. Health organizations, on the other hand, are more likely to draw on statistical compilations (81% ↑25) and to use standardized assessment tools (35% ↑24). Sports & recreation and Arts & culture organizations are less likely to collect information using interviews (29% ↓17 and 39% ↓7) and surveys (46% ↓9 and 48% ↓7) while Sports & recreation groups are less likely to use focus groups (13% ↓18) and logic models / theories of change (6% ↓15).

### MEASURES



<sup>3</sup>For the purposes of this breakdown, administrative data, statistical compilations, surveys, web statistics, and experimental studies are considered quantitative measures. Interviews, focus groups, logic models / theories of change and case studies are considered qualitative. The remaining approaches were not considered definitively quantitative or qualitative. For definitions of these methods / resources, please refer to the Methodology section at the end of this report.

# HOW ARE ONTARIO NONPROFITS USING THE RESULTS?

While organizations typically use a handful of measures to evaluate two or three aspects of their work, they apply evaluation results much more broadly. The survey asked respondents whether they used results in any of 18 specific ways. These uses fall into four major categories:



## Stakeholder reporting / communications.

97% of organizations use evaluation results to communicate with one or more of these groups, including their boards of directors, funders / supporters, people served by the organization, the public / media, peer organizations, funded / supported organizations, and/or government.



## Organizational / program planning and decision-making.

94% of organizations use evaluation results to inform one or more aspect of planning and decision-making, including revising existing programs, developing new programs, developing / revising organizational strategies, and/or allocating resources.



## Learning.

88% of organizations use results to learn about one or more aspects of their work, including determining whether the original objectives of the work were achieved, learning about the outcomes of the work as well as how it was implemented, and/or contributing to the broader knowledge of the field.



## Organizational performance.

60% of organizations use results to compare organizational performance to specific goals / benchmarks and/or to support more general evaluation of organizational performance.

The most common specific uses for evaluation findings are reporting to boards of directors and funders / supporters, revising existing programs and developing new ones, and determining whether project objectives have been met and learning about project outcomes. Organizations using results in these ways are somewhat distinct from others in that they are more likely to evaluate the most common aspects of their work (outputs and outcomes) using some of the more common methods or resources (statistical compilations, administrative data, surveys and focus groups).

## USES OF EVALUATION RESULTS





## USES BY ORGANIZATION SIZE

	Small	Medium	Large
Compare organizational performance to goals / benchmarks	33%	54%	84%
Report to senior management	23%	44%	72%
Allocate resources	51%	64%	84%
Report to funded / supported organizations	21%	41%	73%

While organizations using results to communicate with the board and funders are more likely evaluate outputs or outcomes, organizations using results to communicate with other audiences (i.e., funded or supported organizations (69% ↑34), peer organizations (54% ↑19), the public (48% ↑13), and government (68% ↑33) are comparatively likely to measure their impact. Depending on the specific audience, they also tend to draw on specific qualitative measurement techniques. For instance, those seeking to communicate with funded / supported organizations (80% ↑34) or peers (73% ↑27) are more likely to draw on interviews, while those seeking to communicate with or influence government are more likely to draw on logic models / theories of change (43% ↑22).

Different aspects of organizational decision-making tend to draw on different types of evaluation and on different measures. Organizations using results to inform strategy are comparatively likely to evaluate the quality of their work (71% ↑15), while those using them to allocate resources are more likely to evaluate their outcomes (73% ↑13) and impact (46% ↑11). Similarly, organizations are comparatively more likely to draw on surveys (71% ↑16), interviews (59% ↑13) and web statistics (53% ↑13) to inform strategy, but administrative data (75% ↑17) when allocating resources.

Organizations wanting to use results to contribute to the knowledge of the field are more likely to evaluate their impact (65% ↑30) and return on investment (44% ↑20) and to draw on some rarely reported resources, including case studies (36% ↑19), experimental studies (21% ↑12), and standardized assessment tools (23% ↑12). Those wanting to better understand how initiatives were implemented also tended to draw on experimental studies (15% ↑6), supplemented by logic models (32% ↑11) and surveys (73% ↑18).

Organizations comparing their performance to known benchmarks are comparatively likely to evaluate the quality of their work (78% ↑22) and to draw on administrative data (80% ↑22) and statistical compilations (74% ↑18). Organizations assessing their work more generally are more likely to draw on some form of standardized assessment tool (16% ↑5).

Sports & recreation organizations stand out from others as being comparatively unlikely to use evaluation results for some purposes, including communicating with the public (20% ↓26), influencing government (8% ↓18), better understanding how initiatives were implemented (29% ↓16), supporting the development of new programs (59% ↓14), and learning whether program objectives were achieved (60% ↓8). Education organizations, on the other hand, were more likely than average to use results to determine whether objectives were achieved (81% ↑13), to support the development of new programs (88% ↑15), and to assess general organizational performance (51% ↑21). Grantmaking, fundraising & voluntarism organizations were also more likely to seek to determine whether objectives were achieved (74% ↑6) and to learn from how initiatives were implemented (50% ↑5), but less likely to seek to contribute to knowledge of the field (22% ↓11) or communicate with the populations served (46% ↓12).

## ASPECTS EVALUATED BY USE OF RESULTS



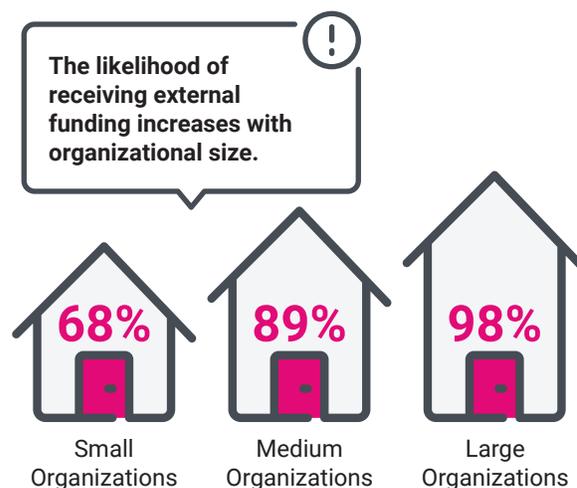
# THE ROLE OF FUNDERS

External funding is quite common among organizations that responded to the survey – 78% say they receive some level of funding from government, foundation or corporate sources. Government is the most common source (61% of organizations), followed by foundations (46%) and corporations (36%).

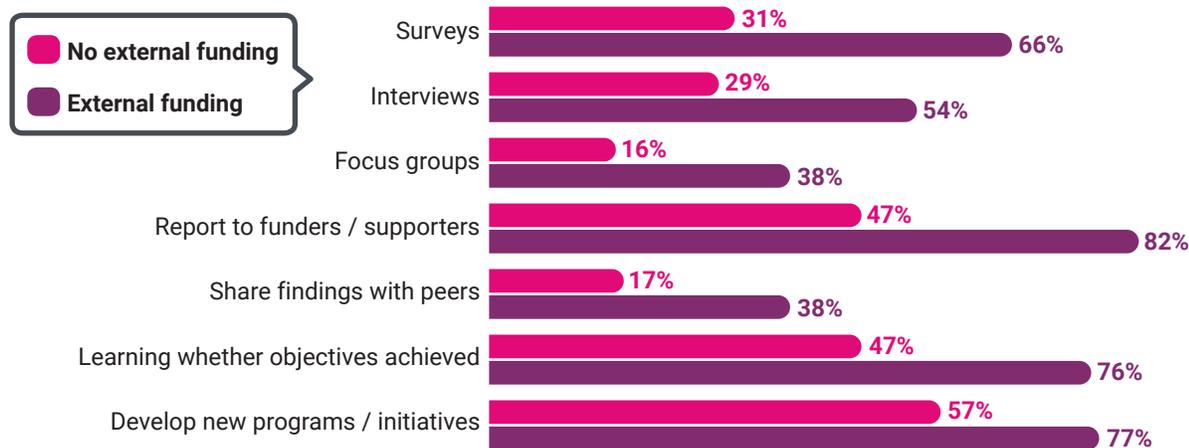
Whether an organization receives external funding appears to influence their evaluation activities in a few different ways. **Firstly, organizations receiving external funding allocate a median of 5% of their total budget to evaluation, compared to 2% for organizations not receiving external funding.** Secondly, organizations receiving external funding are more likely to draw on a few more formal, comparatively specialized and labour-intensive, measurement methods including surveys (66% ↑11), interviews (54% ↑8), and focus groups (38% ↑8). Thirdly, as one might expect, funded organizations are more likely to use evaluation findings to report to funders (82% ↑9), but they are also more likely to use them to share findings with peer organizations (38% ↑5). As well, organizations receiving corporate (65% ↑19) or foundation (56% ↑10) funding are more likely to communicate with the public or media (this does not appear to be the case with government funding).

Finally, externally-funded organizations are also more likely to use results to investigate whether their original objectives were achieved (76% ↑8) and to support the development of new programs or initiatives (77% ↑4).

## RECEIVING EXTERNAL FUNDING BY ORGANIZATION SIZE



## EVALUATION METHODS AND USES BY EXTERNAL FUNDING STATUS



## FUNDING FOR EVALUATION

Only a minority of externally funded organizations receive funds specifically to support evaluation. **28% of organizations said at least some of their external funding included monies specifically dedicated to evaluation.** Government funders are most likely to provide dedicated evaluation funding (26% of government-funded organizations reported this), followed by foundations (18%) and corporations (5%). Dedicated funding for evaluation made a difference in spending on evaluation only with government funding, with median spending on evaluation going from 5% to 7% of total budget.



### DEDICATED EVALUATION FUNDING BY ORGANIZATION SIZE

Larger externally-funded organizations are more likely to receive dedicated evaluation funding.

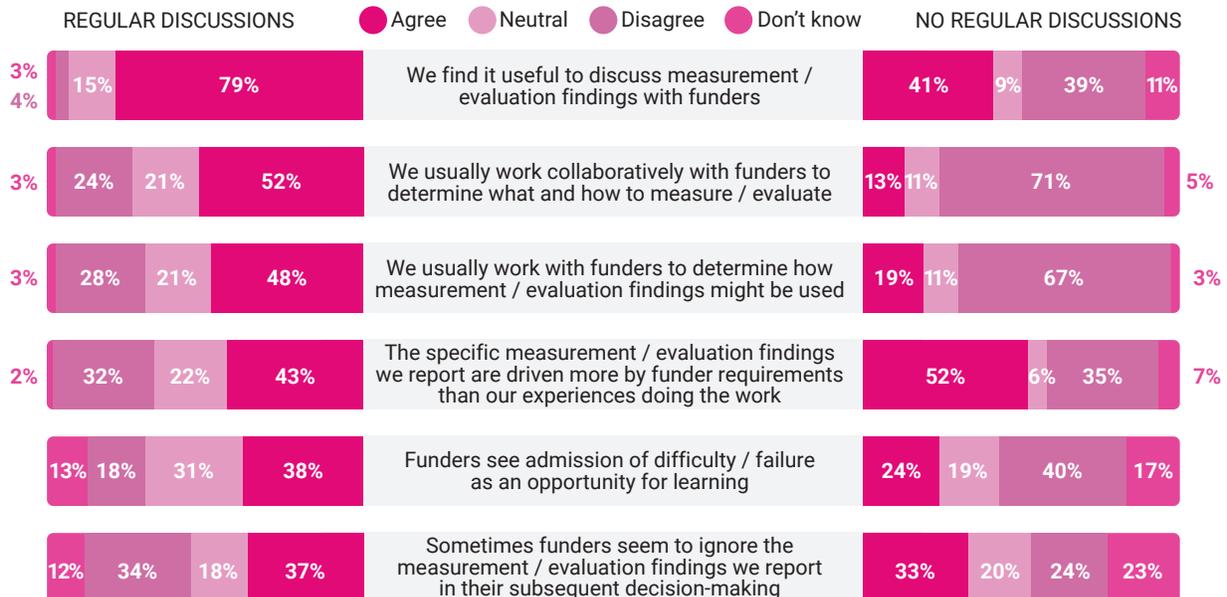
## COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN FUNDERS AND FUNDEES

When it comes to communications between funders and fundees, regular contact about evaluation is key. Organizations that regularly discuss evaluation findings with funders (43% of organizations) hold more favourable opinions about the relationship than organizations that do not discuss findings (25% of organizations). They are far more likely to find discussions with funders more useful, to work collaboratively with them to determine what to evaluate and how to use evaluation findings, and to have more positive views of

what funders want them to measure and how funders will use findings. Without exception, organizations that do not regularly discuss evaluation findings have more negative views and/or greater uncertainty about their relationships with their funders. Critically, given the complex and dynamic nature of the challenges funders and organizations are working together to address, those not regularly discussing evaluation findings are less likely to communicate about difficulties faced and lessons learned.



### COMMUNICATIONS WITH FUNDERS



The more invested organizations are in evaluation (in the sense of drawing on more measurement methods or resources and making more use of evaluation findings), the more they tend to view some aspects of their relations with funders in a positive light. For example, the more ways organizations apply evaluation findings, the more useful they find discussing them with funders and the more likely they are to believe funders see difficulty or failure as an opportunity for learning. Similarly, organizations using more measures are more likely to work with funders to determine how to apply their evaluation results.

However, there are indications of a few key areas where the funder-fundee relationship could be improved. Both Arts & culture (46% ↑7) and Sports & recreation (42% ↑3) organizations are more likely to believe the evaluation findings they are asked to report seem driven more by funder requirements and less by their experiences. Funders and nonprofits in these sub-sectors may wish to discuss this further. Additionally, Grantmaking, fundraising & voluntarism organizations are very likely to say that funders view difficulties or failure as opportunities for learning (49% ↑20). However, organizations that are not themselves funders are less likely to believe this (26% ↓3).

# ENABLERS AND BARRIERS

An organization's capacity to conduct evaluation and use findings can be affected by a wide range of factors. When present at sufficient levels (or of sufficiently high quality) factors tend to function as enablers, increasing an organization's evaluation capacity. When not present at sufficient levels (or when quality is low) they tend to function as barriers, hindering organizations in their evaluation work. For each factor, organizations were asked whether it was an enabler or barrier to their evaluation capacity. **The most potent enablers are support from organizational leaders and buy-in from staff. The most potent barriers, by far, are lack of money and staff time to conduct evaluation.** Evaluation-related knowledge, skills and tools cut both ways (as to a certain extent does funder support for evaluation) – when present these are potent enablers, but their absence can also be a significant barrier.

## ENABLERS AND BARRIERS



Looking at the most common enablers, larger organizations are more likely to view leadership support as an enabler, as are organizations making greater use of evaluation findings. Over three quarters (76% ↑10) of organizations making heavier than average use of evaluation findings (i.e., using them in 10 or more ways) view support from their organizational leadership as an enabler. Organizations making heavy use of evaluation findings are also more likely to view staff buy-in as an enabler (69% ↑10). Social services organizations are more likely to view staff buy-in as an enabler (66% ↑7) but Grantmaking, fundraising & voluntarism organizations are much less likely to share this view (27% ↓32), suggesting they may face significant obstacles in this area.

Turning to the most common barriers, organizations receiving funding from foundations are less likely to view finances as a barrier to evaluation (55% ↓6). Sports & recreation organizations are also less likely to see this factor as a barrier (46% ↓15), likely due to a generally lower level of engagement in evaluation, as indicated by the number of measures and uses reported. Social services organizations, on the other hand, are more likely to view finances as a barrier (70% ↑9). Perhaps unsurprisingly, organizations with dedicated evaluation staff are less likely to view staff time as a barrier (44% ↓16). Organizations that evaluate three or more aspects of their work are less likely to view staff time as a barrier (55% ↓5) while those using four or more measures are more likely to view staff time as an enabler (36% ↑7). On the other hand, both Education (70% ↑10) and Health (71% ↑11) organizations are more likely to view staff time as a barrier.

Finally, staff skills, knowledge and tools are more likely to be an enabler for organizations that have dedicated evaluation staff (69% ↑16) and make heavier than average use of evaluation findings (62% ↑9). Organizations using four or more evaluation measures are more likely to view external evaluators as an enabler (44% ↑12) as are large organizations (68% ↑36).

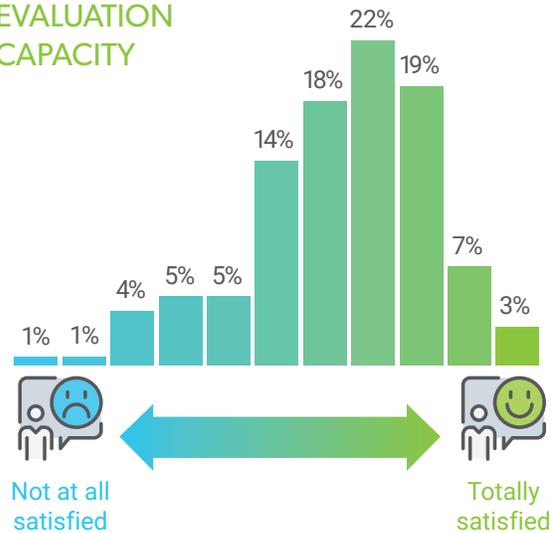
# OPINIONS ABOUT EVALUATION

Survey respondents were asked to evaluate their overall satisfaction with their organization's evaluation capacity using a scale ranging from 0 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied). As a group, organizations are moderately satisfied with their evaluation capacity (with an average satisfaction score of 6.2), but there is clearly a wide range of opinion on the matter.

Satisfaction does not seem to vary much by organizational characteristics such as sub-sector or size. Instead, it appears to vary primarily according to how many aspects of their work organizations evaluate and how they use evaluation results, as well as whether they experience some key barriers. Organizations evaluating more aspects of their work tend to be more satisfied with their capacity, as do those using evaluation results to report to senior management (6.5  $\uparrow$ 0.3), to contribute to the knowledge of the field (6.6  $\uparrow$ 0.4), make resource allocation decisions (6.5  $\uparrow$ 0.3) and to support the development of new initiatives (6.3  $\uparrow$ 0.1). In contrast, organizations viewing their levels of financial resources (5.7  $\downarrow$ 0.5) and staff skills, knowledge and tools (5.4  $\downarrow$ 0.8) as barriers to evaluation tend to be less satisfied with their capacity.

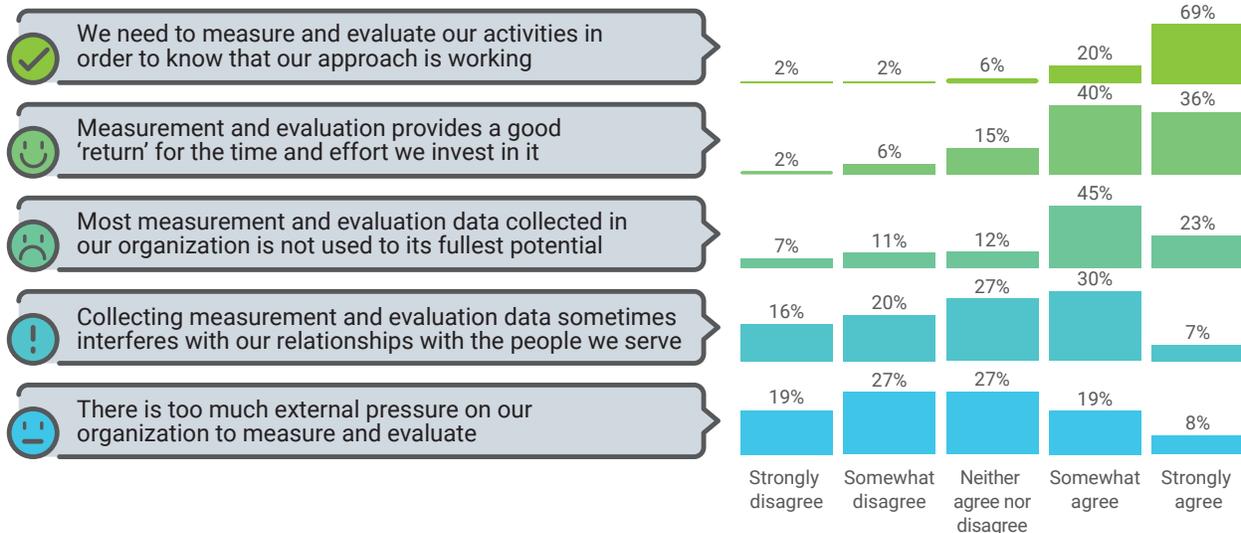
To better understand the contexts in which organizations operate, survey respondents were also asked for their opinions related to various dimensions of evaluation. Overall, responses show that organizations hold very favourable views of evaluation, but can face challenges with specific aspects of the work. Strong majorities see a need for evaluation and view it as a good investment of time and resources. Organizations tend to view their evaluation activity as internally driven, but a significant minority report external pressures. In terms

## SATISFACTION WITH EVALUATION CAPACITY



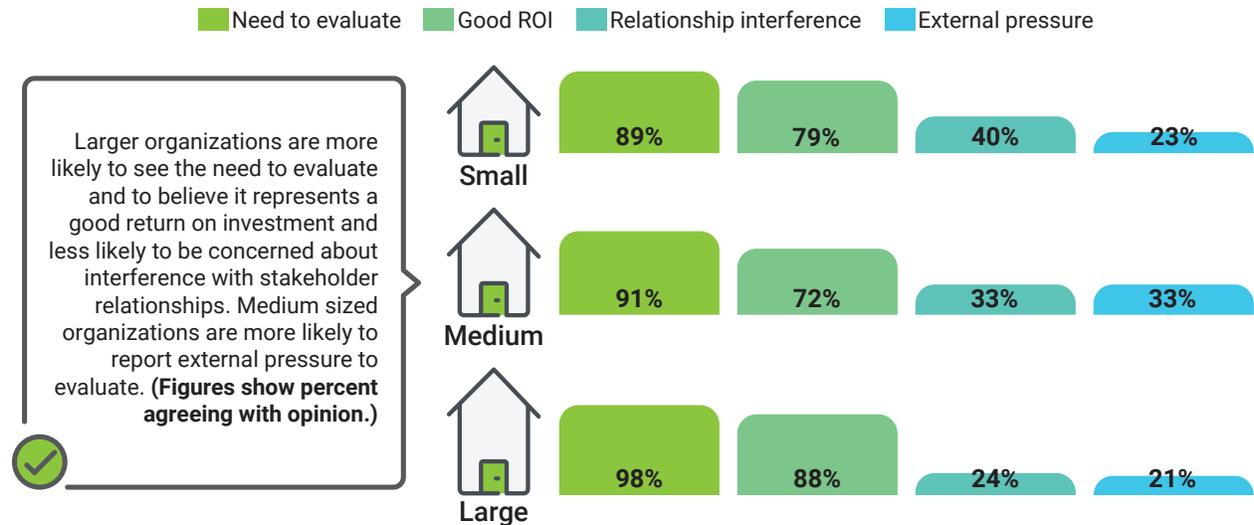
of challenges, most organizations believe they are not using their measurement and evaluation data to its full potential and just over a third highlight potential relationship challenges with the people they serve that can arise from evaluation work (e.g., privacy concerns, confusion about why information is being collected, etc.).

## OPINIONS ABOUT EVALUATION



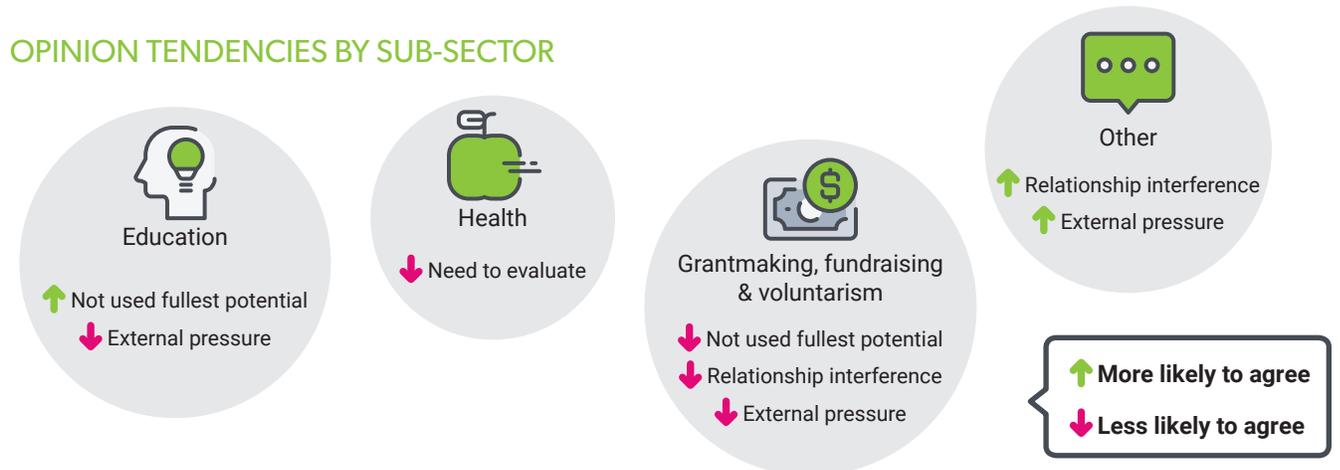
Organizations using more measures are more likely to see a need to evaluate their work and to experience greater returns from evaluation. It is clear, however, that there are also some challenges. As the number of measures collected increases, organizations are more likely to have difficulty making maximum use of their findings or to experience relationship challenges with the people they serve. To a certain extent, the latter challenge may be affected by resource availability – larger organizations (which, all things being equal, tend to be better resourced) find this less of a problem. Organizations that use their evaluation findings in more ways are more likely to view their evaluation efforts as being internally directed while organizations receiving government funding are more likely to report external pressure to evaluate.

## OPINIONS BY ORGANIZATION SIZE



Grantmaking, fundraising & voluntarism organizations also tend to have more positive opinions related to evaluation. They are less likely to believe their evaluation activities are externally motivated (11% ↓16), to see relationship challenges associated with evaluation (17% ↓20) and to believe they are not making full use of the information they gather (48% ↓21). Health organizations are significantly less likely to see the need for evaluation (81% ↓9). Education organizations are more likely to believe they are not making the fullest use of the data they collect (85% ↑16), but slightly less likely to believe their evaluation efforts are driven by external pressure to evaluate (24% ↓3). Organizations in the “Other” category<sup>4</sup> are more likely to see potential relationship challenges (43% ↑6) and to believe that they face too much external pressure to evaluate their activities (29% ↑2).

## OPINION TENDENCIES BY SUB-SECTOR



<sup>4</sup>This category includes organizations working in the areas of Environment, Development & housing, Law, advocacy & politics, International development & relief, and Religion, as well as organizations not able to be assigned to one of the named categories.

# THE ROLE OF NETWORKS

**26% of Ontario organizations are involved in some sort of formal or informal group, network or association related to evaluation.** The range of relationships identified by organizations is extremely broad and diverse including things as formal as being part of a federated organization, as informal as drawing on an ad hoc group of local university professors for advice on evaluation, and everything in between. Many organizations report being part of multiple evaluation-related relationships.

Organizations that are more invested in evaluation, in terms of the number of methods and resources they draw on and the number of ways they use evaluation results, are more likely to belong to a network. Additionally, government-funded organizations are substantially more likely to be involved in these networks (33% ↑7). The likelihood of being part of an evaluation-related network does not seem to vary significantly by organizational characteristics such as size or sub-sector.

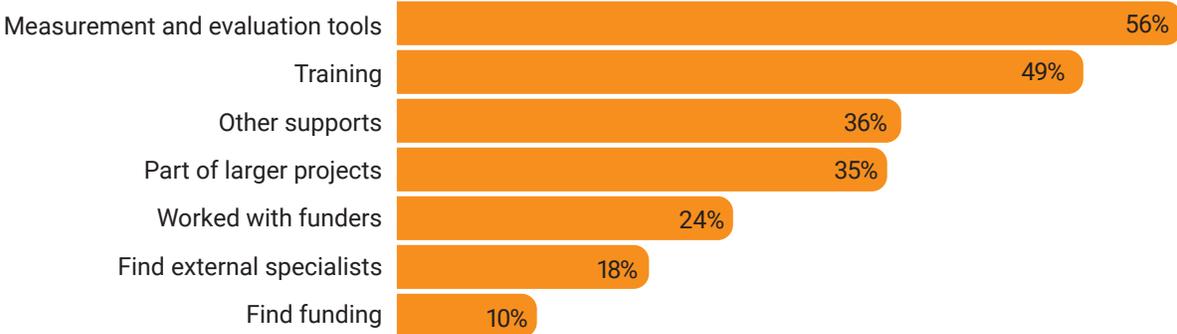
Judging from the descriptions provided by survey respondents, comparatively few of these relationships centre on evaluation. However, organizations clearly draw on them for a wide range of evaluation-related supports. Evaluation and measurement tools and training are the two most commonly provided supports, while assistance finding external specialists or funding for evaluation are least common. Most organizations receive only one or two evaluation supports from their network involvement (the average number reported is 2.3).

## NETWORK INVOLVEMENT VS. LEVEL OF INVESTMENT IN EVALUATION

Organizations that are more invested than average are more likely to be involved in an evaluation-related network.



## NETWORK PROVIDED SUPPORTS



# STAFFING

**14% of Ontario organizations have at least one staff member primarily dedicated to measurement and evaluation work.** In the remaining 86% of organizations, staff conduct evaluation exclusively as a supplemental responsibility in addition to their primary responsibilities. For organizations without dedicated evaluation staff, evaluation and measurement activities are most commonly carried out by program staff / volunteers, followed by the CEO and members of the board. About two thirds of the time, evaluation activities are split across multiple positions. Just over three quarters of the time, the CEO and/or members of the board are involved. When they are not, responsibility is most likely to rest with program staff / volunteers.

The likelihood of having dedicated evaluation staff increases with staff size, but does not vary much by sub-sector. The only exception is with Education organizations, which are somewhat less likely to have dedicated evaluation staff (9% ↓5).

Organizations with dedicated evaluation staff appear to have greater evaluation capacity. They express greater satisfaction with their capacity (6.9 ↑0.7) and they are more likely to evaluate both their impact (58% ↑23) and their return on investment (46% ↑22). Perhaps unsurprisingly, they are more likely to identify levels of staff skills and knowledge and staff time as enablers, but they are also more likely to view levels of staff buy-in and support from organizational leadership as enablers.

## RESPONSIBILITY FOR EVALUATION IN THE ABSENCE OF DEDICATED STAFF

**51% Program staff / volunteers**



**50% ED/CEO/President**



**39% Chair and/or Board member(s)**



**29% Administrative & finance staff/volunteers**



**16% Marketing & communications staff/volunteers**



**15% Fundraising staff/volunteers**



**10% Outside evaluator(s)/consultant(s)**



**3% No one**

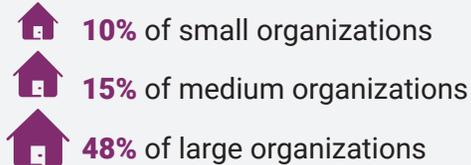


**7% Other**

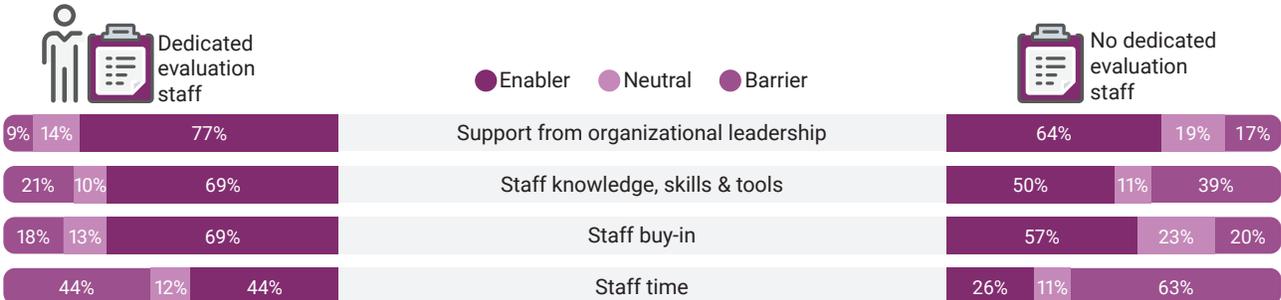


### DEDICATED EVALUATION STAFF VS ORGANIZATION SIZE

Large organizations are much more likely to have dedicated evaluation staff.



### ENABLERS / BARRIERS VS EVALUATION STAFF



# EXTERNAL EVALUATORS

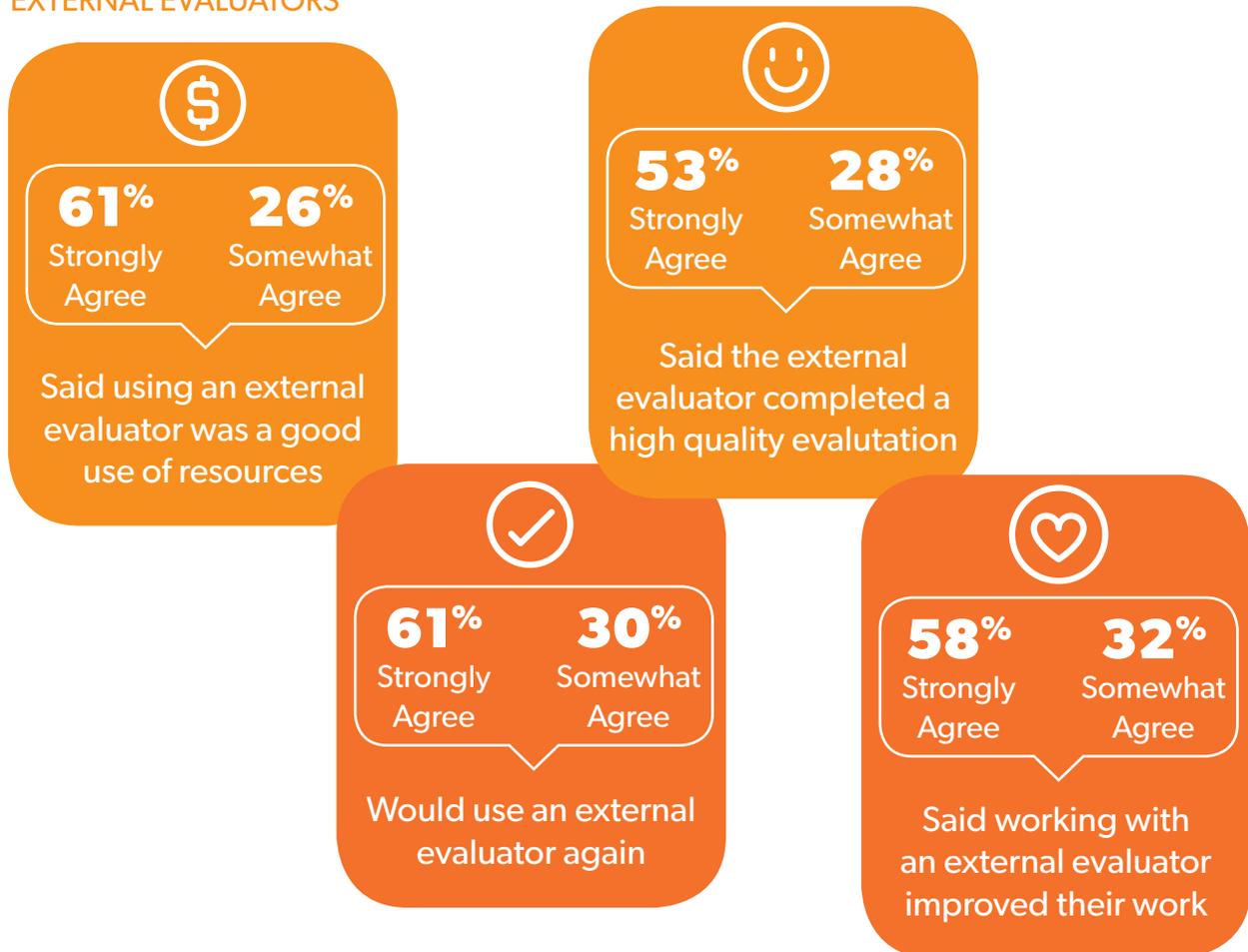
**19% of Ontario organizations worked with an external consultant or organization in some capacity during the previous year to support their measurement and evaluation work.**

Organizations do not seem to be drawing on external evaluators because they lack capacity. Organizations with at least one staff person primarily responsible for evaluation are more likely to engage external evaluators (30% **↑11**), as are organizations viewing their levels of staff time as an enabler (23% vs. 16% of those seeing it as a barrier) and their level of staff knowledge and skills as an enabler (21% vs. 16%).

On the other hand, availability of resources does appear to be a significant factor. Organizations saying lack of financial resources was a barrier are less likely to engage an external evaluator (13% vs. 31% of those seeing it as an enabler). Similarly, organizations engaging an external evaluator tended to devote somewhat larger proportions of their total budget to measurement and evaluation (median values of 5% vs. 3%).

Organizations working with external evaluators were very positive about their experiences. Strong majorities find that working with an external evaluator improves the quality of their work, represents a good use of resources and produces a high-quality product. The net result is that nine in ten organizations that have engaged an external evaluator say they would do so again.

## EXPERIENCES WITH EXTERNAL EVALUATORS



# METHODOLOGY

**SUMMARY.** The survey was conducted between May 10 and July 8, 2018. Survey invitations were sent to 4,985 Ontario charities and nonprofits. Potential respondents received an invitation e-mail directing them to an interactive survey website where they could complete the survey. Periodic reminders spaced roughly two weeks apart were sent during the survey period to help increase the response rate. We received 1,260 useable responses (1,138 complete and 122 partial). Once undeliverable e-mails are accounted for, the net response rate was 26.1%.

**RESPONDENTS.** Executive Directors / CEOs (62%) and board chairs / members (14%) accounted for the majority of respondents. Administration and finance staff accounted for 6%, program and evaluation staff 5%, and fundraising, marketing and communications staff 3%. Other staff and volunteer roles accounted for the remaining 10%.

**SAMPLE.** All Ontario charities and nonprofits were considered in-scope for this survey. The contact sample was drawn from a few different sources. The largest component (58% of total) was a convenience sample of nonprofits and charities from the Ontario Trillium Foundation's contact list. Another 27% was a convenience sample of charities drawn from the memberships of Imagine Canada and similar umbrella organizations. The remaining 15% was randomly drawn from the population of Ontario charities. Once undeliverable e-mails are accounted for, the total sample consisted of 3,711 charities and 1,109 nonprofits.

**RESPONSE RATES.** Responses rates were consistent between the Imagine Canada and Ontario Trillium Foundation convenience components (27% for both), but somewhat lower for randomly drawn charities (22%). In terms of variation by organizational characteristics, so far as can be determined, rates were reasonably consistent across known characteristics. Response rates by organizational type (i.e., nonprofits vs. charities) were virtually identical. However, response rates were somewhat lower than average among organizations with annual revenues less than \$150,000 and higher among organizations in the Arts & culture and Sports & recreation sub-sectors.

**WEIGHTING.** Responses were weighted by organization type (nonprofit vs. charity), revenue size and sub-sector to account for differences between the survey sample and estimated organizational population counts and for differences in response rate. Estimated organizational population counts were based on 2016 counts of registered charities and results from the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations.<sup>5</sup> Broadly speaking, nonprofits tended to be more heavily weighted, as did organizations with annual revenues less than \$150,000 and organizations working in a few sub-sectors including Environment, Development & housing, Law, advocacy & politics, and Religion. Organizations in the Arts & culture and Sports & recreation sub-sectors tended to be lightly weighted.

**ANALYSIS STRATEGY.** Findings were analysed using multivariate techniques that provide better insights into how survey responses related to multiple factors, such as organization type, size, and sub-sector, **simultaneously**. This allows us to emphasize the most significant drivers and associations. While thorough analyses of all data were conducted, we have chosen key results for this short report to highlight important themes about these key drivers and present them in an easy-to-understand way that provokes discussion. Break-downs that are reported here are those that were found to be statistically significant.

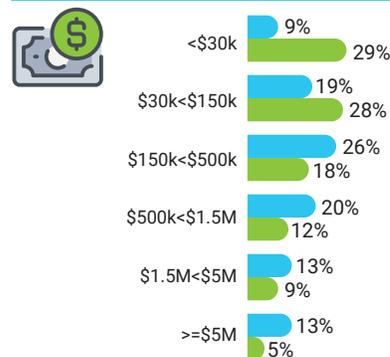
## WEIGHTED AND UNWEIGHTED DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY KEY VARIABLES



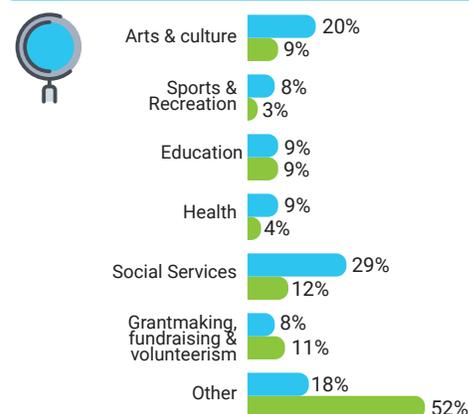
### ORGANIZATION TYPE



### REVENUE SIZE



### SUB-SECTOR



<sup>5</sup>Hall, M.H., deWit, M.L., Lasby, D., McIver, D., Evers, T., Johnston, C.,... (2005). Cornerstones of Community: Highlights of the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

**KNOWN BIASES.** Beyond the ways survey respondents differ from the estimated population of Ontario organizations described above (which we have attempted to compensate for with our weighting strategy), we believe there are two other key differences that may affect survey results which we were **not** able to compensate for. First, the percentage of respondent charities reporting government funding (55.4%) is significantly higher than it is known to be among Ontario charities generally (28.5%). Second, the percentage of respondent charities without paid staff (39.5%) is somewhat lower than it is known to be among Ontario charities (49.5%). Because of the lack of administrative data for non-charities, we are unable to make equivalent comparisons for nonprofit organizations. The net effect, because having government funding and paid staff tend to correlate higher levels of evaluation activity, is that survey findings should be considered high bound estimates of the level of evaluation.

**DEFINITION OF MEASUREMENT METHODS AND RESOURCES.** Measurement methods and resources were defined as follows: *Case studies* – detailed examination of one or a few subjects (individuals, organizations, situations, etc.); *Statistical compilations* – counts of services delivered / programs / individuals served or other measures of the organization's volume of activity; *Administrative data* – internal tracking forms, documentation review, etc.; *Web statistics* – social media statistics, downloads or other web analytics; *Surveys* – typically feedback questionnaires, but may include other types of surveys such as long-term follow-up surveys; *Interviews* – one on one discussions (could include participants / clients, staff members, volunteers, or other stakeholders); *Focus groups* – structured discussions with small groups (could include participants / clients, staff members, volunteers, or other stakeholders); *Logic models / theories of change* – depictions of the relationships between the resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes / impacts of a program; *Standardized assessment tools* – clinical assessments, ability / achievement tests, etc.; *Experimental studies* – control group studies, before and after studies, etc.

## ABOUT THE PARTNERS

### ONTARIO NONPROFIT NETWORK

ONN is the independent nonprofit network for the 58,000 nonprofits in Ontario, focused on policy, advocacy and services to strengthen Ontario's nonprofit sector as a key pillar of our society and economy.

ONN works to create a public policy environment that allows nonprofits to thrive. We engage our network of diverse nonprofit organization across Ontario to work together on issues affecting the sector and channel the voices of our network to government, funders, and other stakeholders.

### IMAGINE CANADA

Imagine Canada is a national charitable organization whose cause is Canada's charities. Our three broad goals are to amplify the sector's collective voice, create opportunities to connect and learn from each other, and build the sector's capacity to succeed.

### TAYLOR NEWBERRY CONSULTING

Taylor Newberry Consulting is a firm that specializes in evaluation, applied research, planning, facilitation and program design. Our focus is on helping our partners make thoughtful use of research evidence.

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### COMPANION REPORT

#### THE STATE OF EVALUATION Measurement and Evaluation Practices in Canada's Charitable Sector

A national report that looks at what is being evaluated and measured by Canadian charities and the role and influence of funders on measurement and evaluation.

Available November 2018 for download at [imaginecanada.ca](http://imaginecanada.ca) or [theonnc.ca](http://theonnc.ca).



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