



# Innovation and Equity in Education

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Kelly Fitzsimmons, Founder and Chief Executive, Project Evident

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**We are at an exciting phase in the history of evaluation practice, particularly in this country.**

**Together, we are reckoning, reflecting and rethinking.**

# The Power of Evidence



Demonstrate clear impact



Guide critical decision-making



Deepen shared understanding



Enable learning, innovation, & improvement



Generate more equitable outcomes




# Who We Are

**Project Evident is unapologetically practitioner-centric.**

We were founded 5 years ago out of a constructive dissatisfaction with the prevailing approach to building and using evidence in the social and education sectors, and a belief that a stronger and more equitable evidence ecosystem that puts practitioners in the driver's seat will result in better, more meaningful, and more equitable outcomes for the students and communities they serve.

# The Challenges of Evidence-Building Today

Stakeholders	Challenges
Practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Want more <b>voice and agency</b> in their own evidence-building</li><li>● Have been <b>underfunded</b> – often have to choose between <i>providing</i> versus <i>proving</i> impact</li></ul>
Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Want to effectively <b>fulfill their evaluation responsibilities</b> for both funders and practitioners</li><li>● Many of the established <b>methods aren't configured</b> to meet today's growing needs</li></ul>
Funders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Want continued <b>evidence/learnings/insights</b> around the impact of social change</li><li>● No <b>unified standards</b> – evaluation is often customized to each funder's requirements</li></ul>
Policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Want to <b>modernize and adopt more equitable</b> actionable evidence</li><li>● Overwhelmed by a <b>sea of data</b> – hard to always know what is most useful or relevant</li></ul>




**“Most science agencies believe that research follows a ladder: exploration, development, efficacy, and effectiveness...This neat structured pattern is not reality-based. In reality the image is not one of steps in terms of evidence gathering – it's more like a spaghetti bowl. It's twisting and turning, forward and back.”**

**– Mark Schneider, Director, Institute of Education Sciences**

# Shifting the Approach to Evidence-Building



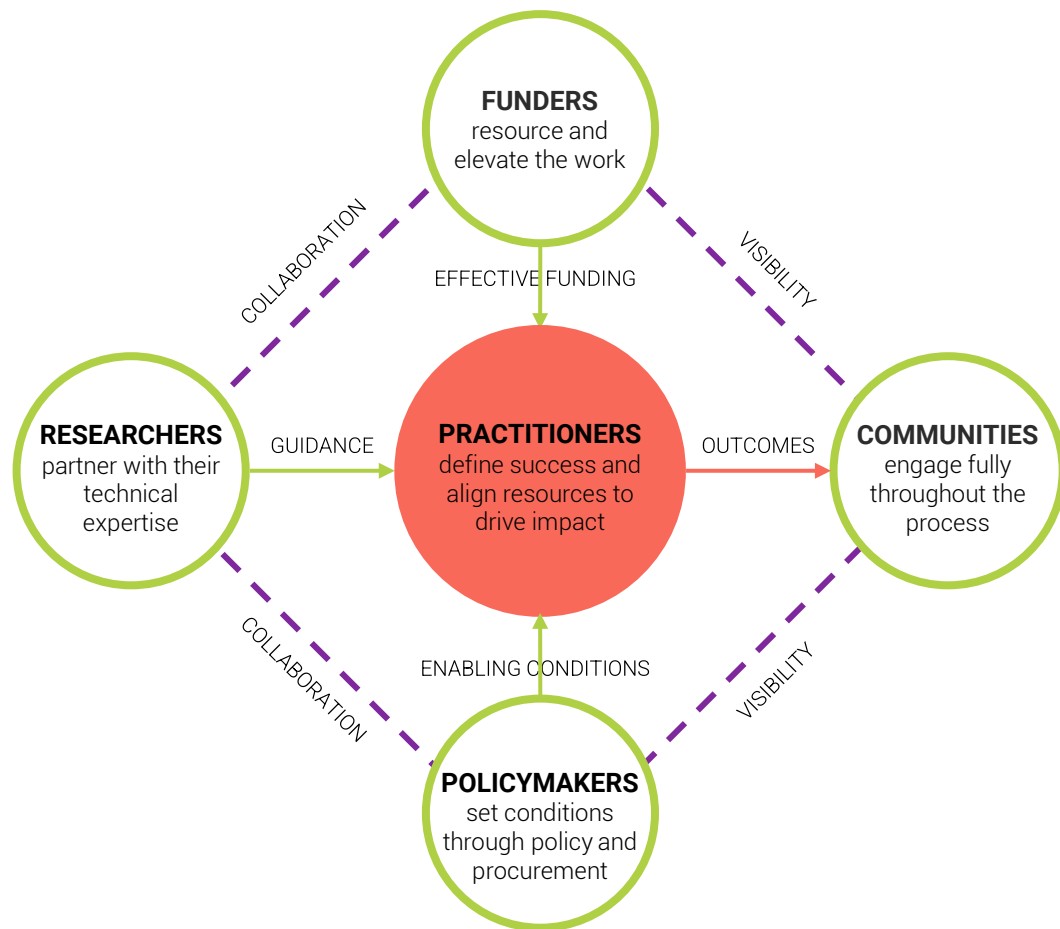


**“We get hired for hundreds of evaluations...with the bulk of them through an accountability lens. I’ll know the script is flipped when we start getting calls for more through a learning lens.”**

**— Chris Spera, Senior Vice President, Abt Associates (2019)**



# The Next Generation Evidence Ecosystem



**“Who is required to show evidence to prove their basic humanity?...**

**‘Evidence’ is too often used in calculated, inhumane ways to reach some cold cost-benefit analysis, completely removed from the real lives and lived experiences of the people affected by the policies...”**

**– Dr. Michael McAfee, President & CEO, PolicyLink**

Excerpt from *Next Generation Evidence*, Project Evident’s upcoming book

# Actionable Evidence for Equitable Outcomes in Education

## Responsive to operational context of practitioners

Reflects the context in which practitioners operate, including organizational settings, relationships and resources, and political and policy environment

## Centers on community needs and voices

Addresses the context, perspectives, priorities and assets of students and families, along with the challenges they face

## Attends to systemic and structural conditions

Considers systems, policies, practices, cultural norms, and community conditions that drive inequity, including those related to poverty and racism

## Prioritizes practitioner learning and decision making

Answers questions that are highly relevant to policy and practice, and that help practitioners prioritize decisions in service of students and families.

## Credible and transparent

Uses high-quality data and analysis, aligning methods with practitioner questions, timeline and context

## Enables timely improvements

Allows practitioners to make evidence informed decisions in a timely manner

## Accessible and user-centered

Clearly communicates research design, analysis, and findings to facilitate practitioner understanding and use

## Builds practitioner capacity for R&D

Provides practitioners with data, products, tools and trainings to own and advance their evidence agenda

# Actionable Evidence Guidance for Researchers

## Across All Stages

- Engage practitioners on decisions throughout the process.
- Intentionally engage community members in the various stages of the process.
- Recognize the value of practitioner expertise and lived experiences of community members.
- Invest in training and coaching to strengthen the research team's competencies for actionable evidence building.

## Evidence Planning

- Allocate time to build trust, relationships, and knowledge necessary for practitioners and communities to engage.
- Co-create learning agendas and evidence plans with practitioners and communities.
- Engage practitioners and communities to learn about their systems and community context.
- Set up clear structures, processes, and tools for communication, collaboration, data sharing, and decision-making across stakeholders.

## Evidence Building

- Align research design and methods with practitioner learning agendas, available resources, and timelines.
- Use tools and processes that are responsive to the needs of those participating in the research.
- Incorporate the voices of practitioners and community members in deriving meaning from findings.

## Evidence Sharing

- Establish feedback loops with practitioners to inform key decision points.
- Develop dissemination products and strategies that are accessible and audience specific.
- Build capacity of practitioners to act on evidence and advance their learning agenda.

# The Modern Evidence Stack



## The Foundation

How the work will drive change and a culture of always seeking to understand and improve.

Theory of Change

Culture of Learning



## The Capacity

Essential resources for data collection, course correction, and continuous learning.

Effective data systems

Capacity to collect, understand, & use data

Information architecture

Precision analytics



## The Data

Metrics showing the effectiveness of outreach, services, and outcomes.

Fiscal metrics

Implementation metrics

Participant metrics

Outcome metrics



## The Confirmation

Using external research and evaluation to validate internal data.

Continuous improvement

Performance measurement

Implementation research

Impact evaluation



## The Goal

Better, more meaningful, and more equitable outcomes

# Improving Career Readiness in Baltimore City Public Schools

## The Challenge:

Strengthen BCPS' career and technical education (CTE) programs to provide students with a pathway to in-demand, living wage jobs.

## The Work:

Project Evident supported analyses, planning, and implementation, resulting in immediate improvements to resource optimization and equitable access.

## The Impact:

- New CTE Strategic Plan, Capital Improvement Plan, and 4-year financial model.
- Greater community inclusion with an engagement strategy that conducted more than 100 stakeholder meetings.
- Reallocation of \$1,000,000 in service of more equitable and impactful programming for students.



**“The beauty of working with Project Evident is we not only have the data to support our actions, but we're engaging with the community, so that it's not just being mandated by our office...this is our North star.”**

### **Kumasi Vines**

Director, Career Readiness, Baltimore Public Schools

# A Research-Practitioner Partnership: Vermont's Universal Prekindergarten System

## The Challenge:

Evidence showed a large proportion of Vermont's children were entering kindergarten unready, leading lawmakers to pass universal preK legislation.

## The Work:

The Vermont Universal PreK Research Partnership's work centered on a practitioner-identified need to evaluate universal preK legislation. State agencies and practitioner partners collaborated to develop and prioritize research questions, review findings, and draft implications.

## The Impact:

- Results presented to the Vermont legislature, providing actionable evidence to inform potential changes to legislation
- Deep focus on equitable access for students and families, especially those from historically marginalized backgrounds and/or rural locations.
- Built practitioner and policymaker capacity for continuous R&D and led to opportunities for future funding

"By authentically collaborating during each step of the research process, the partners in the Vermont Universal PreK Research Partnership have been able to conduct empirically sound research that is actionable. This takes time and dedication to respecting what each partner brings to the table as well as a deep desire to engage in the work together."

**Clare Waterman Irwin, Ph.D.,  
Education Development Center,  
and Wendy Geller, Ph.D., Vermont  
Agency of Education**

**“For the first time, I was able to stand my ground with a funder on our approach to evaluation and continuous improvement. I could do so because I could point to our SEP, which provides clear and thoughtful justification.”**

**– Elisabeth Stock, Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder, PowerMyLearning**



# Join Us

**To learn more and join the Actionable Evidence Network:**

**Visit:** [projectevident.org/actionable-evidence](https://projectevident.org/actionable-evidence)

**Email:** [actionableevidence@projectevident.org](mailto:actionableevidence@projectevident.org)

**Join the Conversation:** [#ActionableEvidence](https://twitter.com/ActionableEvidence)



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