

**The Evaluation Checklist Project:
The Inside Scoop on Content, Process, Policies, Impact, and Challenges**

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According to *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, a checklist is, simply, "a list of things to be checked or done." Michael Scriven has identified and analyzed several types of checklists: laundry lists, sequential checklists, iterative checklists, diagnostic checklists, and criteria of merit checklists. But regardless of focus, purpose, or complexity, all checklists share in common a basic mnemonic function: they remind (or inform) us what we are supposed to do, check, look for, etc. (Scriven, 2000, ¶ 2)

Shortly after we¹ set up the Evaluation Checklists Web site,² I read a chapter by Ernest House and Kenneth Howe (2000) on their Deliberative Democratic Evaluation Model. In concluding the chapter, they wrote that the principles upon which the model is based—inclusion, dialogue, and deliberation—"are too important to leave to chance or intuition all the time." They continued, "It may help to have a justification and checklist to remind evaluators caught in the complexities of difficult evaluations what evaluation in democratic societies should aim for" (p. 421). The point here is that many aspects of evaluation are "too important to leave to chance or intuition all the time." And this is why even the lowly laundry-list-type checklist can be extremely useful in the complex world of evaluation.

The Evaluation Checklists Project is an effort to make these extremely useful tools—evaluation checklists—readily available to the evaluation community via the World Wide Web. The checklists are "distillations of lessons learned from practice" (D. Stufflebeam, personal communication, September 26, 2002). A checklist provides an efficient and user-friendly format to share such lessons learned.

The checklists Web site now has 24 checklists representing the work of 16 different authors (some are coauthors). It is part of Project MTS, directed by Dr. Arlen Gullickson at The Evaluation Center. Project MTS is a National Science Foundation-funded project to enhance evaluation capacity in the science, mathematics, engineering, and technology education communities through materials development, training, and support services. The Checklist Project supports the materials development component of Project MTS.

¹ "We" in this paper refers to the persons responsible for the Checklist Project, including Dr. Arlen Gullickson, director of The Evaluation Center and director of Project MTS; Dr. Daniel Stufflebeam, former director of The Evaluation Center and major contributor to the project; Mr. Dale Farland, The Evaluation Center's technology specialist and Project MTS manager; and me, the Checklist Project manager.

² www.wmich.edu/evalcrt/checklists/

In the remainder of this paper, I will briefly summarize the content of the Evaluation Checklists Web site, discuss our process and policies, share what we know regarding use and impact of the checklists, and raise challenging questions that we will need to address as we continue with the project.

Content

I see the 24 checklists on the site as generally fitting into 3 overlapping categories: (1) evaluation planning and management checklists; (2) criteria of merit checklists; and where these categories overlap, (3) metaevaluation checklists—checklists that can serve both as evaluation guides as well as criteria of merit checklists for evaluating evaluations. The relationship of these categories and examples of checklists are presented in Figure 1.

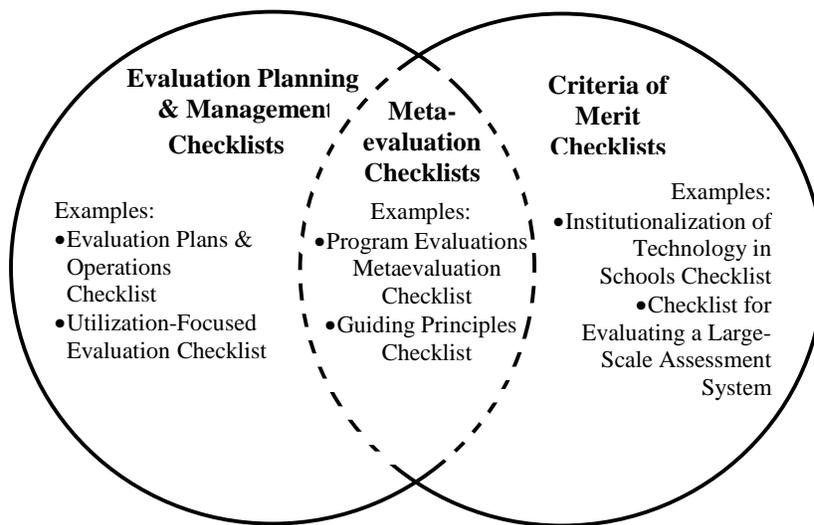


Figure 1. Checklist Categories and Their Relationships³

Notice that the where the circles overlap, the lines are dashed indicating that movement from one category to another may be possible, depending on the nature of the checklist.

Evaluation Planning and Management Checklists

For example, the *Evaluation Plans and Operations Checklist*,⁴ by Daniel Stufflebeam, is essentially a guide for planning and conducting an evaluation, thus its placement in the evaluation planning and management category. This checklist identifies several factors that should be considered in terms of the evaluation's conceptualization, sociopolitical factors, contractual arrangements, technical design, management plan, moral/ethical imperatives, and utility provisions. With 89 separate checkpoints, this checklist represents Daniel Stufflebeam's nearly 40 years' experience of doing evaluation. It is an excellent tool for evaluation planning and management, but it can also be used for formative metaevaluation.

³ For a more detailed delineation of the checklists according this scheme, see the appendix, which is an adaptation of Stufflebeam's (2002) Checklist Organizer.

⁴ All checklists mentioned in this paper are available on-line from www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/

Similarly, Michael Scriven's *Key Evaluation Checklist* reminds evaluators of the factors they should investigate, assess, and report on in an evaluation, but it works equally well as a metaevaluation tool.

Daniel Stufflebeam and Arlen Gullickson's *Feedback Workshop Checklist* is a practical guide for planning, conducting, and following up on feedback workshops (meetings to present and discuss draft evaluation reports with clients and other stakeholders). Conceivably, one could use this checklist to evaluate a feedback workshop, if such an occasion should present itself.

For a complete list of the 12 evaluation planning and management checklists available on the Checklist Web site, see the appendix.

Criteria of Merit Checklists

The site includes a few subject-specific criteria of merit checklists, which delineate criteria for evaluating a particular evaluand (Scriven, 2000). An example is Awsumb, Post, and Bickel's *Institutionalization of Technology in Schools Checklist*. This checklist, based on the authors' field experience and literature review, identifies criteria for evaluating the extent to which technology is institutionalized in schools. An evaluator faced with the task of evaluating the institutionalization of technology would find this to be a valuable tool for focusing his or her attention on the critical factors to assess and determining the quality and effectiveness of the institutionalization. However, this checklist also has potential to serve the other checklist categories: it could also be used as a metaevaluation checklist—for evaluating the content of an evaluation in this area and it could also be used as an aid in developing an evaluation plan.

Other criteria of merit checklists on the site include Scriven's *Duties of the Teacher Checklist* and *Product Evaluation Checklist* and Lorrie Shepard's *Checklist for Evaluating Large-Scale Assessment Programs*.

Metaevaluation Checklists

In the middle category, where the circles overlap, are checklists developed primarily for metaevaluation. Metaevaluation checklists are, by definition, criteria of merit checklists. But, since they lay out criteria for evaluating evaluations, metaevaluation checklists are also excellent guides for evaluation planning and management. What better way to make sure your evaluation meets the standards and principles of the evaluation profession than to use these checklists, which are based on the Joint Committee Standards and the AEA Guiding Principles, to guide your work?

See the appendix for a list of the metaevaluation checklists on the site.

This delineation of checklist types into 3 categories, 2 of which overlap, illustrates the checklists' versatility. And it is because of their versatility that, to some extent, they defy categorization or pigeonholing. It was one way of examining the nature of the checklists on our site, but certainly not the only way (see Stufflebeam, 2001).

For example, to help evaluators identify and select the checklists that will best meet their needs, Daniel Stufflebeam developed a “Checklist Organizer.” He arranged the checklists according to various tasks—such as developing a contract, identifying criteria, and metaevaluation—and indicated the available checklists that are particularly relevant to that task. This organizer is being added to the Web site, as is a new search function and brief descriptions of each checklist.

Other Content

While the checklists get most of the attention, there are other materials on the site—papers about the use, development, and methodology of checklists by Michael Scriven and Daniel Stufflebeam. It is likely that we will add this and other papers presented on the Checklist Project at 2002 American Evaluation Association conference to the Web site. Examples of how people have applied the checklists would be an excellent addition to facilitate a deeper understanding of the uses, strengths, and limitations of checklists.

Process

The Checklist Project basically started as a mechanism to make available existing checklists developed by Michael Scriven and Daniel Stufflebeam, including Scriven’s influential *Key Evaluation Checklist* and Stufflebeam’s translation of the *Program Evaluation Standards* into checklist format—the *Program Evaluations Metaevaluation Checklist*. The project started with 8 checklists by Stufflebeam and Scriven, and the site has grown slowly and steadily to 24. We have not been in a rush to expand the site, since we think its content should be judged according to quality, not quantity.

When we started the project, we knew that we wanted to gather and develop additional checklists, but we didn’t set out with a specific plan about what types of checklists we wanted or how we would decide if they were appropriate for the site. So, there is no checklist of procedures we use to identify and select checklists for the site. But to give you an idea of how we got where we are today, I will describe the process as it has unfolded.

Identifying Checklists for the Site

The checklist collection has grown somewhat according to need, but mostly according to opportunity. For example, the first checklist we added after the initial set by Scriven and Stufflebeam was a checklist by House and Howe on their Deliberative Democratic Evaluation Model. As soon as I read what they wrote about the need for a checklist to remind evaluators about principles too important to leave to chance or intuition, I suggested to Dr. Stufflebeam—and he agreed—that we should invite them to develop a checklist on how to implement their model. House and Howe agreed and their *Deliberative Democratic Evaluation Checklist* was the first to be developed under contract for the project.

Of the 24 checklists on the site, only 6 were developed under contract with The Evaluation Center:

- *Checklist for Developing and Evaluating Evaluation Budgets*, by Jerry Horn
- *Deliberative Democratic Evaluation Checklist*, by Ernest House and Kenneth Howe
- *Guidelines and Checklist for Constructivist (a.k.a. Fourth Generation) Evaluation*, by Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln
- *Institutionalization of Technology in Schools Checklist*, by Catherine Awsumb Nelson, Jennifer Post, and William Bickel
- *Making Evaluation Meaningful to All Education Stakeholders*, by Paula Gangopadyay
- *Utilization-Focused Evaluation Checklist*, by Michael Quinn Patton

These authors are all colleagues of The Evaluation Center staff and we believed they had something valuable to share with the wider evaluation community and that what they produced would be of high quality.

Five checklists—those by Michael Scriven, Robert Stake, and Lorrie Shepard, already existed and we were granted permission by the authors to include them on the site. Many of the checklists were developed by Daniel Stufflebeam specifically for the Checklist site.

All the checklist authors are influential or up-and-coming spokespersons for various evaluation perspectives and practices.

The checklist home page includes an option for people to recommend other checklists. We have received only a few submissions—less than five—so this has not been a fruitful mechanism for acquiring additional checklists.

Evaluating Checklists

One might presume that since we advocate the use of evaluation checklists we have a checklist for evaluating checklists, but we do not. Stufflebeam's *Checklist Development Checklist* provides useful guidelines for developing new checklists, but since it focuses on process, it has limited capacity for evaluating checklist content. Basically, we want checklists that are relevant to the evaluation community; make internal sense; provide practical guidelines, preferably with supporting rationales; and are user-friendly.

Our submission, review, and publishing process is similar to that of an academic journal. Dr. Stufflebeam and I essentially serve as the editors, and we occasionally call upon our colleagues to assist in the review and critique of checklists for the site. In the case of checklists we have contracted for, I usually do the initial reviews and work with the author to make revisions; then the checklist goes to Dr. Stufflebeam for final review. Newly developed checklists go through an iterative review and development process, with Dr. Stufflebeam using his expert judgment—using a connoisseurship-style evaluation approach—to make a final determination.

Policies

Policy concerning use of the checklists is an area that has been somewhat neglected until recently. With a growing collection of checklists and increased publicity and use of the site, we realized there is a need to put in place formal policies concerning acceptable use of the

checklists. It has always been our intention for people to print and use the checklists to facilitate their evaluation work. Occasionally, however, I receive inquiries from people requesting permission to use the checklists. We want to make it clear that people are welcome and encouraged to use the checklists, but also make them aware that there are limitations to what we regard as acceptable use.

At this writing, I have completed a draft “Acceptable Use Policy” for the checklists and recently met with Western Michigan University’s attorney to review the wording of the policy. He agreed with the spirit of the policy, but will be “tweaking” the language to make it more explicit.

The draft policy includes examples of acceptable and prohibited use of the checklists, as follows:

Examples of Acceptable Use:

- Using a checklist to guide your evaluation or metaevaluation activities
- Including a copy of a checklist in an evaluation report
- Distributing copies of an evaluation checklist to participants in an evaluation training workshop
- Including a copy of a checklist in a course pack for a higher education course

Prohibited Use:

- Adding, removing, or modifying checklist content or author information.
- Reprinting a checklist in a book or journal article without permission.
- Reproducing a checklist on another Web site

As soon as the policy is finalized, it will be posted on the Checklists Web site.

Use and Impact

We would like to know a lot more than we do about the use and impact of the Evaluation Checklists Web site.⁵ We have discussed the idea of requiring users to provide some basic information before they can access a checklist, e.g., affiliation, intended use of the checklist, etc. A concern is that this might discourage people from using the site.

We do have some cursory indicators of use and impact. These include the various inquiries I have received concerning the checklist site, the type and number of other Web pages that have links to the checklist site, and the number of hits on the checklists home page and individual checklist pages.

Inquiries

While I have received just a few inquiries about the checklists from a handful of individuals, the diversity in geography and affiliation suggests that the checklists have reached far and wide.

⁵ I encourage anyone who has visited the Web site or used any of the checklists to send feedback to lori.wingate@wmich.edu.

This is illustrated by the following list of some of the people who have contacted me about the checklists:

- Continuing Legal Education Director, King County Bar Association (Seattle, WA)
- Project Manager, Catholic Relief Services (Morocco)
- Project Officer, Sports Federation of Victoria (Australia)
- Trainer, Greater Manchester Police Training Branch (UK)
- Project Manager, Francophone Agency (France)

Links From Other Web Pages

Another rough indicator of use and impact is the number and type of Web sites that have links to the checklists site. I conducted a search on Google.com to locate pages that link to (a) the checklist pages, (b) the Evaluation Support Services home page on The Evaluation Center's Web site, or (c) The Evaluation Center's home page—if the checklists were specifically mentioned in conjunction with the link. Again, the diversity speaks to the broad appeal of checklists:

Evaluation Organizations:

- Canadian Evaluation Society
- Finnish Evaluation Society
- Ohio Program Evaluators' Group

University Departments and Faculty:

- Illinois State University (Social Work course Web page)
- Linz University (Austria)—Institute for Pedagogy and Psychology
- Michigan State University (Park, Recreation and Tourism course Web page)
- Missouri Southern State College (Psychology professor's Web page)
- Nova Southeastern University (Instructional Technology & Distance Education professor's Web page)
- University of Minnesota—Division of Epidemiology
- University of Minnesota—College of Education and Human Development
- University of North Carolina—"21st Century Schools"—Professional Development Resources for Teachers and Administrators
- Valdosta State University (Educational Psychology professor's Web page)
- Xavier University—Office of Assessment

Research Institutes, Professional Associations, and Related Organizations:

- American Association for Higher Education
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention
- International Consortium for the Advancement of Academic Publication
- Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center Online (site of the Justice Statistics and Research Association)
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

- National Service Learning Clearinghouse
- Society for Applied Sociology
- University Corporation for Atmospheric Research—Digital Library for Earth System Education (DLESE), Evaluation Toolkit (NSF project)

Evaluation and Related Consulting Services:

- Artemis Services for Nature Conservation and Human Development (France)
- CITO Group (testing and measurement firm) (Netherlands)
- Jerhong Training Consultants
- Non-Profit Research and Evaluation Services, Inc.
- Tom Snyder Productions (educational software development and publishing)
- WritingSolution.com (resources for technical writers and instructional designer)

Teacher Support:

- Leon County Schools (Pensacola, FL)—Division of Teaching and Learning, Program Monitoring and Evaluation
- PBS—TeacherSource

Hits on the Checklist Menu and Checklists

There have been just over 21,500 hits (at this writing) on the checklist menu page (i.e., the list of available checklists) since the site was established in July 2000. It is hard to judge if this is excellent, mediocre, or poor. To date, our only mechanism for publicizing the site has been to make announcements on Evaltalk (AEA's listserv) whenever the site is updated and to mention the site in various publications and presentations. Notably, each time an announcement pertaining to the site is made on Evaltalk, there is a surge in the number of hits.

Beginning September 16th of this year, the Information Technology office at WMU made a Web analysis service available to us. It basically reports the number of hits on our Web pages within a given date range. While the total number of hits on each checklist page doesn't tell us anything about overall impact, the relative number of hits per page does reveal something about which checklists are the most popular—presumably a good indication of which ones are most used. Figure 2 compares the number of hits on each checklist page.⁶

⁶ Most checklists on the site are available in both PDF and HTML formats, so the number of hits for each format have been combined.

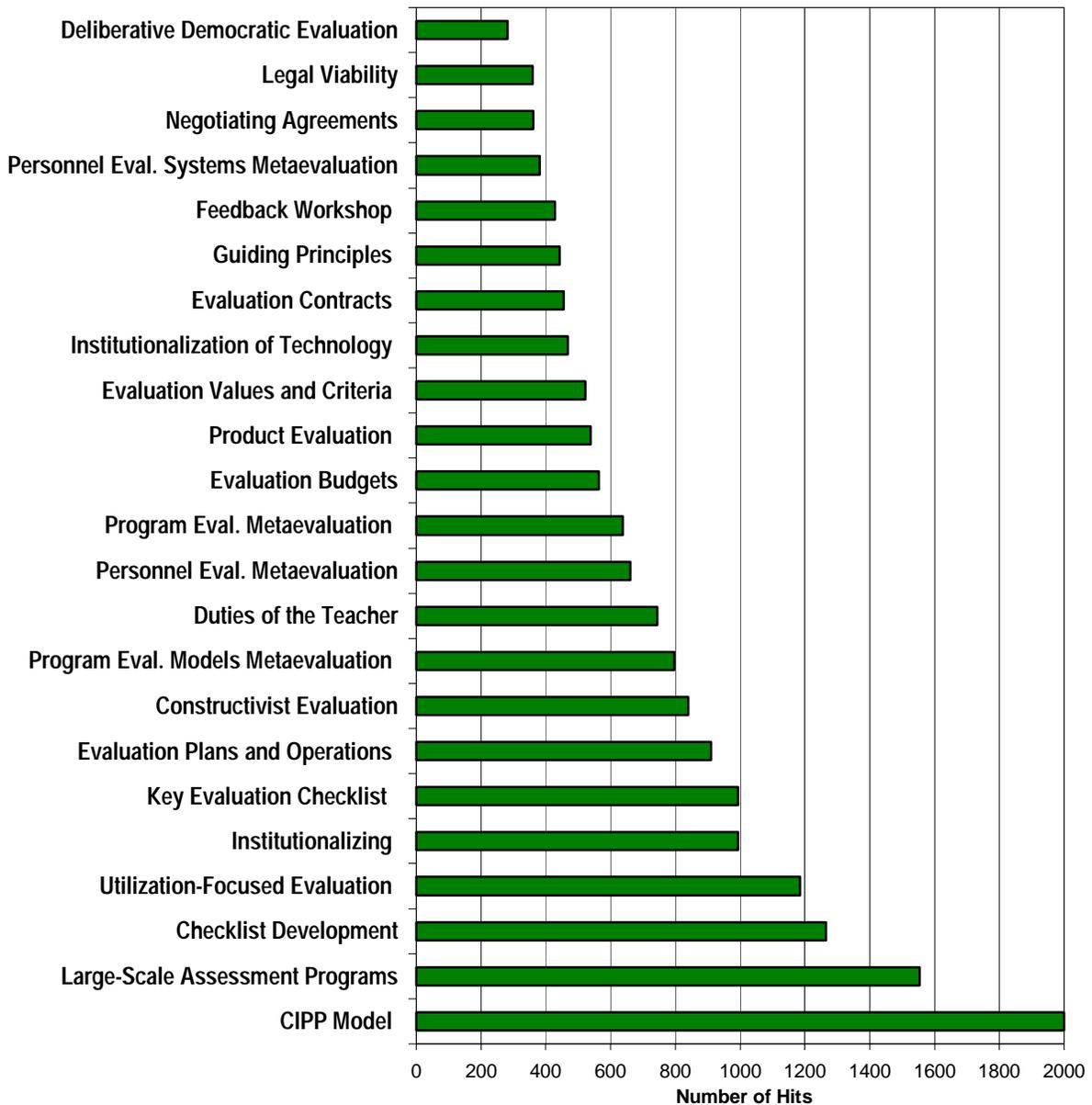


Figure 2. Number of Hits per Checklist: September 16 – November 4, 2002

I am reluctant to draw any conclusions based on these figures, since they represent only a short period of time. However, it does appear that “big picture” checklists tend to be most popular. We will keep track of the hits and use the information to help us determine what types of checklists are perceived as the most valuable.

Challenges

As we move forward to expand and improve the Checklists Project site, there are a number of issues that we need to address. In this section, I present a quick overview of the challenges we face.

What evaluation methods, tasks, and approaches should be represented among the checklist collection and aren't?

To date, we have not done a systematic needs assessment to determine what types of checklists are most needed. A review of the EvalTalk archives might reveal common questions and challenges that evaluators face for which checklists could be useful. Another option would be to engage future MTS Summer Institute participants in conducting a needs assessment to identify what types of checklists are most needed within the evaluation field. However we proceed, we want to make sure we address the most common evaluation tasks and adequately represent various evaluation approaches.

Should we develop a rubric for evaluating checklists?

As we build on the strong set of checklists we already have, we believe it will serve us well to develop clear procedures and policies for encouraging the development of new checklists and determining their appropriateness and readiness for inclusion on the checklists Web site. Certainly, Scriven's (2000) paper on the logic and methodology of checklists and Stufflebeam's (2000) paper on checklist development offer beginning guidance. Additional steps that could serve development of a rubric include gathering input from current checklists users and analyzing the characteristics of checklists already on the site. We will certainly want to engage Dr. Stufflebeam in translating his tacit knowledge and expert judgment into a set of clearly articulated operational criteria for evaluating checklists.

Is there adequate guidance for how the checklists should be used?

Most of the checklists on the site have brief introductions, noting the checklists' orientations and intended uses. I recently added to the site "thumbnail" descriptions of all the checklists. But feedback from some users suggests this may not be enough guidance. Perhaps there is a need for supporting information about each checklist's logic, uses, potential applications, limitations, and what other checklists might appropriately be used in tandem. We are reminded that expectations for measurement instruments routinely call for both administrative manuals and technical manuals as part of the materials provided to users (A. Gullickson, personal communication October 10, 2002). While checklists do not call for extensive technical manuals, case examples describing how evaluators have applied the checklists, with information about the checklist's strengths and weaknesses, could provide valuable guidance for selecting and applying checklists.

Closing

In this paper, I have attempted to provide the "inside scoop" on the checklists project—how we got to where we are now, how we do things, what we know about impact, and the challenges we face.

Dr. Barbara Bichelmeyer is conducting an evaluation of the Evaluation Checklists Web site and will present her results during the panel session at the 2002 AEA conference for which this paper was prepared. I look forward to her feedback so that we can make further improvements to the site. Recently we have made some changes to the site—added after Dr. Bichelmeyer completed

her evaluation. These include the addition of a search function, the Checklist Organizer, and checklist descriptions; we will be adding an acceptable use policy statement in the near future. Hopefully, these changes will be consistent with what is suggested from the evaluation. I am sure her evaluation will point to other changes and improvements.

References

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Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. (1994). *The program evaluation standards: How to assess evaluations of educational programs*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

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**Appendix:
Adaptation of Stufflebeam's (2002) Checklist Organizer**

Checklists to Guide Evaluation Planning & Management:		Metaevaluation Checklists: (may be used to guide evaluations or as criteria of merit checklists for evaluating evaluations)		Criteria of Merit Checklists:	
<i>Task</i>	<i>Relevant Checklists</i>	<i>Task</i>	<i>Relevant Checklists</i>	<i>Task</i>	<i>Relevant Checklists</i>
Plan an evaluation in detail	<i>Evaluation Plans and Operations Checklist</i>	Evaluate or Guide a Program Evaluation	<i>Key Evaluation Checklist</i>	Evaluate teacher performance	<i>Duties of the Teacher Checklist</i>
Develop and negotiate an evaluation contract	<i>Checklist for Negotiating an Agreement to Evaluate an Educational Programme</i>		<i>Program Evaluations Metaevaluation Checklist</i>	Evaluate the institutionalization of technology in schools	<i>Institutionalization of Technology in Schools Checklist</i>
	<i>Evaluation Contracts Checklist</i>		<i>Guiding Principles Checklist</i>	Evaluate an educational product	<i>Product Evaluation Checklist</i>
Construct an evaluation budget	<i>Checklist for Developing Evaluation Budgets</i>	Evaluate or Guide a Personnel Evaluations	<i>Personnel Evaluations Metaevaluation Checklist</i>	Evaluation a large-scale assessment program	<i>Checklist for Evaluating Large-Scale Assessment Programs</i>
			<i>Personnel Evaluation Systems Metaevaluation Checklist</i>		
Conduct an evaluation in accordance with a specific evaluation approach/model	<i>CIPP Model Evaluation Checklist</i>				
	<i>Guidelines & Checklist for Constructivist Evaluation</i>				
	<i>Deliberative Democratic Evaluation Checklist</i>				
	<i>Key Evaluation Checklist</i>				
	<i>Utilization-Focused Evaluation Checklist</i>				
Identify general criteria for judging the evaluand	<i>Evaluation Values and Criteria Checklist</i>				
Develop a plan for reporting evaluation findings	<i>Feedback Workshop Checklist</i>				
	<i>Making Evaluation Meaningful to All Education Stakeholders</i>				