

Rapid evidence-support system assessment (RESSA) tool (Last updated 03 September 2024)

As noted in the Global Evidence Commission's Update 2024, some member of the RESSA Country Leads Group – Canada, China and Ireland – are now piloting a more detailed set of criteria to assess the enablers, culture and capacity on the demand side, interface mechanisms, and timely, demand-driven evidence support mechanisms (i.e., the three domains in the visual below), as well as how evidence synthesis is used in the production of other forms of evidence (the fourth domain).

In the section below, we provide sample methods for conducting a RESSA that piloted the more detailed set of criteria. Following the methods, we introduce the criteria and a corresponding legend for the ratings. We provide these methods as an example that could be followed. However, we encourage teams to adjust their methods to best suit the context of the evidence-support system they are assessing. In the coming months, we hope to provide other examples of methodologies used by global groups conducting these assessments.

Updated methods for conducting a RESSA

A six-step, formative evaluation approach can be used to conduct the RESSA.

First, we suggest identifying champions within the organization (or across organizations of interest) who can help to provide an overview of the organization, request documents from across the organization illustrate the approach to evidence support and help to identify potential interviewees who could provide diverse perspectives from across the local evidence-support system.

Second, review the submitted documents to identify any emergent themes and develop questions to use during interviews. Consider developing two types of questions: 1) specific questions related to the submitted documents and 2) more general questions about evidence support to ask all interviewees in the RESSA.

Third, conduct interviews with staff identified by the champions. Consider having multiple staff to take notes during the interview so that you can reconcile your findings later in the process. Depending on the context in which you are undertaking the RESSA, you may wish to learning and improvement project rather than a formal evaluation, which may mean not recording and transcribing interviews.

Fourth, apply the the explicit assessment criteria for each of each of three key domains in an evidence-support system (see Figure 1 and domains 1-3 in the list below) and for the one sub-domain within the third domain (see item 4 in the list below):

- 1) environment for evidence use, specifically the enablers, culture and capacity for evidence use within the organization
- 2) interface between the need (or demand) for evidence and the supply of evidence
- 3) forms of research evidence and other types of information being produced (which we return to below)
- 4) how evidence synthesis – both syntheses of different forms of domestic evidence and syntheses of what has been learned from around the world, including how it varies by groups and context – is used in the production of other forms of evidence.

These assessment criteria are listed in tables following the methods.

Applying the criteria can be done by having authors independently review the notes from your document analysis and the notes taken during the interviews and provided a rating (included below following the assessment criterion) for each criterion. We suggest having authors compare respective ratings and write justifications for each rating. You can then use a consensus process to develop a joint rating and written justifications for each rating.

Consider also documenting opportunities for improvement emerging from the document analysis and the notes taken during the interviews. These may be used as descriptions for future opportunities that the organization (or organizations) may wish to consider to advance their evidence support.

Fifth, you may wish to distinguish ratings and justifications for which there is less or more confidence, changing the text to italics to designate less confidence (see bullet 1 below) and keeping a regular font to designate more confidence (see bullet 2 below):

- *little confidence because the assessors only spoke to a few people, to people who have experience with only part of the domain, or to people who have experience in only a small part where the domain is relevant*
- more confidence because the assessors spoke to more people, to people with experience with the domain, and to people with experience across the organization.

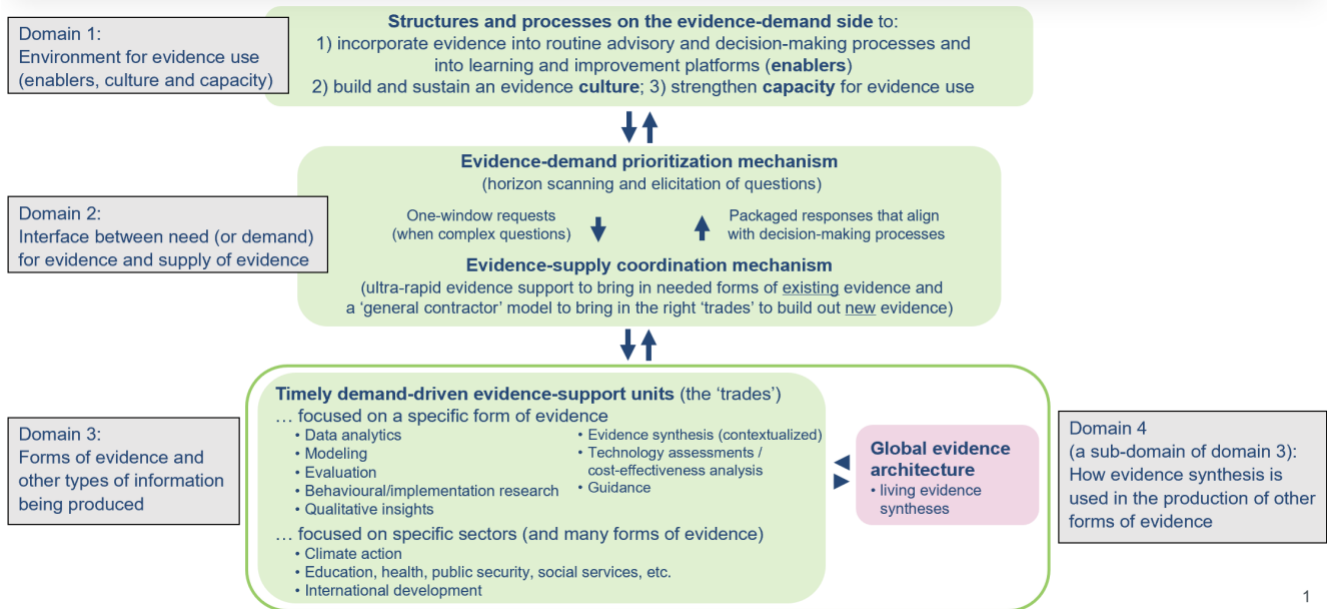
A similar approach can be used to arrive at consensus for these uncertainty flags.

Sixth, consider undertaking an engagement process to obtain feedback on the approach and findings, including asking individuals to provide feedback on:

- assessment criteria
- rating system (the partial 'traffic-light' approach shown below)
- ratings and justification for each criterion, particularly participants' reflections on whether the ratings match their understanding of where current performance is compared to where it could be with appropriate resources and supports
- future opportunities to consider and reflections on potential priorities within the lists.

The engagement process could include written feedback or facilitated 'sense making' sessions.

Figure 1. Evidence supports system domains



Domain 1: Assessment of the environment – enablers, culture and capacity – for using evidence

Assessment criteria	Rating	Justification
Enablers		
Manageable number of clearly defined advisory and decision-making processes where evidence is needed (1.1)		
Advisory and decision-making processes have explicit standards for how multiple streams of evidence flow to and are integrated for them (1.2)		
Appointments to advisory processes are made in a way that ensures a mix of subject-matter expertise, evidence-methods expertise, and lived experience (or such expertise is available through a secretariat) (1.3)		
Secretariat support for advisory processes, as well as stakeholder-engagement processes, includes pre-circulating evidence inputs (and making them and the methods used publicly available), supporting robust deliberations, and documenting the evidence and expertise underpinning recommendations (1.4)		
Budget equitably dedicated across types of evidence support (1.5)		
Knowledge-management system dedicated to evidence support (1.6)		
Explicit plan for how evidence supports will pivot and/or ramp up again if/when a new crisis emerges (1.7)		
Culture		
Explicit organization-wide commitment to using the best available evidence in advisory and decision-making processes (1.8)		
Transparency in evidence inputs used to support advisory and decision-making processes (1.9)		
Regularly collected measures of evidence use and impact, and periodic evaluations or audits of evidence use and evidence supports (1.10)		
In-house learning and improvement processes related to evidence support (1.11)		
Cross-jurisdictional learning and improvement processes related to evidence support (1.12)		
Capacity		
Documented capacities required for evidence coordination and evidence support (1.13)		
Hiring and retention of staff with relevant types of evidence-methods expertise and identification of types of staff well suited to taking on expanded evidence-support roles (1.14)		
Professional development related to advisory and decision-making process, evidence coordination, and evidence products and processes (1.15)		
Performance-review criteria related to evidence products and processes (1.16)		
Career-progression pathway for evidence-methods experts and subject-matter experts, including medical advisors (1.17)		

Domain 2: Assessment of the interface between the need (or demand) for evidence and the supply of evidence

Assessment criteria	Rating	Justification
Roles		
Designated general contractor(s) for evidence support aligned to advisory and decision-making processes (2.1)		
Designated evidence-support unit(s) for each form of evidence and other type of information, along with fit-for-purpose procurement approaches (2.2)		
Designated evidence-methods experts (2.3)		
Explicit role for subject-matter experts in relation to evidence support (2.4)		
Mechanisms		
Clarifying (and prioritizing) the questions emerging from advisory and decision-making processes and communicating them to evidence producers (2.5)		
Selecting the relevant policy, systems, equity (SGBA+), risk, surveillance and other frameworks that will generate a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive (MECE) set of domains where evidence may be needed to address the prioritized questions (2.6)		
Sourcing the many needed forms of existing evidence from the 'trades,' particularly evidence from outside government and from other countries (2.7)		
Examining the quality of existing evidence and setting standards for those providing more in-depth evidence support (2.8)		
Efficiently approving and posting/publishing evidence products, including enforcing standards (2.9)		
Packaging evidence products in ways that make them findable and understandable (2.10)		
Rigorously integrating evidence products and other inputs to advisory and decision-making processes (2.11)		

Domain 3: Assessment of the forms of evidence and other types of information being produced

For this domain, the assessment criteria combine the criteria below with the row headers in the table.

1. Alignment of evidence-related workflows to advisory and decision-making processes (or to learning and improvement processes)
 2. Coordination mechanism for evidence-related requests and responses
 3. Designated evidence-methods experts and role clarity with respect to subject-matter experts and expectations regarding citizen engagement in evidence-related work
 4. Agreed definitions and standards by evidence product or process type
 5. Internal-support mechanism (e.g., inventory of internally produced or commissioned evidence products, inventory of key external evidence sources, coordination mechanism for other needed evidence inputs, evidence-related community of practice)
 6. Governance mechanism (e.g., evidence-related priorities, tools, standards, and learning and improvement commitments)
- External evidence-related networking mechanisms (across Canada and globally)

Assessment focus (forms of evidence and types of information)	Rating	Justification
Forms of domestic evidence		
Data analytics (3.1)		
Modeling (3.2)		
Evaluation (3.3)		
Behavioural / implementation research (3.4)		
Qualitative insights (3.5)		
Contextualized evidence synthesis (3.6)		
Technology assessment / cost-effectiveness analysis (3.7)		
Guidance (3.8)		
Forms of global evidence		
Evidence synthesis, ideally living (3.9)		
Emerging evidence (3.10)		
Other types of information		
Jurisdictional (or environmental) scan (3.11)		
Horizon scan (3.12)		
Key-informant interviews summary (3.13)		
Deliberative processes summary (3.14)		
Complementary ways of knowing		
Lived experiences summary (3.15)		
Indigenous ways of knowing summary (3.16)		

Domain 4: Assessment of how evidence synthesis is used in the production of other forms of evidence

Assessment criteria	Rating	Justification
Across forms of evidence being produced		
Understand the rationale for, and have the capacity and time for, considering one or more evidence syntheses as an input in producing other forms of evidence (4.1)		
Know where to start to find one or more evidence syntheses for use in producing other forms of evidence (4.2)		
Know how to commission one or more evidence syntheses for use in producing other forms of evidence (4.3)		
By form of evidence being produced		
Use evidence syntheses in designing an approach to and to complement data analytics (4.4)		
Use evidence syntheses in undertaking modeling (4.5)		
Use evidence syntheses in designing and reporting on an evaluation (4.6)		
Use evidence syntheses in planning behavioural / implementation research (4.7)		
Use evidence syntheses in generating qualitative insights (4.8)		
Use evidence syntheses in producing a contextualized evidence synthesis (4.9)		
Use evidence syntheses in producing a technology assessment / cost-effectiveness analysis (4.10)		
Use evidence syntheses in preparing guidance (4.11)		
In eliciting other types of information		
• Deliberative processes (4.12)		

The legends for the ratings are provided above.

Legend for domains 1, 2 and 4	Meets criterion (or most aspects of the criterion) most of the time in all parts of the organization (5)
	Meets criterion (or most aspects of the criterion) most of the time in most parts of the organization (4)
	Meets criterion (or most aspects of the criterion) most of time in some parts of the organization (3)
	Meets criterion (or some aspects of the criterion) at some times in some parts of the organization (2)
	Does not meet the assessment criterion (1)

Legend for domain 3	Meets most criteria most of the time in all parts of the organization (5)
	Meets most criteria most of the time in most parts of the organization (4)
	Meets most criteria most of time in some parts of the organization (3)
	Meets some criteria at some times in some parts of the organization (2)
	Meets no or few assessment criteria (1)