

# STATE OF EVALUATION IN CANADA

## EDUCATION & RESEARCH CHARITIES

### Introduction

Education & research charities provide primary, secondary and post-secondary education as well as vocational and continuing education. In addition, they conduct research in the physical, biological, medical and behavioural sciences. There are approximately 7,100 education & research charities (equivalent to 8.3% of all charities), a large majority of which focus on the delivery of primary and secondary education.

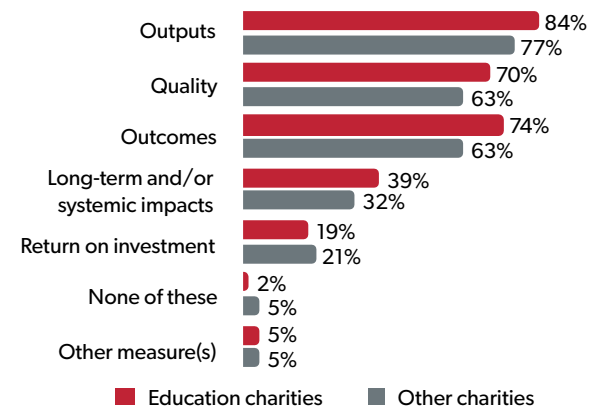
### What aspects of their work do they evaluate?

As with other types of charities, education & research charities are most likely to focus on evaluating more fundamental aspects of their work such as outputs, outcomes and quality.<sup>1</sup> They are less likely to evaluate more involved aspects such as their impact or return on investment. Compared to other sub-sectors, education & research charities place considerable emphasis on evaluation and they are somewhat more likely to evaluate almost all aspects of their work. Evaluation of return on investment marks the only exception to this general pattern.

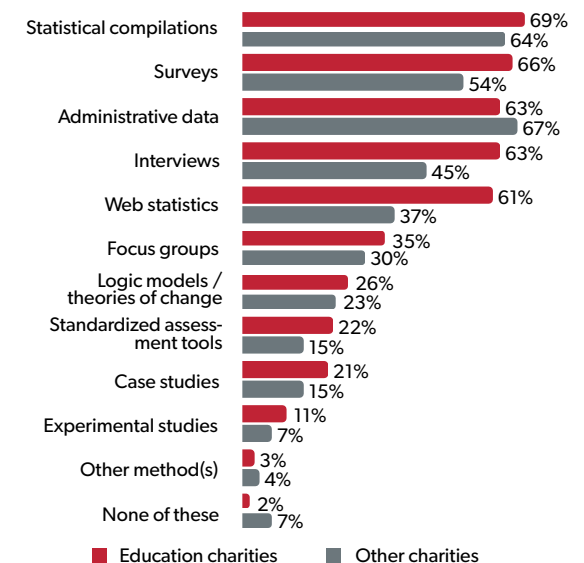
### What techniques and resources do they use to evaluate their work?

Education & research charities draw on a very wide range of techniques and resources to evaluate their work. Compared to other charities they tend to use more measures, averaging 4.4 individual measures (vs. 3.6 for other charities). Given this, it is not surprising that they are at least as likely as charities in other sub-sectors to draw on virtually all evaluation measures.

### Aspects of their work evaluated



### Measures used to evaluate their work



<sup>1</sup> *Outputs* were defined as how much the charity did (e.g., number of events, patrons attending, etc.), *outcomes* as the direct effects of its work on the people or cause it serves, *quality* as how well it carried out the work, *impact* as broader long-term or systemic effects of the 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.

In terms of specific types of evaluation measures used, they tend to emphasize quantitative techniques and are particularly likely to draw on statistical compilations of services delivered, administrative data collected in the course of their work, surveys and web statistics as well as qualitative interviews. Judging from the fact that they are more likely than other charities to use standardized assessment tools and case studies, they also seem to emphasize these approaches.

## How do they use evaluation results?

Education & research charities use evaluation results in many different ways. Overall, they use evaluation results about as intensively as other types of charities, averaging 9.4 individual uses (vs. 9.1 for other sub-sectors).

Looking at the general ways they use evaluation results, the vast majority of education charities use them for some form of reporting (95% use results this way) and to inform their organizational or program-level decision making (also 95%). Somewhat fewer use results to learn about their work (91%), but only about two thirds use them to measure organizational performance (64%).<sup>2</sup> Overall, these levels of general use are very comparable to those observed in other sub-sectors.

Looking at specific uses for evaluation results, education charities stand out as being particularly focused on learning about their work and tracking performance. They are more likely than other charities to use evaluation results to learn about the outcomes of their work and to determine whether their objectives have been achieved. They are also significantly more likely than other charities to use evaluation results to benchmark organizational performance against known standards or goals. It seems likely that these differences are driven by the nature of modern pedagogy and its focus on metrics and student outcomes, and by the desire of research organizations to understand how the knowledge they produce and disseminate is applied. Finally, education charities (principally charities focusing on research rather than instruction) are somewhat more likely to use evaluation results to inform or influence governments.

### Uses for evaluation results



<sup>2</sup> The comparatively small percentage of charities using evaluation results to monitor organizational performance is likely driven mainly by the fact that the survey devoted only two questions to this application of evaluation results.

## Staffing for evaluation

In education & research charities, as in other sub-sectors, responsibility for evaluation tends to be shared across multiple positions / roles. Most commonly, those directly engaged in program delivery and the charity's most senior leader evaluate the work, but staff and volunteers in a wide range of roles may also be involved.

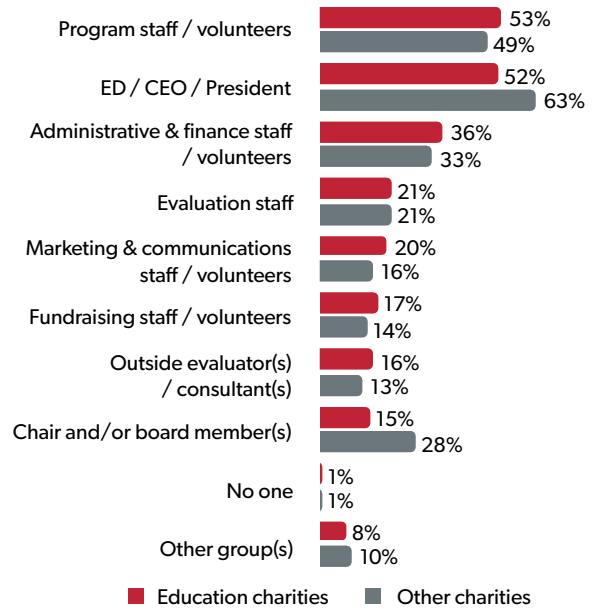
Roughly one in five education charities have at least one staff member primarily devoted to evaluation, in line with norms for other sub-sectors. Compared with other types of charities, both the most senior leader and the chair and/or other board members are less likely to be involved in evaluation. Levels of involvement for other positions / roles are roughly in line with norms for other sub-sectors.

## Evaluation networks

Just under a quarter (23%) of education & research charities belong to some sort of formal or informal group, network or association related to evaluation, roughly in line with the norm in other sub-sectors.<sup>3</sup>

On average, education charities that belong to these types of networks draw 2.0 individual supports, almost exactly the same as the average in other sub-sectors. Measurement and evaluation-related tools and training are the most common supports, followed by participation in evaluation initiatives or projects run by the network. Relatedly, charities belonging to these networks are more likely to use many more involved evaluation techniques such as standardized assessment tools, surveys and focus groups. Markedly smaller proportions of charities receive other types of support, such as help finding external evaluation experts or funding to support evaluation. Overall, the percentages of education charities receiving most individual supports were broadly consistent with the percentages in other sub-sectors.<sup>4</sup>

## Staff positions involved in evaluation



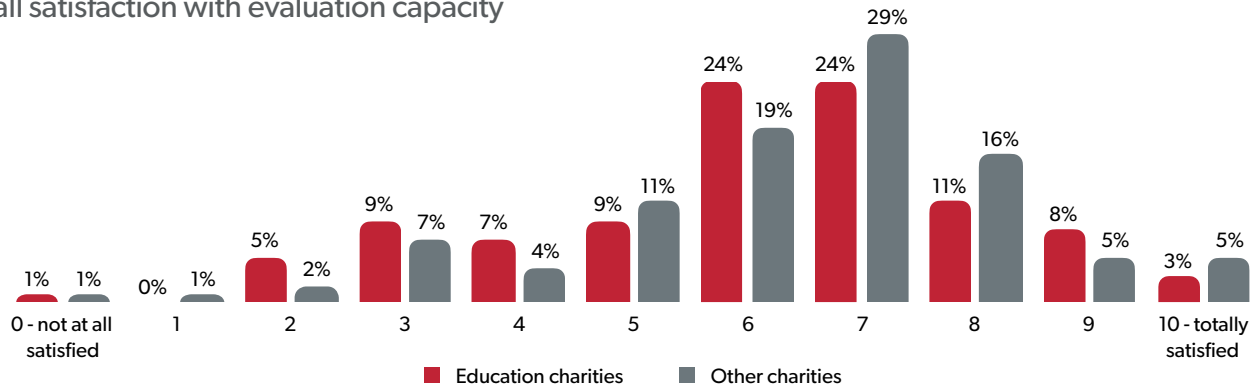
## Resources & supports received from evaluation networks



<sup>3</sup> The range of evaluation-related relationships described by survey respondents is extremely varied, ranging from periodic consultations with groups of peer organizations through to long-standing formal membership in national umbrella groups. Many charities reported being in multiple relationships related to evaluation.

<sup>4</sup> In large part this appears to be due to sample size limitations.

## Overall satisfaction with evaluation capacity



## Opinions about evaluation

Overall, education & research charities tend to be somewhat less satisfied than other charities with their capacity to evaluate their work and apply evaluation findings. Using the 11-point scale depicted above, their average satisfaction level was 6.0 (vs. 6.4 for charities in other sub-sectors).

The vast majority of education charities see a need for evaluation in order to know whether they are achieving their objectives and most see sufficient value in the evaluation process to justify the time and resources devoted to it. However, a strong majority believe that their organization is not making the most use it could of

the evaluation data it collects. Finally, education charities are much more split on whether collecting evaluation data causes relationship problems with their stakeholders or whether they face too much pressure from external entities to evaluate their work.

Overall, the opinions expressed by education charities are fairly consistent with those expressed by other types of charities. The only significant difference is that education charities are somewhat more likely to believe that collected evaluation data is not being used to its full potential and they are slightly less likely to be undecided as to whether they need to evaluate their work.

## Opinions related to evaluation



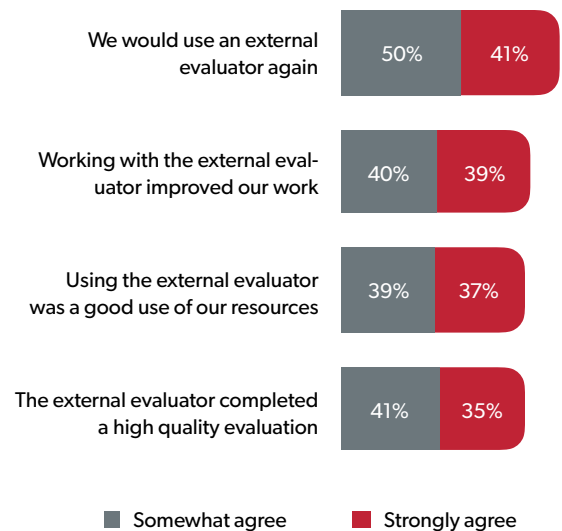
## The role of external evaluators

Nearly a third of education & research charities (30%) worked with an external evaluation consultant or organization over the previous year (vs. 21% of charities in other sub-sectors). Regardless of whether they have dedicated evaluation staff or not, education charities are equally likely to engage external expertise (30% of both groups did this). While lack of dedicated staff does not appear to be a motivator for engaging external expertise, dissatisfaction with their evaluation capacity may be. The average satisfaction score for education charities engaging external expertise is significantly lower (5.2 vs. 6.1 for charities not drawing on external expertise).

Education charities that engage outside evaluation assistance have quite different opinions about evaluation and its role. They are substantially more likely to agree that there is too much outside pressure on them to measure and evaluate their work (42% believe this vs. 23% of charities not engaging outside assistance). Charities engaging outside evaluation assistance are also more likely to believe that evaluation and measurement activities can pose problems for their relationships with those they serve (47% vs. 27% of charities without outside assistance) and that most of the measurement and evaluation data they gather is not used to its fullest potential (88% vs. 76%). All this having been said, education charities that engage outside assistance are more likely to believe that evaluation provides a good return for the time and effort they invest in it (83% vs. 69%).

Overall, education charities are quite satisfied with their experiences engaging external evaluators. Fully nine in ten would engage an external evaluator again in the future and just under four in five found that working with the evaluator improved their evaluation work. About three quarters found using external evaluators to be a good use of resources and received a high quality evaluation. These responses are quite similar to those of charities in other sub-sectors. The only significant exception is that education charities are somewhat less likely to view the use of an external evaluator as a good use of resources (76% vs. 88% of charities in other sub-sectors).

### Opinions about external evaluators



## Enablers and barriers

Survey respondents were asked whether any of nine potential factors functioned as enablers or barriers to effective evaluation for their organization. For education charities, staff-related factors are the most commonly reported enablers. Two thirds of education charities view support from their organizational leadership as an enabler, while somewhat over half view staff buy-in as an enabler. Overall, education charities are more likely to see funder support and stakeholder buy-in as enabling factors, though many are neutral on the role of these factors. The opinions of education charities regarding these factors are quite consistent with the opinions expressed by other types of charities.

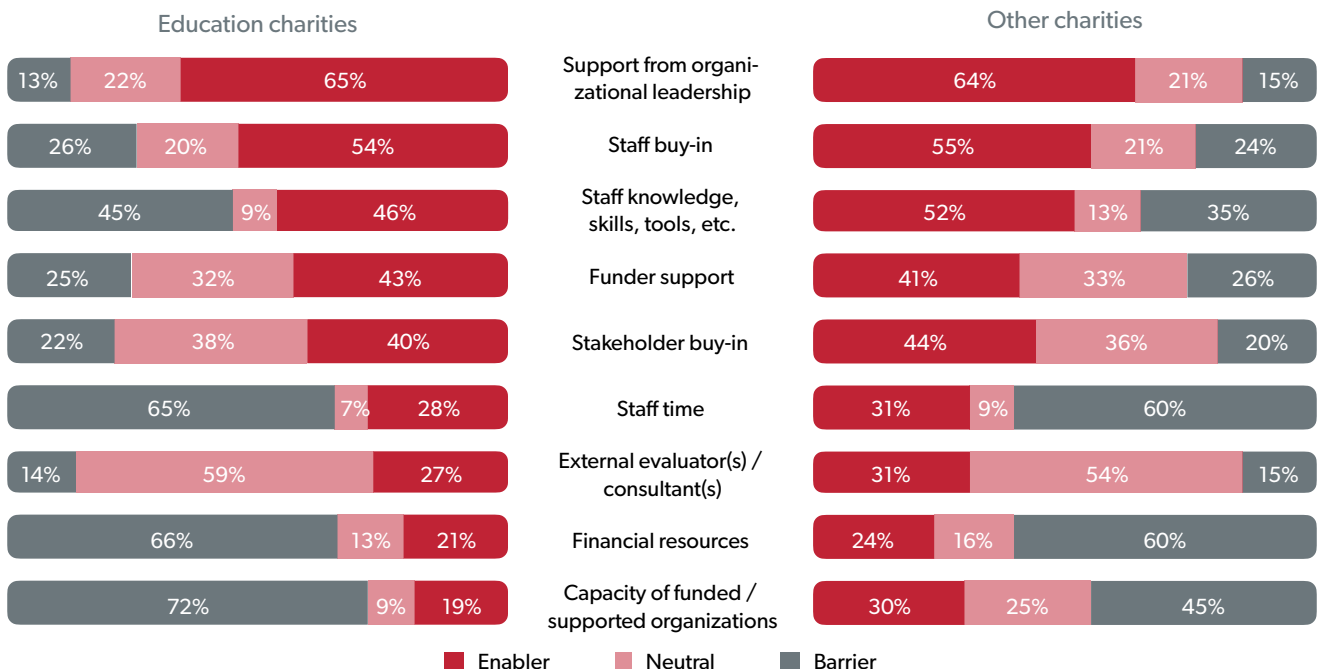
Interestingly, opinions about levels of staff knowledge and skills are more divided. Just under half of education charities view them as a barrier and an enabler of their evaluation work. Compared to other charities, education charities are somewhat more likely to view this factor as a barrier. At first glance, this seems quite curious, given that education charities are at least as likely as charities

in other sub-sectors to use most evaluation techniques, including more sophisticated ones. Given that education charities are more likely to believe that they are not making the fullest use of the data they collect, this may be more a reflection of unmet potential than a skills gap writ large.

Education charities are quite neutral in their views about the role of external evaluators or consultants, with just under three fifths holding this view. These opinions are consistent with those expressed by charities in other sub-sectors.

In terms of barriers, education charities are somewhat different from other charities in that they are comparatively likely to view lack of capacity among the organizations they work with as a barrier to evaluation. As with charities in other sub-sectors, they are quite likely to view resource constraints as barriers. Two thirds of education charities viewed lack of staff time and financial resources as barriers to effective evaluation work.

## Enablers and barriers of evaluation



## Methodology

**SUMMARY.** The survey was conducted between May 10 and July 8, 2018. 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 rates. Survey invitations were sent to 7,529 charities from across Canada, including 826 education charities. In total, we received 1,884 useable responses, including 181 from education charities. Once e-mails that did not reach the intended recipient are taken into account, the net response rate was 24.6% (23.8% for education charities).

**RESPONDENTS.** Executive Directors / CEOs (64%) and board chairs / members (12%) accounted for the majority of respondents. Administration and finance staff accounted for 7%, program and evaluation staff 3% and fundraising, marketing and communications staff 3%. Other staff and volunteer roles accounted for the remaining 11%.

**SAMPLE.** Registered charities with annual revenues of \$30,000 or more that were not religious congregations were considered in-scope for this survey. For more details on how the sample was constructed, please refer to the Methodology section of the national highlights report entitled *The State of Evaluation in Canada*.

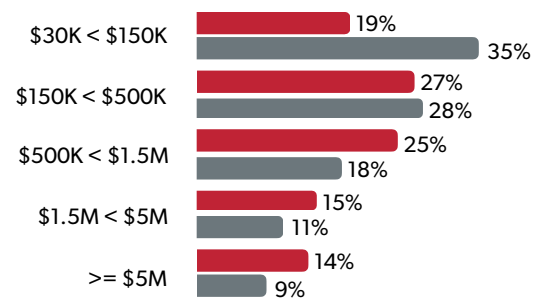
**RESPONSE RATES.** Response rates varied according to organizational characteristics. They were lower among charities with annual revenues less than \$150,000, located in British Columbia or working in the education or grantmaking, fundraising & voluntarism sub-sectors. Response rates were higher among charities with annual revenues between \$500,000 and \$1,499,999, located in the Prairies or working in the arts, culture & recreation sub-sector.

**WEIGHTING STRATEGY.** Responses were weighted according to revenue size, sub-sector and region in or-

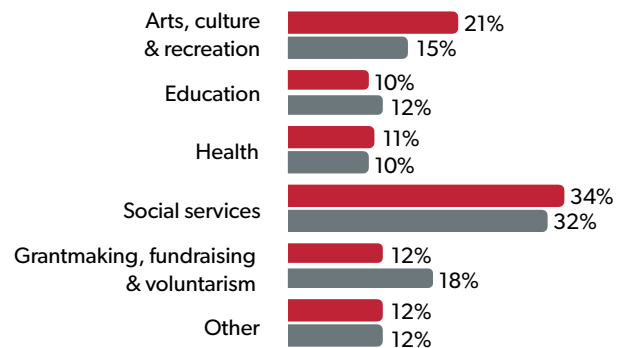
der to account for differences between the survey sample and the population of in-scope charities and for variations in the response rate. Population counts were based on the 2016 distribution of registered charities. For more details of how weights tended to vary by organizational characteristics, please refer to the Methodology section of the national highlights report.

### Weighted and unweighted distributions of survey respondents by key variables

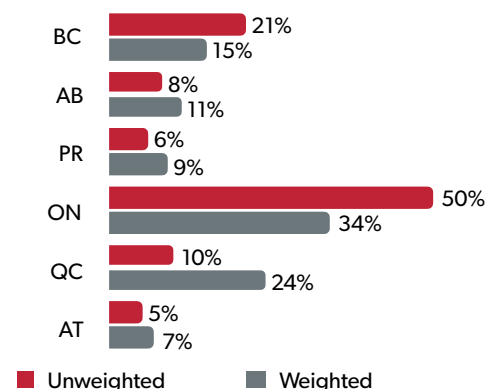
#### Annual revenue size



#### Sub-sector



#### Region



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For more information about evaluation practices among Canadian charities, please see our national highlights report *The State of Evaluation: Measurement and evaluation practices in Canada's charitable sector* available at <http://imaginecanada.ca/resources-and-tools/research-and-facts/state-evaluation-canada>.

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

Evaluation plays an integral part in our vision for a stronger Canada. Through our research, our goal is to support a sector-wide culture where organizations and individuals use data, information and knowledge to make better decisions.

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