Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is evaluation?

Evaluation can be defined as a systematic way of reflecting and assessing the value of what is being done (i.e. a project, a programme, an event). This is commonly interpreted as an end product or an activity taking place at the end of a project. However evaluation should be considered as a process, taking place throughout a project or programme or set of projects, used to determine what has happened and whether the initial aims of the project have been carried out and achieved.

Evaluation is more than assessing and measuring, it includes setting the stage for a culture of learning, change and improvement.

2. What if I don't know much about evaluation, can I still be involved in the programme?

Yes please (and don't worry: the Evaluation Exchange is a knowledge exchange, learning programme). There is no "off the shelf" or "one size fits all" approach to evaluation, so no-one is going to know everything about evaluation. Evaluation is a process that involves critical thinking, logic and reflection: all skills that you have (and we all have). You have a range of skills that are relevant to evaluation and, as part of the programme, you will be supported through this process.

It can feel daunting as there are numerous approaches to evaluation, ranging in focus (i.e. assessing processes, outputs, outcomes and/or impacts), timing (i.e. throughout the life or at the end of project), audience (e.g. funders, stakeholders, beneficiaries) and methods used (e.g. quantitative and/or qualitative). Ultimately, decisions over what to investigate, for whom and for what purpose determine how the evaluation is approached.

3. When is the programme running?

Students and organisations will work collaboratively together for 6 months between September/October 2021 – April 2022.

Applications open May 2021. Applications close 16 June, 2021.

4. How much time is required?

We ask that each organisation commits to working with a student team at least one day per month of the 6 month project. At busier times, you may need to commit more than a day a month. We ask students to be able to commit to a minimum of two days per month of the 6 month project.

Everyone taking part must also commit to attending the relevant full day training sessions listed in the answer below.

5. Are there set dates for the work?

There are set dates for the three training sessions for all Evaluation Exchange participants.

For organisations working in or with Newham communities, the dates for the training will be: 23 September 2021, 18 November 2021, 27 January 2022. Students matched to organisations in Newham are required to attend the training on these dates.

For organisations working in or with Camden communities the dates for the training will be: 14 October 2021, 9 December 2021, 24 February 2022. Students matched to organisations in Camden are required to attend the training on these dates.

We will also hold a joint celebration symposium for all participants at the end of the programme. The likely date for the symposium is April 2022.

6. You say that the organisation and student team will work together 1 day a month, can the time be split across the month rather than dedicating a whole work day to being together?

This question relates to how to work together as a group! We have noticed (from the pilot) that some groups worked together "on one day", but also that some groups took an approach where they split their time across the month. We also noticed that some groups did a bit of both (depending upon the task and stage of their project).

There is no right or wrong, more just preferable and practical ways of working. I think this is just finding a dynamic and approach that suits your team (and you).

There might be points of the project where you will be "sitting" together and discussing things, but others where you will be working independently.

7. Which organisations will be taking part in the Evaluation Exchange?

We are in the process of recruiting voluntary and community sector organisations to be involved in the programme. So, at the moment we are unsure which organisations are

planning to take part. However we do know that these organisations will be based within or working with communities in Newham and Camden.

Have a look at who took part in our pilot programme [here](#).

8. What is a voluntary or community sector organisation?

Voluntary or community sector organisations come in all shapes and sizes and provide a wide range of activities and services. A voluntary or community organisation is a group that has been established to meet a need faced by a community. It will work to address or eradicate this need and support beneficiaries facing difficulty.

Although larger organisations have paid staff, many organisations depend on volunteers to deliver all or some of their services. They will raise money solely to deliver their aims and objectives. The organisation may be governed by a committee and a constitution and may have volunteers as trustees/committee members.

The organisations that take part in the Evaluation Exchange will be based, or delivering services, in Newham or Camden.

9. What is the evaluation challenge set by the organisation?

We are in the process of recruiting voluntary and community sector organisations to be involved in the programme, and it will be these organisations that will set the evaluation challenge.

The last few months we have been speaking to organisations to understand the challenges they are currently facing. We imagine that challenges set may relate to: designing an evaluation strategy; adjusting evaluation methods in response to changing needs of the organisation; designing an organisation's theory of change to align the organisation's overall mission with the data it collects; or making sure evaluation and learning is used to make a difference to the organisation's work.

We are encouraging any organisation wishing to apply to get in touch with us to talk through queries that they have to help them think through their evaluation challenges and their suitability to the Evaluation Exchange.

10. What skills are needed?

This is an excellent question, and you may be asking this as you are wondering if your skills are relevant. There are no set skills that are required! As a researcher or community organisation practitioner you have lots and lots of relevant skills – even ones you are not aware of. The Evaluation Exchange is a knowledge exchange programme, so it is more about sharing, working together and collaborating.

11. What is covered in the training?

We are still planning our training and we will, once the programme is running, ask participants about their training needs to ensure that we can shape the sessions to be of value to you.

Previously, in our pilot, we ran 3 sessions which included a host of content and activities: from getting to know each other to setting aims, from creative evaluation methods to analysing different data. The sessions will be interactive and participatory, focused on collaborative sharing and problem-solving.

12. Will there be face-to-face meetings?

We are taking a blended approach to the scheme – with some online materials and activities and some face-to-face meetings (if safe and allowed). But considering the last 18 months, one thing that is for sure is that plans change! So we know we are going to have to be flexible and adaptable in our approach.

Student and researchers

13. Who will I be matched with, as a team?

We have set some criteria to help us (the Evaluation Exchange team) match the groups together, these criteria are in a form of reflective questions linked to underlying principles of the programme. One key principle is participation and inclusion: we are keen to bring together a diversity of perspectives and experiences – so it is likely you will be working in a team with people with different disciplinary backgrounds, different experiences and skills to you.

14. Do I need my manager/supervisor to sign off my involvement?

To take part in the Evaluation Exchange, we are not asking for official sign off from your manager or supervisor. However, we would encourage you to talk to your manager/supervisor about the programme, your interests and the potential impacts on your research or studies.

15. I am a UCL student, but I am not in London. Can I participate if I am not in London?

Yes, you can. As noted above, we are taking a blended approach to the scheme – with some online materials and activities and some face-to-face meetings.