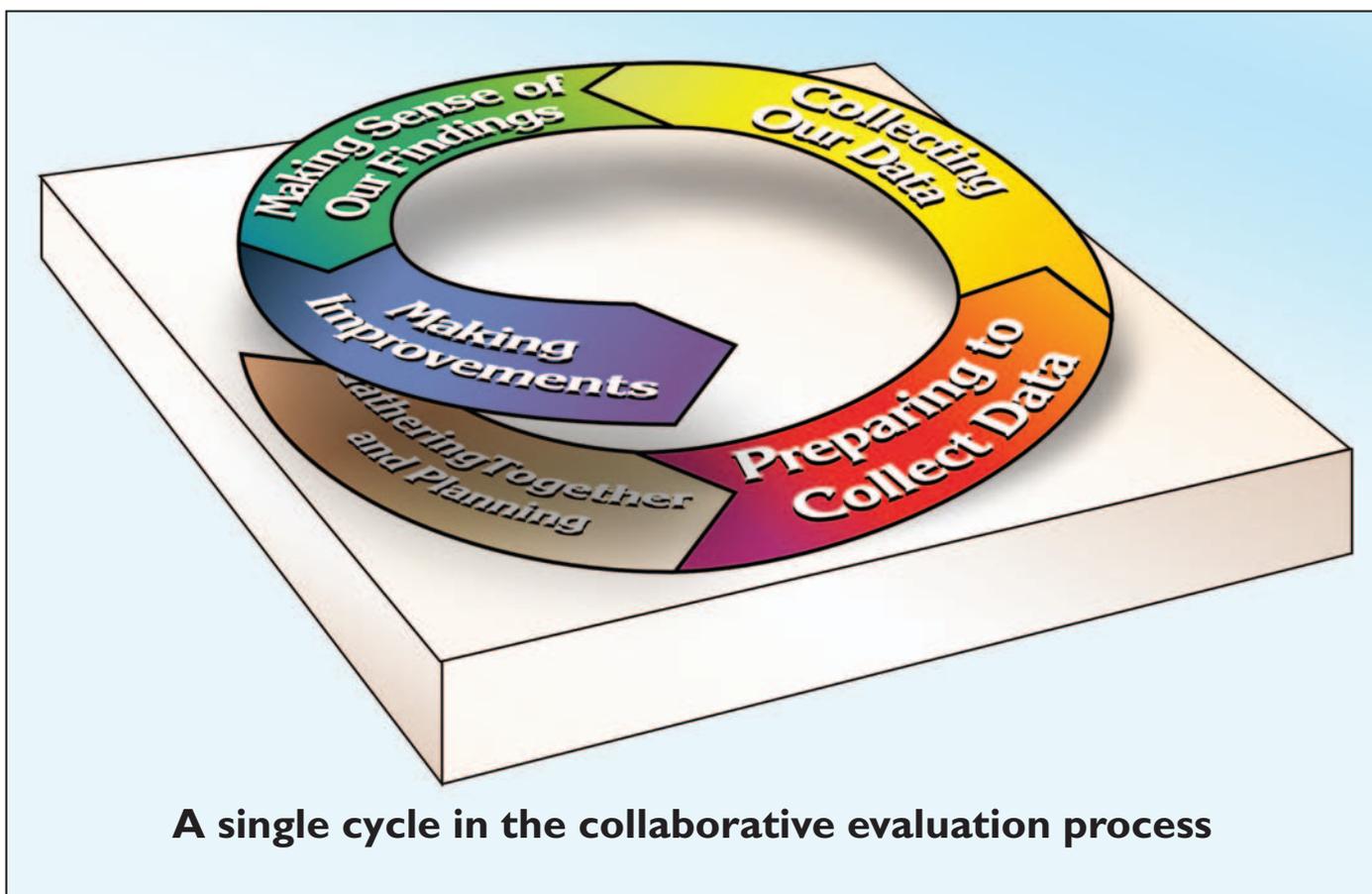


Collaborative Evaluation Led by Local Educators:

A Practical, Print- and Web-Based Guide

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The Collaborative Evaluation Process

Collaborative evaluation engages teams of educators in a dynamic inquiry process focused on assessing the effectiveness of local programs and initiatives. It begins with the baseline stage of Gathering Together and Planning, and continues on through Preparing to Collect Data, Collecting Our Data, Making Sense of Our Findings, and Making Improvements.

This Guide provides a framework and process for local educators to use for continuous data gathering, sharing of findings, and planning for improvement. Designed especially for educators with limited background in evaluation, it leads you through the stages of the evaluation process with guiding questions, evaluation task checklists, and corresponding web-based resources. On the accompanying website (www.neirtec.org/evaluation) you will find a detailed evaluation planning template and practical, step-by-step “how-to’s” for evaluation tasks ranging from selection of data-gathering strategies to development of questionnaires and facilitation of community discussions of findings.

What are the Purposes of Collaborative Evaluation?

In collaborative evaluation, you, the educators, drive the evaluation process, creating useful information that you can share with colleagues to improve your collective efforts. This Guide provides a framework for assessing the impact of school- and district-based efforts to improve teaching and learning, including federally funded projects. The primary purposes of collaborative program evaluation as described in this Guide are:

- **Continuous assessment of progress that informs program improvement.** Collaborative evaluation provides the necessary process, framework, and tools for taking stock of the progress and impact of your work. The assessment process informs your work at the district, school, and classroom levels.
- **Development of authentic and relevant documentation.** Your collaborative evaluation efforts yield authentic and relevant documentation of your work—documentation that you can use with a variety of audiences, especially present and future funders.
- **Engagement and buy-in of an expanding school and district learning community.** Through collaborative evaluation, you will engage educators and other stakeholders who are committed to improving and sustaining effective innovations and practices. Through this process, you work together to design the data-gathering methods, collect and organize the data, reflect on the findings, and determine the implications for program improvement. This work enriches school and district learning communities and builds your capacity, as local educators, to evaluate the impact of your work.

Using the collaborative evaluation approach does not, however, preclude engaging the services of an external evaluator when funding allows. An external evaluator adds deeper evaluation experience as well as the additional perspective of an outside observer.

How does local evaluation fit into the national context of accountability?

As schools and districts receive federal funding for improvement efforts, they are also being held accountable for the use of these funds in meeting program goals. Local educators potentially have roles in three different types of accountability studies.

- **Scientifically based research and evaluation studies.** Efforts and requirements are underway, especially at the national and state levels, to design and conduct research and evaluation studies that determine the impact of federally funded projects. These studies now require the use of rigorous designs and methods, especially experimental designs with random assignment of subjects and groups. Local educators who receive federal funding are sometimes asked to participate in these studies and to provide data as needed.
- **State-level data gathering.** States, often in response to federal requirements, conduct large-scale studies by gathering data from schools and districts. Local educators are often required to provide information by using standard reporting mechanisms such as online surveys.
- **School- or district-based program evaluation.** Local grant recipients must assess the impact and effectiveness of federally funded initiatives. Local educators, even when working with an external evaluator, drive the collective learning through this evaluation work.

How Do You Use this Guide?

Given the limited time and funding that school- and district-based educators can devote to program evaluation, and yet the enormous significance of such work, we suggest the following approach to using this Guide and proceeding with your evaluation work:

1. Gather together a group of 5-10 interested people, including administrators, teachers, and other constituents such as students, parents, or school partnership representatives, to begin a collaborative approach to evaluating one of your school initiatives. If funding allows, you may want to include an experienced evaluator as well.
2. With this group, use this Guide to learn about the evaluation process and what it entails. In the print Guide you'll find one page devoted to each stage of collaborative evaluation. At the end of this Guide you'll find a two-page graphical representation of the collaborative evaluation process. You may want to use this section during the first meeting of your team in order to build a shared understanding of the different stages and overall process for collaborative evaluation. There is room for participants to record highlights of the group's plans and decisions as the evaluation work continues.
3. Explore the website at <http://www.neirtec.org/evaluation> to find the information available to support your group along the way.
4. Come to agreement on what school initiative to evaluate and the level of effort that will be manageable for your group.
5. Use this Guide to structure the ongoing collaborative work of the group. You might consider planning your meeting schedule around the stages identified in the Guide. At each stage, the Guide gives a checklist of tasks to perform, questions to guide your group's work and discussions, and a list of web-based resources to support your work at that stage.
6. At each stage of the evaluation, use the web-based materials. They include practical "how-to" information addressing the evaluation tasks, as well as agendas for your team meetings and sample documents such as interview protocols, questionnaires, and reports.

What Does this Guide Include?

It is important to keep in mind that this Guide supports practical evaluation that informs ongoing improvement in school initiatives. This collaborative approach to evaluation promotes reflection and learning among practitioners and is led by local educators within your own learning communities. This is in contrast to scientifically based research conducted by external researchers. The following table outlines what this Guide does and does not provide.

This Guide includes...	This Guide does NOT include...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A process and framework for practical, focused evaluation of improvement efforts in a school context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines for conducting rigorous, scientifically based research with experimental designs and random assignment of subjects and groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clear explanation of the evaluation process Practical evaluation methods that can be used in schools The essentials of sampling techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive coverage of research design, methods, and sampling, such as what is available in graduate courses and textbooks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pointers for developing useful and contextually valid evaluation instruments such as questionnaires, interview and focus group protocols, and observation protocols 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive coverage of instrument development and testing for reliability and validity of those instruments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sample data-gathering instruments that can help you get started in creating tools that address your own evaluation questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A set of ready-made, one-size-fits-all data-gathering instruments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clear explanation of basic data analysis processes Pointers for analyzing and presenting quantitative data Pointers for analyzing and presenting qualitative data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The equivalent of a comprehensive, graduate-level course in quantitative or qualitative data analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes and tools for reporting and communicating your evaluation findings to your school community and funders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal reporting requirements

Gathering Together and Planning

Who needs to be involved? What do you want to know?

Nothing is more important to good program evaluation than the beginning phase of reflecting, discussing, and planning that draws on the thinking of a variety of stakeholders. Once your group is assembled and you have selected the project you wish to evaluate, you will identify the overarching evaluation questions that you wish to answer through your collaborative evaluation work. You will refer back to these questions frequently as you select the methods to gather your data and then later as you make sense of your findings.

Guiding Questions

- Who needs to be involved?
 - What points of view do you need represented?
 - Who brings the needed interest, skill, and enthusiasm to this work?
- What useful skills can you develop individually and collectively through this work?
- Considering your project goals and activities, on which aspects of your work should you focus your evaluation inquiry?
- What are the critical questions you want to answer about the impact of your project?
- What are you learning from the research that informs your project work and your evaluation?
- Who within your school community needs to learn about your evaluation findings? What difference might this make?

Tasks for this Stage

- Identify evaluation team members.
- Select the project you wish to evaluate.
- Review project goals and activities.
- Develop three or four overarching questions to guide your evaluation.
- Read and discuss articles or books relevant to your project.



WEB RESOURCES FOR THIS STAGE

- Agenda for evaluation team's work together
- Evaluation planning worksheet
- Information briefs:
 - Exploring useful skills for educators to develop through collaborative evaluation
 - Developing and using good evaluation questions

Preparing to Collect Data

How do you find out?

This stage is critical to conducting a sound evaluation of your school or district's project. This is the time that you carefully select the data-gathering methods that will best address your overarching evaluation questions. Also, you want to consider aspects of your own local context in terms of the data-gathering strategies you choose as well as the ways in which you communicate with people about the evaluation work.

Guiding Questions

- Which of your available sources of information are most critical to your investigation and why?
- Which data-gathering strategies make the most sense to answer your evaluation questions? Do you need multiple sources of data for certain questions?
- Which data-gathering strategies will be most fruitful, given your school culture?
- How do you wisely and objectively select the people from whom you gather information? How can you maximize their buy-in?
- What might be the value of developing your own data-gathering tools?
- What steps, such as completing consent forms, do you need to take to obtain permission to collect data from staff or students?
- In order to maximize your efficiency and learning, how should you, as a team, communicate along the way?

Tasks for this Stage

- Identify available sources of information, e.g., people, artifacts, and database information.
- Identify potential data-gathering strategies, e.g., interviews, questionnaires, observations, and analysis of student work.
- Select manageable data-collection strategies appropriate for each of your overarching evaluation questions.
- Identify appropriate sampling techniques.
- Plan ways to communicate with people from whom you want to gather information.
- Select or develop data-collection instruments such as interview protocols and questionnaires.
- Pilot data-collection instruments before use.
- Check district policy for obtaining permission to collect data from staff and students.
- Develop a detailed evaluation plan with tasks, timelines, and persons responsible.
- Develop team communication and meeting plan for the year.

WEB RESOURCES FOR THIS STAGE

- Agenda for evaluation team's work together
- Information briefs:
 - Choosing evaluation methods and data sources
 - Dealing with issues of confidentiality and anonymity
 - Developing questionnaires
 - Developing interview protocols
 - Developing focus group protocols
 - Developing observation protocols
 - Developing rubrics for student or teacher artifacts
 - Choosing or developing tests or other learning assessment tools
 - Choosing samples
 - Communicating with the evaluation team



Collecting Our Data

Are you getting the information you need?

This is the stage when all of your planning pays off. You collect the data that will inform your program work as you go along and the decisions you make for future improvements. Depending on the plan you devise, you may conduct interviews and focus groups, distribute questionnaires, observe classroom or professional development activities, or collect student work to be analyzed. It is essential that the data-gathering activities be perceived as respectful, non-intrusive, and non-threatening. Communication with participants in your study must be clear, consistent, and frequent. To the extent possible, these activities should be respectful of your colleagues' time and should provide opportunities for them to reflect on their work and extend their learning.

Guiding Questions

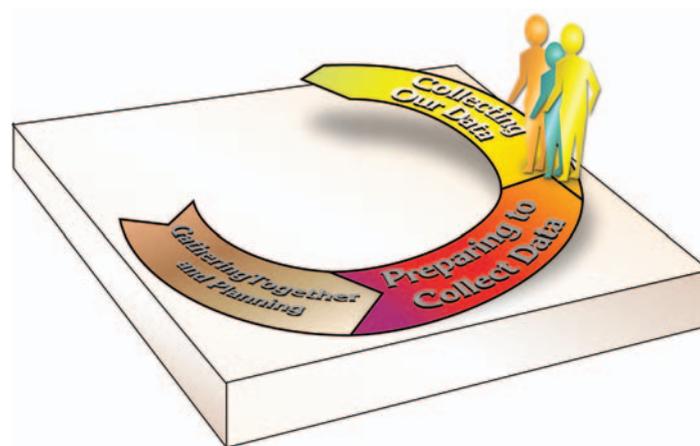
- Are people responding to questionnaires? Are they agreeing to participate in interviews or classroom observations? Is the student information accessible to you as planned?
- Are your school colleagues developing trust in the process?
- What new questions are emerging as you collect your information?
- Do you need to adjust your timing or data-gathering strategies?

Tasks for this Stage

- Communicate with colleagues from whom you will gather data.
- Collect data via interviews, questionnaires, observations, gathering of student or teacher products, or other strategies.
- Monitor data-gathering schedule.
- Monitor success in obtaining all necessary data.
- Adjust evaluation plan as needed.

WEB RESOURCES FOR THIS STAGE

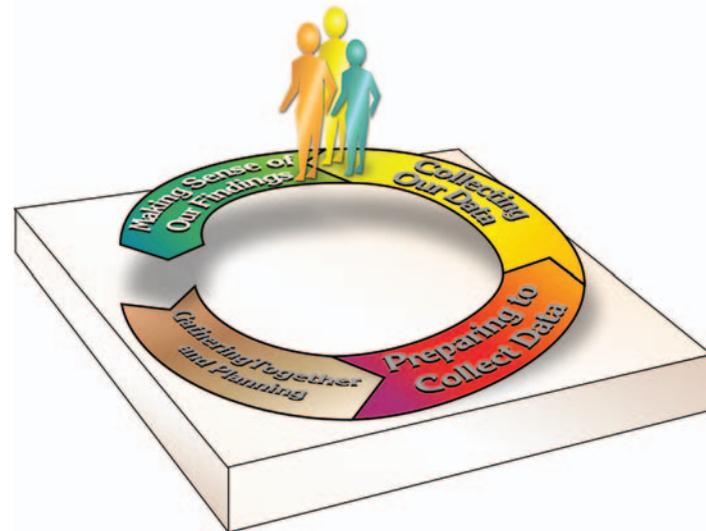
- Agenda for evaluation team's work together
- Information briefs:
 - Communicating with study participants and maximizing participation
 - Conducting interviews
 - Conducting focus groups
 - Conducting observations
 - Getting a good response to questionnaires
 - Collecting student and teacher artifacts



Making Sense of Our Findings

What are you learning?

For many, this stage is the most exciting, because the planning and careful implementation of the evaluation work are bearing fruit. This is when your evaluation team starts making sense of your findings and turning the sense-making into learning. It's a time when you identify themes in your qualitative data and patterns or trends in your quantitative data. It's when you ask yourselves if the changes you see in classrooms match the changes described by teachers and students, and whether these changes match your program goals. It's a time of analyzing, writing, organizing, talking, making connections together, and turning "aha's" into real learning. It's when the implications for your program work become clear.



Guiding Questions

- What are the major themes emerging from the qualitative data, e.g., interviews, focus groups?
- What trends or patterns show up in the quantitative data, e.g., student scores, scaled items on questionnaires, and observation protocols?
- What do your findings tell you in relation to your overarching questions? Are there any surprises?
- What are the limitations to your data? Where are the gaps?
- How can you organize and present your findings in a way that is clear and useful for others?
- What are the implications of your findings for your project work, classroom practice, and future project plans?
- What are the implications of your findings for future evaluation?
- How might you use the findings from your initial study to pursue additional grant funds?

Tasks for this Stage

- Conduct basic content analysis on qualitative data.
- Conduct basic quantitative analysis of numerical data.
- Organize, present graphically, and write about your findings.
- Discuss findings as a team.
- Discuss the implications of the findings with your team and other school and district stakeholders.
- Explore grant opportunities to obtain funding to extend your work.

WEB RESOURCES FOR THIS STAGE

- Agenda for evaluation team's work together
- Information briefs:
 - Analyzing and presenting quantitative data
 - Analyzing and presenting qualitative data
 - Organizing user-friendly reports and presentations
 - Facilitating stakeholder discussion of findings

Making Improvements

What do you do now?

This stage is the time for reviewing all you have learned from the evaluation work and improving your program work based on what you have learned. This is the time to make *informed* decisions—decisions to improve your professional development or leadership practices, ongoing support for teachers, methods for student assessment, or strategies for working with parents or community partners. Finally, it's the time to review your previous evaluation plan, the gaps that you found in the data you gathered, the glitches in the data-gathering process, and the new evaluation questions that may have emerged. Following this stage, you'll move to the next iteration, beginning again at Stage 1: *Preparing To Collect Data*. This iterative process allows you to continue your inquiry based on previous learning and evaluation experiences.

Guiding Questions

- How will you adjust the work you do through this project based on what you have learned?
- To effect maximum change, who else needs to learn about your evaluation findings and recommendations?
- What will be the most effective means of communicating your findings and recommendations with these individuals and groups?
- As you look ahead to your future evaluation work, should your overarching questions remain the same or do they need adjustments?
- How might you adjust your future information gathering based on what you have learned?
- Are there more people who need to be involved in your collaborative evaluation planning?

Tasks for this Stage

- Identify additional audiences and provide interactive opportunities to discuss evaluation findings.
- Develop a set of recommendations for improvement of your work based on evaluation findings and stakeholder discussions.
- Adjust evaluation questions as appropriate based on evaluation findings, new undertakings in the work, and emerging issues.
- Begin thinking of revisions needed to your continuing plan for program evaluation.
- Identify additional people to work with the evaluation team.

WEB RESOURCES FOR THIS STAGE

- Agenda for evaluation team's work together
- Evaluation planning worksheet
- Information briefs:
 - Developing and using good evaluation questions
 - Exploring useful skills for educators to develop through collaborative evaluation

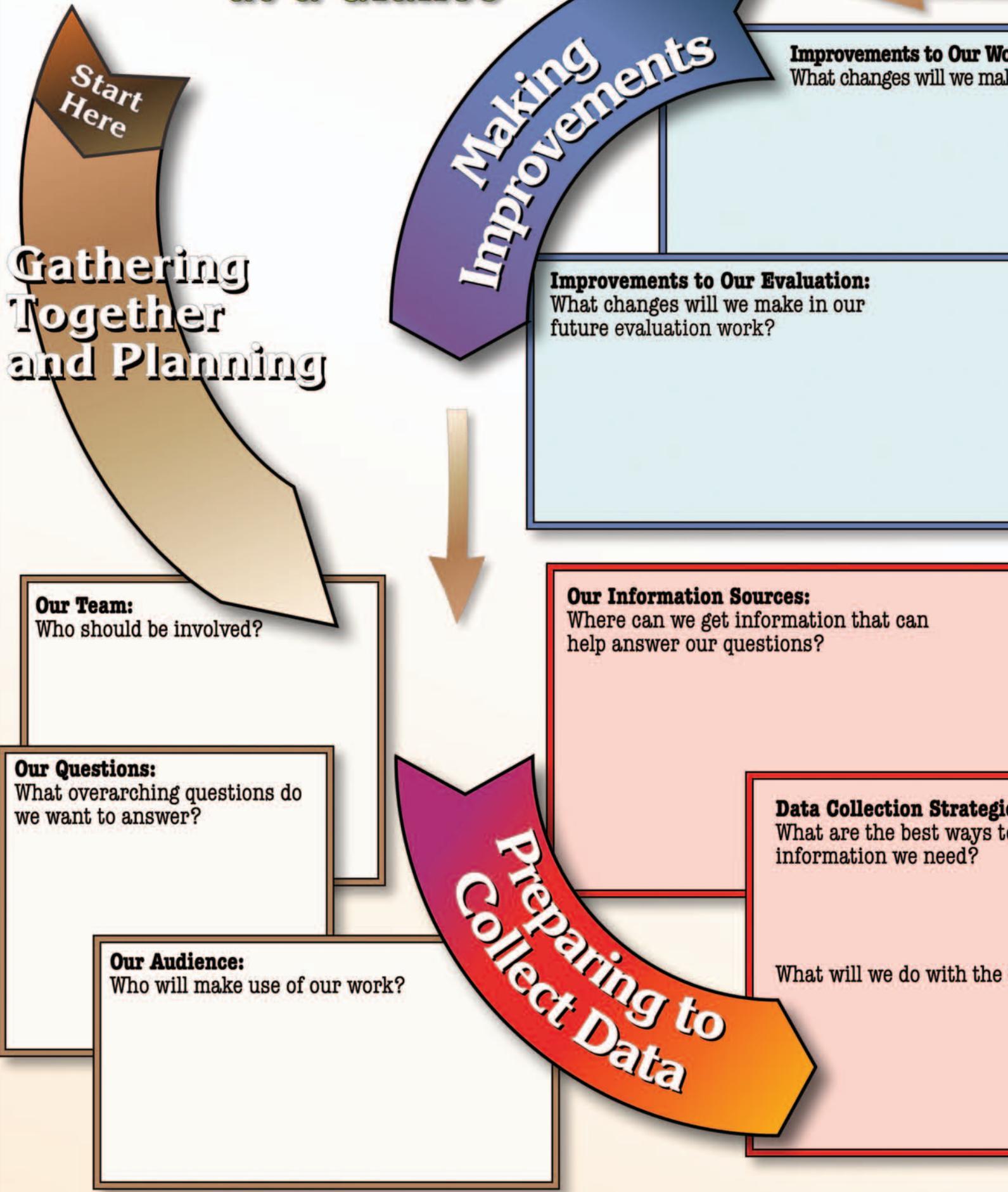


"HOW-TO" WEB RESOURCES FOR EACH STAGE

<http://www.neirtec.org/evaluation>

EVALUATION STAGE	AGENDAS, WORKSHEETS, INFORMATION BRIEFS
Gathering Together and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda for evaluation team's work together • Evaluation planning worksheet • Information briefs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring useful skills for educators to develop through collaborative evaluation • Developing and using good evaluation questions
Preparing to Collect Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda for evaluation team's work together • Information briefs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing evaluation methods and data sources • Dealing with issues of confidentiality and anonymity • Developing questionnaires • Developing interview protocols • Developing focus group protocols • Developing observation protocols • Developing rubrics for student or teacher artifacts • Choosing or developing tests or other learning assessment tools • Choosing samples • Communicating with the evaluation team
Collecting Our Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda for evaluation team's work together • Information briefs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating with study participants and maximizing participation • Conducting interviews • Conducting focus groups • Conducting observations • Getting a good response to questionnaires • Collecting student and teacher artifacts
Making Sense of Our Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda for evaluation team's work together • Information briefs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzing and presenting quantitative data • Analyzing and presenting qualitative data • Organizing user-friendly reports and presentations • Facilitating stakeholder discussion of findings
Making Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda for evaluation team's work together • Evaluation planning worksheet • Information briefs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and using good evaluation questions • Exploring useful skills for educators to develop through collaborative evaluation

Collaborative Evaluation Process at a Glance



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ke in our work?

Implications for Our Work:
What are the implications for our project work, classroom practice, and future plans?

Making Sense of Our Findings

Our Primary Findings:
What are the major findings from our data gathering?



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o get the
data?

Our Evaluation Process:
Are we getting the information we need?

Are our school colleagues developing trust in the process?

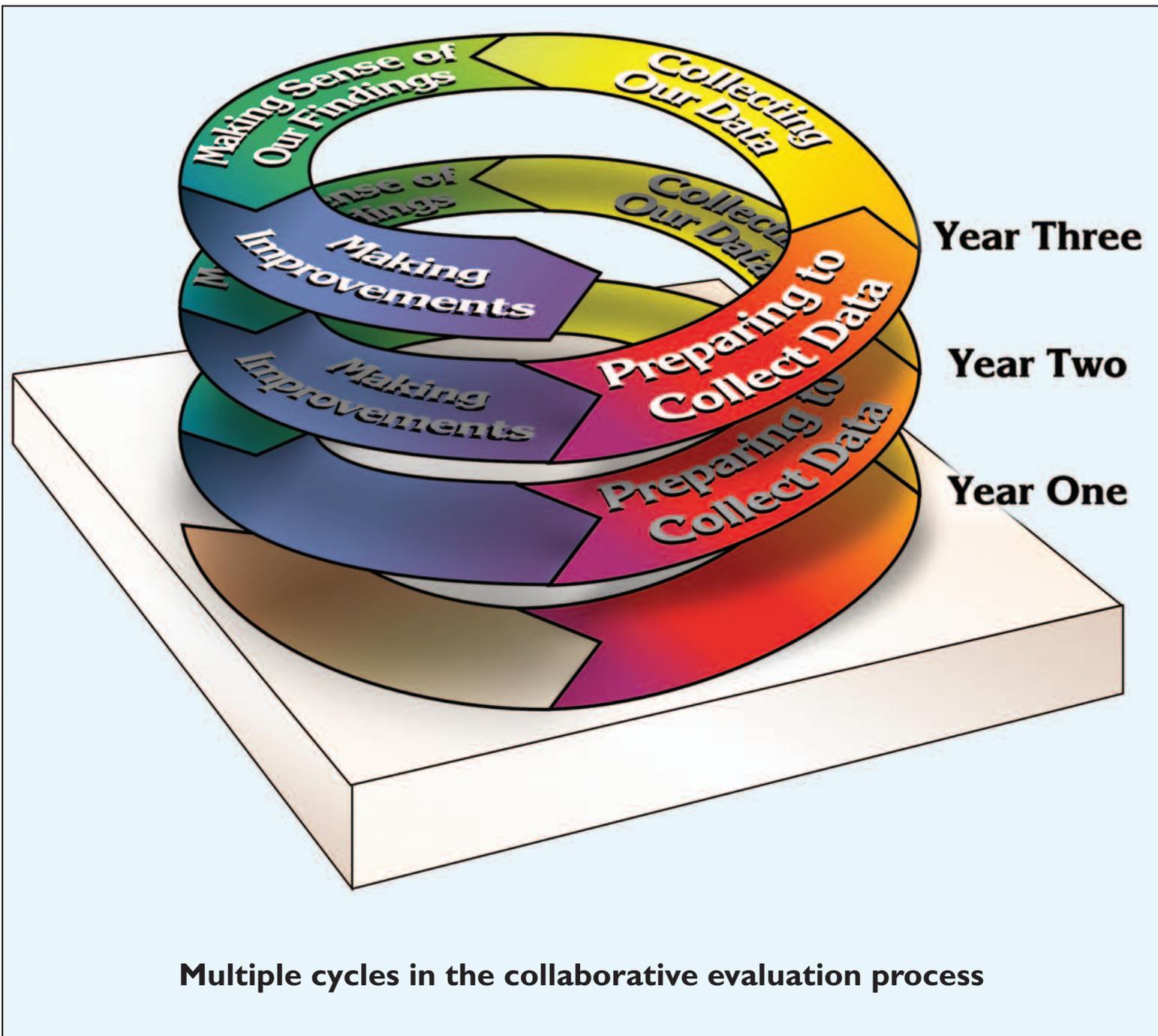
What new questions are emerging?

Do we need to adjust our timing or data-gathering strategies?

Collecting Our Data



NOTES



Multiple cycles in the collaborative evaluation process