

STRATEGIC TRAINING EVALUATION

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
MEASURING PROGRAM IMPACT



DR. JACQUELINE ORTIZ

Version 1.0 — Published September 20, 2025
Dr. Ortiz Global Training & Development, LLC

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	4
Chapter 2: Mapping the Landscape of Training Program Evaluation	7
Chapter 3: Measuring Impact Through Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model	10
Chapter 4: Measuring Impact Through Phillips ROI Methodology	13
Chapter 5: Measuring Impact Through Brinkerhoff's Success Case Method	16
Chapter 6: Strategic Training Evaluation Toolkit	19
Chapter 7: Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them	22
Chapter 8: Final Thoughts & Call to Action	25

A Note from Dr. Ortiz Global Training & Development

At Dr. Ortiz Global Training & Development, we are dedicated to equipping individuals and organizations with knowledge and strategies that spark insight, encourage reflection, and drive meaningful transformation for lasting impact. This eBook is offered freely as part of that mission. To honor both your journey and our shared responsibility, we ask that you review the following terms of use.

Disclaimer

This eBook is © 2025 Dr. Ortiz Global Training & Development, LLC and is provided free of charge through www.DrOrtizTraining.com. All rights reserved.

By downloading or using this resource, you agree to the following:

- **Purpose:** This content is intended for **educational and informational purposes only**. It does not constitute professional advice or establish a client, consulting, or services relationship with Dr. Ortiz Global Training & Development, LLC.
- **Accuracy & Citations:** While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and proper citation, **no guarantees are made** regarding results, applicability, or completeness.
- **References & Trademarks:** Mentions of products, organizations, or trademarks are for illustrative purposes only and **do not imply endorsement**.
- **Usage Rights:** This eBook may **not be sold, altered, or redistributed** without written permission.
- **Contact:** For permissions or inquiries, please reach out to: **info@DrOrtizTraining.com**

Strategic Training Evaluation – A Practical Guide to Measuring Program Impact

By Dr. Jacqueline Ortiz

About This eBook

This eBook offers a foundational guide to the art and science of training evaluation. Drawing from decades of experience, I've curated essential strategies, frameworks, and real-world insights to help practitioners elevate evaluation from a procedural task into a process that informs decisions, demonstrates value, and strengthens long-term improvement.

Strategic Training Evaluation: A Practical Guide is designed for facilitators, program managers, and organizational leaders seeking to measure what matters and elevate the impact of their training efforts. Blending the rigor of evaluation theory with practical application, this guide explores what it truly takes to assess and amplify learning in today's performance-driven environment.

Strategic Training Evaluation: A Practical Guide to Measuring Program Impact is a practical guide for evaluating the effectiveness of training programs. It offers proven frameworks, practical tools, and strategies for improving learning outcomes and ensuring that training drives meaningful results. This resource empowers organizations to align training initiatives with performance goals and maximize return on investment.

Authored by Dr. Jacqueline Ortiz—an accomplished leader with over four decades of distinguished service to the United States Army—this resource reflects a career of directing enterprise-level initiatives, including the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command Initial Military Training Leadership School and national cadre development programs spanning 48 sites across 25 states.

Supported by a Doctorate in Global Training & Development, a Master's in Curriculum & Instruction, and a Bachelor's in Human Resource Development, Dr. Ortiz integrates scholarly research with lived leadership experience to deliver an evidence-based framework that is both practical and visionary, empowering those entrusted with developing the next generation of leaders.

Whether you're developing, executing, or refining programs for aspiring leaders or senior executives, this eBook offers a foundational approach to connecting evaluation theory with real-world application—transforming training into a catalyst for continued growth and measurable organizational impact.



Chapter 1: Introduction

“Investing in Training Means Measuring More Than Attendance—It Means Tracking Transformation”.

In today’s performance-driven landscape, training without evaluation is like navigating without a map or GPS. You may be moving, but you won’t know if you’re headed in the right direction.

Strategic Training Evaluation: A Practical Guide to Measuring Program Impact is designed to help learning and development professionals, program managers, and trainers move beyond attendance sheets and post-session smiley faces. It provides a clear, actionable framework for measuring what truly matters: **how training affects behavior, performance, and organizational outcomes.**

This guide bridges the gap between theory and practice by offering tools, techniques, and real-world insights grounded in decades of experience designing and evaluating training programs at scale—including enterprise-level military, government, and civilian initiatives. Drawing from established models such as Kirkpatrick’s Four Levels, the Phillips Return of Investment (ROI) Methodology, and the American Evaluation Association (AEA) guiding principles, this book equips you to measure training with precision and purpose.

At its core, training evaluation is not about proving value. It’s about **improving value**. When done strategically, it becomes a decision-making tool, a quality assurance mechanism, and a critical feedback loop that drives continuous improvement.

Whether you're evaluating a one-hour microlearning session or a multi-phase leadership development program, this eBook will help you:

- Identify the right data to collect
- Use evaluation to inform training design and delivery
- Demonstrate alignment with business or mission outcomes
- Communicate findings in a way that drives action

This journey begins with a shift in mindset: from viewing evaluation as an afterthought to embracing it as a core part of the training lifecycle. If you’ve ever asked, “Did this training really work?”—you’re in the right place...Let’s start by measuring what matters.

Key Objectives of This eBook

This eBook is designed as a **practical starting point** for anyone responsible for evaluating training—whether you're a trainer, instructional designer, HR professional, or team leader. By the end of this guide, you will be able to:

1. **Recognize Why Training Evaluation Matters**

Understand the purpose of evaluation and how it supports better learning, accountability, and results across your organization.

2. **Learn the Basics of Evaluation Models**

Get introduced to foundational models such as Kirkpatrick’s Four Levels and other practical frameworks used to assess training effectiveness.

3. **Connect Learning Objectives to Measurable Outcomes**

Discover how to link what your training is trying to achieve with what you actually evaluate—so you can tell if it worked.

4. **Choose Simple, Effective Evaluation Methods**

Learn how to gather meaningful data using easy-to-apply tools like surveys, quizzes, observation checklists, interviews, and feedback forms.

5. **Use Evaluation to Improve Your Training**

Use what you learn from participants and results to improve future sessions, adjust your content, and strengthen your delivery.

6. **Build Confidence in Reporting and Sharing Results**

Learn how to summarize findings in clear, actionable ways that help your team, leaders, and stakeholders understand the value of your efforts.

7. **Start Building a Culture of Continuous Improvement**

Use evaluation not just to “check a box,” but to make your training better over time—for both the learners and the organization.

Why This Matters

Training is an investment—but without evaluation, there’s no way to know whether that investment is paying off.

Too often, training success is measured by how many people showed up or how satisfied they felt. While these metrics are easy to collect, they don’t tell the whole story. Did participants actually learn? Are they applying what they learned on the job? Has it improved performance or outcomes?

This matters because organizations rely on training to solve real problems—**improving leadership, closing skill gaps, supporting cultural change, and driving measurable results**. If we don’t evaluate our programs strategically, we risk spending time and resources on efforts that look good on the surface but fail to produce lasting impact.

Evaluation is more than a report—it’s a learning process in itself. It helps us understand what’s working, what’s not, and what to do next. It equips trainers and organizations to make informed decisions, demonstrate accountability, and continuously improve learning experiences.

When evaluation is embedded into the training life cycle, we don’t just prove the value of what we deliver, but we **increase** the value of what we deliver.

This foundational guide empowers you to move beyond delivering training—to building a culture of learning accountability and impact—with clarity, confidence, and purpose.

What You'll Gain

This eBook is more than a foundational guide—whether you're just beginning to explore evaluation or looking to refine your current approach, this resource will walk you through the essential steps to make training evaluation meaningful, manageable, and mission-driven.

You'll gain:

- A clear understanding of **what training evaluation is—and what it isn't**
- Familiarity with **foundational models** like Kirkpatrick's Four Levels and how to use them
- Practical tips for choosing the **right data to collect** and how to gather it without overwhelming your learners
- Templates, tools, and examples you can adapt to **real-world programs**
- Guidance on how to **interpret results** and translate them into actionable feedback
- Confidence to report outcomes to your stakeholders in a way that supports **accountability and improvement**

Most importantly, you'll gain the mindset and methods needed to ensure your training efforts don't just check a box—but drive real impact.

Chapter 2: Mapping the Landscape of Training Program Evaluation

“An Introduction to Models, Frameworks, and Why They Matter”

In the world of training and development, designing excellent instruction is only part of the equation. Equally important is knowing whether the training worked, how well it met its intended outcomes, and what impact it had on individuals and the organization. For that reason, training program evaluation has become a cornerstone of intentional leader development and organizational learning.

From the late 1950s through the early 2000s, multiple frameworks—such as Kirkpatrick’s Four Levels (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006), Phillips’ Return on Investment (ROI) (Phillips, 1997), Brinkerhoff’s Success Case Method (Brinkerhoff, 2003), and Stufflebeam’s CIPP Model (Stufflebeam, 2003)—emerged to help learning professionals assess and improve their programs. While each model approaches evaluation differently, they all serve a common purpose: to make learning **measurable**, **meaningful**, and **mission aligned**. Recent advances in data analytics and adaptive evaluation methods have built on these foundations, providing more accurate and flexible approaches to measuring training impact in dynamic and rapidly evolving contexts.

This chapter provides an overview of the most widely used training evaluation models. It is not intended as a deep dive—but rather as a **map** of the tools and approaches you can draw from as you strengthen your evaluation strategy. Subsequent chapters provide a practical review of widely used evaluation frameworks, focusing on the Kirkpatrick Model, Phillips ROI Method, Brinkerhoff’s Success Case Method, and the AEA Standards (American Evaluation Association, 2018).

Overview of Major Evaluation Models

The table below introduces eight well-established models or frameworks. Each has its own focus area and ideal use case.

Table 2.1 – Overview of Training Program Evaluation Models

Model / Framework	Focus	Common Use Cases
Kirkpatrick Four Levels	Reaction, Learning, Behavior, Results	Leader development, corporate training, military schools
Phillips ROI Model	Adds Level 5: Return on Investment	Executive-level reporting, cost justification
Kaufman’s Five Levels	Inputs, Processes, Acquisition, Application, Societal Outcomes	Systems-based programs, government agencies
CIRO Model	Context, Input, Reaction, Outcome	Strategic planning and after-action reviews
Brinkerhoff’s Success Case Method	Focuses on successful outcomes and case studies	Qualitative storytelling, pilot programs

Model / Framework	Focus	Common Use Cases
Anderson's Model of Learning Evaluation	Evaluates alignment between learning and strategic goals	Corporate L&D departments, HR
AEA Evaluation Standards	Utility, Feasibility, Propriety, Accuracy	Formal evaluations, ethical practice, stakeholder trust
Logic Model	Visual flow from Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes	Grant programs, training proposals, nonprofit evaluation

Strategic Selection: Choosing the Right Model

No one model fits every situation. Your choice should be guided by several key factors:

- **What is your evaluation goal?** (e.g., ROI, learning outcomes, ethical accountability)
- **Who are your stakeholders?** (e.g., training teams, HR, senior leadership)
- **What kind of data do you need?** (quantitative, qualitative, financial, performance-based)
- **How mature is your evaluation process?** (Are you starting with basics or optimizing an advanced system?)

Each model offers different strengths. For example:

- Use **Kirkpatrick** when measuring the effectiveness of leadership development or behavior change.
- Use **Phillips ROI** when needing to prove fiscal return on training investments.
- Use **AEA Standards** when ensuring evaluation credibility, fairness, and ethical soundness.
- Use **Logic Models** when designing or visualizing complex training programs from start to finish.

How This Chapter Supports You

This chapter introduces the language and lens that support a purposeful exploration of training evaluation. By understanding what models exist, you'll be better prepared to:

- Communicate with stakeholders
- Choose the right framework for your needs
- Build layered evaluation strategies
- Avoid common pitfalls such as over-reliance on attendance numbers or post-course satisfaction surveys

In the next several chapters, we'll examine the most practical and widely used models—starting with the **Kirkpatrick Model**, which serves as the foundation for many evaluation systems in both public and private sectors.

Looking Ahead

This chapter provided a foundation in established evaluation approaches, highlighting practical options to support effective planning. Chapter 3 builds on this foundation by examining the Kirkpatrick Four Levels of Evaluation, a model that remains influential and continues to evolve across training contexts.

Chapter 3: Measuring Impact Through Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model

“From Reactions to Results: Building Evidence That Training Works”

Although Dr. Donald L. Kirkpatrick developed his namesake evaluation model in 1959, the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model remains a proven and viable training evaluation framework today. This four-level training evaluation framework measures both learning outcomes and organizational impact. It is widely used in corporate, academic, and military environments for assessing the effectiveness of training programs.

Why Use the Kirkpatrick Model?

Organizations use the Kirkpatrick Model (Kirkpatrick & Kirpatrick, 2009) to:

- Align training efforts with strategic objectives
- Measure learner progress and engagement at multiple levels
- Demonstrate the return on investment (ROI) of training
- Guide continuous improvement of learning systems
- Foster accountability across instructors, learners, and supervisors

It is especially effective for programs where leadership, performance, and mission readiness are essential.

Applying the Kirkpatrick’s Model: Suggested Steps and Timelines

Step	Action	Recommended Timeline
Step 1	Define Clear Training Goals Aligned With Organizational Needs	2–4 Weeks Before Training Design Begins
Step 2	Design Evaluation Tools For All Four Levels	2–3 Weeks Prior To Program Launch
Step 3	Deliver the Training Using Instructional Best Practices	Program Duration (1 Day To 12 Weeks)
Step 4	Conduct Evaluation At Each Level (See Below)	Ongoing Per Level
Step 5	Analyze and Report Findings	Within 2–4 Weeks Post-Training
Step 6	Refine Training Based On Data (Continuous Improvement Loop)	Quarterly or Post-Cycle (Every 3–6 Months)

Key Steps in Applying Kirkpatrick's Four Levels

Each of these steps corresponds to one or more of Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Evaluation, which together form the foundation for analyzing training impact (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). The following section summarizes each level and provides recommended timelines for implementation.

Level 1 – Reaction (Immediate Evaluation)

Goal: Gauge participant satisfaction and initial impressions.

Activities	Timeline
End-of-course surveys, Likert scales, interviews	Day of training or immediately after
Faculty observations, check-on-learning prompts	Real-time during training
Informal group feedback	Final 15–30 minutes of session

Timeline: Immediate (0–24 hours)

Purpose: Used to adjust content delivery, environment, and facilitation quality quickly.

Level 2 – Learning (Short-Term Knowledge and Skill Assessment)

Goal: Measure knowledge, skills, and attitude changes.

Activities	Timeline
Pre- and post-tests	First and last day of training
Quizzes or practical exercises	Throughout training program
Skill demonstrations, projects, or group activities	Final week or session

Timeline: During training and immediately post-training (0–2 weeks)

Purpose: Used to validate instructional design and learner engagement.

Level 3 – Behavior (Transfer of Learning to the Workplace)

Goal: Determine if learning is applied on the job.

Activities	Timeline
Supervisor feedback and interviews	30–60 days post-training
Observation checklists or peer reviews	45–90 days post-training
Follow-up coaching or reinforcement activities	2–6 months post-training

Timeline: Short to mid-term (30–90 days post-training)

Purpose: Used to assess real-world impact and alignment with job performance.

Level 4 – Results (Organizational Outcomes)

Goal: Evaluate the training's impact on business or mission outcomes.

Activities	Timeline
Compare KPIs before and after training	90–180 days post-training
ROI calculations and performance reviews	3–6 months post-training
Data analysis on retention, productivity, safety, or morale	6–12 months post-training

Timeline: Mid to long-term (3–12 months post-training)

Purpose: Used to demonstrate strategic value and influence leadership buy-in.

Summary: Evaluation Planning Snapshot

Evaluation Level	Focus Area	Key Methods	Timeline
Level 1 – Reaction	Learner Satisfaction	Surveys, Observations, Critiques	Day 0–1
Level 2 – Learning	Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes	Tests, Exercises, Projects	Day 1–14
Level 3 – Behavior	On-The-Job Application	Interviews, Observations	30–90 Days
Level 4 – Results	Business Impact	Metrics Analysis, Reports	90–365 Days

Tips for Success

- Define outcomes early: Align evaluation questions with training goals.
- Engage stakeholders: Involve supervisors, HR, and leadership from the start.
- Integrate evaluation into design: Plan assessments before delivery begins.
- Use data for improvement: Let results guide the next training cycle.

Use in Military and Public Sector Training

In military and public safety contexts, this model helps justify training budgets, enhance leader development, and support operational readiness. It can also complement existing doctrinal assessments and integrate with performance reviews, unit readiness evaluations, and post-mission debriefs (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2009).

Looking Ahead

As organizations become increasingly cost-conscious and results-driven, the Phillips ROI Method has shifted from a desirable addition to an essential expectation.

Chapter 4 introduces the **Phillips ROI Method**, showing how it extends evaluation to the financial level by quantifying benefits relative to costs and outlining approaches to isolating impact.

Chapter 4: Measuring Impact Through Phillips ROI Methodology

“Turning Evaluation Into a Business Case for Strategic Investment”

Overview

In results-driven organizations, stakeholders expect evidence that goes beyond satisfaction surveys and anecdotal reports. They want to see a return on investment. The Phillips ROI Methodology, developed by Dr. Jack Phillips (1997), builds upon the Kirkpatrick Four Levels of Evaluation by adding a fifth level: Return on Investment (ROI). This methodology enables training professionals to quantify the financial impact of learning and development initiatives, making a compelling case for continued investment in human capital.

How does the Phillips ROI Methodology extend and strengthen traditional training evaluation models?

The Phillips ROI Methodology builds on existing evaluation frameworks (such as Kirkpatrick’s Four Levels) by adding a fifth level—Return on Investment—which seeks to place monetary value on learning outcomes relative to costs. Key dimensions of the method, such as benefit-cost analysis, isolating effects of training, and linking outcomes to strategic business metrics, are explained in *“Measuring ROI: The Process, Current Issues, and Trends”* (Phillips, 2007).

Kirkpatrick & Phillips Training Evaluation Model (Mehale et al., 2021):

- Level 1: Reaction and Planned Action – How participants feel about the training.
- Level 2: Learning – What participants gained in terms of knowledge or skills.
- Level 3: Application and Implementation – How participants apply learning on the job.
- Level 4: Business Impact – What measurable changes occurred as a result of training (e.g., productivity, quality, turnover).
- Level 5: Return on Investment (ROI) – A monetary comparison of program benefits versus total costs.

Why Use the Phillips Evaluation Model?

While Kirkpatrick is powerful for showing behavior change and impact, Phillips fills a critical gap by monetizing the results. This is especially useful for:

- Gaining executive buy-in for future training investments.
- Demonstrating cost-effectiveness of large-scale programs.
- Linking training to strategic business outcomes.

“ROI has become a mainstream process like Six Sigma and Project Management” (Phillips, 2007, p. 42).

Key Steps in Applying the Phillips ROI Framework

The Phillips ROI Methodology provides a structured way to measure the value of training and development programs. The following outline summarizes the key steps, adapted from Phillips & Phillips (2016), to show how organizations can connect learning outcomes to business impact.

Step 1: Align Program Objectives with Business Goals

Begin with end goals in mind—whether it's reducing turnover, increasing sales, or improving safety. Align learning outcomes to strategic metrics.

Step 2: Collect Data at Multiple Levels

Gather data at all five levels. Levels 1–4 mirror Kirkpatrick; Level 5 requires careful data capture on both benefits and costs.

Step 3: Isolate the Effects of Training

Use techniques such as control groups, trend analysis, or participant estimation to isolate the training's impact from other influences.

Step 4: Convert Data to Monetary Values

Translate improvements into dollars (e.g., reduced errors, increased efficiency). Use standard formulas or organizational benchmarks.

Step 5: Calculate the ROI


Apply the ROI formula: **ROI (%) = [(Net Program Benefits) ÷ Program Costs] × 100**

Where: **Net Program Benefits = Total Monetary Benefits – Total Training Costs**

Example: A leadership training program results in a 15% increase in team productivity, which your organization estimates to be worth **\$100,000 in increased output** annually. The total cost to develop and deliver the training was **\$25,000**.

Calculation:

- Net Program Benefits = \$100,000 – \$25,000 = **\$75,000**
- ROI = (\$75,000 ÷ \$25,000) × 100 = **300%**

 **Interpretation:** This calculation indicates that each dollar invested in the training generated a three-dollar return for the organization.

Key Considerations:

- ROI should be **calculated only after Level 4 (Results) evaluation** has confirmed measurable outcomes.
- **Isolating the effects of training** (from other factors) is crucial for credibility. This is often done through:

- Control groups
- Trend analysis
- Supervisor estimates
- Participant self-assessments with attribution questions
- ROI is typically used for **executive reporting, budget justification, and high-stakes programs** (e.g., leadership pipelines, compliance, or enterprise-wide learning initiatives).

Step 6: Report Findings

Present results to stakeholders in a clear and compelling way, including intangible benefits (e.g., morale, collaboration) when appropriate.

Benefits and Limitations of the Phillips Model

Benefits	Limitations
Provides quantitative data to justify training.	Requires time and expertise to collect and analyze data.
Helps prioritize cost-effective initiatives.	May rely on assumptions or estimates for monetizing benefits.
Promotes accountability at all levels of training.	ROI focus can overlook qualitative outcomes that are meaningful but hard to monetize.

Best Practices for Implementation

- Involve stakeholders early in identifying KPIs.
- Use pilot programs to test ROI models before scaling.
- Triangulate data with qualitative feedback to enrich interpretation.
- Apply ROI selectively—for high-stakes, high-cost programs where measurement is most warranted.

Looking Ahead

Chapter 4 introduced the Phillips ROI Method, demonstrating how organizations can connect evaluation to the financial level by quantifying benefits relative to costs. The model emphasizes the importance of isolating training's contribution to results and presenting outcomes that inform executive decision-making. While ROI is most effective for high-stakes programs, it provides a structured process for showing the business value of learning.

Chapter 5 turns to **Brinkerhoff's Success Case Method**, which emphasizes qualitative depth and real-world stories to complement quantitative approaches like ROI.

Chapter 5: Measuring Impact Through Brinkerhoff's Success Case Method (SCM)

"Isolating What Works: Driving Better Decisions Through Evidence"

Overview

Traditional training evaluations often focus on averages—mean satisfaction scores, test performance, or behavior change across a group. However, this can obscure a deeper story: *what's working, for whom, and why?* Dr. Robert O. Brinkerhoff's Success Case Method (SCM) was designed to address this challenge by identifying the most and least successful cases of training implementation (Brinkerhoff, 2003). SCM blends quantitative and qualitative methods to deliver rich, actionable insights that drive improvement and maximize impact.

What Is the Success Case Method?

The Success Case Method is a targeted, high-impact evaluation approach that focuses on:

1. Identifying extreme cases of success and failure.
2. Investigating the factors contributing to those outcomes.
3. Telling the "story behind the numbers" to inform program improvements.

Unlike general surveys that average everyone's feedback, the SCM focuses on specific individuals or groups who either succeeded greatly or struggled after training. This makes it a powerful way to uncover what helps or hinders real-world application and results.

Why Use SCM in Training Evaluation?

The SCM is an evaluation approach designed to capture compelling evidence of how training works in real settings by combining survey data with in-depth case analysis. It identifies individuals who achieved significant results, as well as those who did not, and then investigates the factors that explain these differences. This blend of quantitative screening and qualitative inquiry helps organizations link training to observable outcomes and generate actionable insights for improvement (Lee et al., 2017). SCM is a great option when you need meaningful results, but don't have the time, budget, or need to evaluate everyone. It works especially well when:

- You want quick, credible insights without surveying every participant.
- You care about how the training is being used on the job.
- You need real stories of success to share with leaders or stakeholders.
- You're working with limited resources, and a full ROI analysis or large-scale study isn't realistic.

Key Steps in Applying the Success Case Method

Building on this foundation, the following key steps outline how the Success Case Method can be systematically applied to evaluate training outcomes and uncover what drives—or hinders—real performance results (Lee et al., 2017).

Step 1: Define the Focus

Clearly define what “success” looks like for the training program. This includes targeted performance outcomes and observable results (e.g., faster task completion, improved customer service, reduced errors).

Step 2: Conduct a Brief Survey

Administer a short questionnaire to all participants to identify individuals who report high or low levels of application and benefit from the training.

Step 3: Select Cases for In-Depth Study

From the survey results, select a small, purposeful sample of success cases (and optionally, non-success cases). These individuals will be interviewed to uncover what influenced their outcomes.

Step 4: Conduct Success Case Interviews

Use structured interviews to explore:

- What participants learned
- How they applied it
- What results occurred
- What factors supported or hindered success

Step 5: Document and Share Stories

Summarize findings into detailed case narratives or vignettes. Highlight themes, patterns, and actionable recommendations.

Benefits of the Success Case Method

Strength	Why It Matters
Cost-Effective	Requires Less Data Collection Than Full-Scale Evaluations.
Rapid Turnaround	It Can Be Conducted In Weeks, Not Months.
Real-World Relevance	Reveals How Training Translates To Performance.
Insightful Storytelling	Captures The Human Side Of Training Impact.
Supports Continuous Improvement	Helps Refine Content, Delivery, And Implementation Conditions.

Limitations and Considerations

Limitation	Mitigation Strategy
Not Statistically Generalizable	Use SCM As A Complement To Broader Evaluations (E.G., Surveys, Kirkpatrick).
Requires Skilled Interviewers	Train Evaluators In Qualitative Interviewing Techniques.
Relies On Self-Reporting	Cross-Reference With Performance Data Or Supervisor Input When Possible.

Best Practices for Implementing SCM

- Use SCM in tandem with Kirkpatrick Levels 1–3 for a comprehensive view.
- Select participants strategically to reflect diverse roles, locations, and contexts.
- Share stories anonymously but vividly to preserve confidentiality and credibility.
- Frame findings around conditions for success, not just outcomes.

Practical Guidance for Determining When the Success Case Method Is the Right Fit

Scenario	Evaluation Approach
You need to calculate financial return	Phillips ROI
You want to understand group trends	Kirkpatrick Levels
You want quick, focused, real-world impact stories	Brinkerhoff SCM
You must ensure ethical, culturally responsive evaluation	AEA Standards

Looking Ahead

Chapter 5 presented Brinkerhoff’s Success Case Method, which highlights the importance of identifying the most and least successful outcomes of training and examining the factors that shape them. This approach complements models such as Kirkpatrick and ROI by adding qualitative depth and practical storytelling.

Chapter 6 focuses on the American Evaluation Association’s Evaluation Standards, which provide a structured framework for conducting evaluations that are ethical, credible, and impactful.

Chapter 6: Standards for Strategic Training Evaluation

“Aligned with the American Evaluation Association (AEA) Standards for Program Evaluation”

Introduction

This guide is designed to help trainers, instructional designers, and learning professionals plan, conduct, and communicate evaluations that uphold the American Evaluation Association’s (2018) principles of quality, ethics, and utility. It offers a structured, standards-based framework that emphasizes practical application and encourages the use of methods such as worksheets, templates, and reflective activities to strengthen evaluation practice. While these resources are not included in this guide, readers are encouraged to adapt or develop such tools to support implementation. By applying the principles **presented in this guide**, professionals can strengthen their evaluations to be not only technically sound but also ethical, meaningful, and impactful.

The guide reflects the five AEA Standards for Program Evaluation:

1. **Utility** – Serve the information needs of intended users.
2. **Feasibility** – Be realistic, cost-effective, and context-appropriate.
3. **Propriety** – Ensure ethical conduct and protect participant rights.
4. **Accuracy** – Convey technically adequate information.
5. **Evaluation Accountability** – Document procedures and ensure transparency.

Guide Overview

Tool / Resource	AEA Standard Focus	Purpose
Stakeholder Needs Map	Utility	Identify Primary Users And Clarify How Results Will Be Used
Evaluation Purpose & Use Worksheet	Utility & Feasibility	Clarify Goals, Scope, And Decision-Making Needs
Ethical Checklist & Informed Consent Template	Propriety	Ensure Ethical Participation, Confidentiality, And Voluntary Input
Evaluation Design Matrix	Accuracy	Align Training Goals With Measurable Indicators And Data Sources
Data Collection Tracker	Accuracy & Accountability	Monitor What Data Is Collected, How, And By Whom
Evidence Quality Checklist	Accuracy	Assess Reliability And Validity Of Qualitative/Quantitative Data
Evaluation Reporting Template	Utility & Accountability	Summarize Findings With Actionable Recommendations
Reflective Debrief Template	Evaluation Accountability	Document Lessons Learned, Evaluator Performance, And Improvements

Key Steps in Applying the AEA Standards

This section outlines practical considerations for applying the AEA Standards for Program Evaluation in training contexts. Rather than prescribing a fixed process or offering worksheets, the components below highlight areas to reflect on when planning, conducting, and communicating evaluations. By using these steps as guidance, trainers and instructional designers can align their evaluation practices with the AEA's principles of quality, ethics, and utility (American Evaluation Association, 2018).

1. Clarify Stakeholder Needs

- Identify key users of the evaluation (e.g., training manager, HR, learners).
- Define what they need to know.
- Clarify intended actions (e.g., improve design, justify funding).

2. Define the Evaluation's Purpose & Use

- Ask what decisions the evaluation is meant to support.
- Reflect on what the evaluation should confirm, improve or clarify.
- What constraints do we need to consider (budget, time, access)?

3. Address Ethical Considerations

- Ensure participant rights, privacy, and transparency are respected.
- Provide clear explanations about the purpose of the evaluation and voluntary participation.
- Consider how confidentiality and data protection will be maintained.

4. Design the Evaluation Framework

- Connect learning objectives to key evaluation questions
- Identify data sources (e.g., surveys, interviews, observations)
- Determine methods that fit both the purpose and available resources (e.g., Likert scales, pre/post-tests)

5. Plan for Data Collection

- Decide how, when, and by whom data will be gathered.
- Track response rates and monitor for potential gaps.
- Establish measures to protect data throughout the process.

6. Consider Evidence Quality

- Align questions with evaluation goals.
- Use appropriate sampling approaches.
- Incorporate multiple methods where possible to reduce bias and strengthen validity.

7. Report Findings Clearly

- Communicating results in a way stakeholders can understand and use.
- Include key findings, interpretations, and actionable recommendations.
- Link recommendations to potential stakeholder actions or decisions.

8. Reflect on the Evaluation Process

- Consider what worked well and what could be improved.
- Assess how well the AEA principles were upheld.
- Capture lessons learned to strengthen future evaluations.

How to Apply These Steps

1. Integrate evaluation considerations during the initial design phase of training.
2. Collaborate Often – Involve stakeholders and learners throughout the process.
3. Reflect and Adjust – Treat evaluation as iterative rather than a one-time task.
4. Document Clearly – Maintain transparency so the process and findings are credible and replicable.

Chapter 7: Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

“Why Some Training Program Evaluations Fail—and How to Course Correct”

Overview

Training evaluation can be one of the most powerful tools for improving programs and demonstrating value—but only if it’s done thoughtfully and strategically. Many well-intentioned professionals fall into common traps that undermine the purpose and effectiveness of their evaluation efforts.

This chapter explores the most frequent mistakes made in training evaluation and provides practical advice on how to avoid them. Whether you're new to evaluation or simply seeking to strengthen your process, being aware of these pitfalls can save time, improve accuracy, and increase the credibility of your findings.

Pitfall #1: Evaluating Only at the Reaction Level

The Mistake:

Many organizations rely solely on end-of-course surveys that ask participants how they “felt” about the training—without exploring whether they learned, applied, or benefited from it.

How to Avoid It:

Use a multi-level approach. Incorporate measures of learning (quizzes, activities), behavior (observation, self-reporting), and results (performance metrics). Even small steps beyond reaction-level data can provide a clearer picture of impact (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006).

Pitfall #2: Confusing Activity with Impact

The Mistake:

Tracking attendance, hours trained, or number of sessions delivered without measuring whether the training made a difference in performance or outcomes.

How to Avoid It:

Focus on results. Ask: *What should change because of this training?* Then work backward to design evaluation tools that capture that change. Use follow-ups, supervisor feedback, or on-the-job observation when possible (Phillips & Phillips, 2016).

Pitfall #3: Collecting Irrelevant or Excessive Data

The Mistake:

Trying to measure everything leads to survey fatigue, wasted effort, and data that doesn't align with goals.

How to Avoid It:

Be selective. Align your evaluation with the training objectives and intended outcomes. Identify two or three key questions and choose the best tools to answer them. Prioritizing relevant, targeted measures yields more meaningful results than attempting to collect all possible data (Lim, 2025).

Pitfall #4: Lack of Stakeholder Involvement

The Mistake:

Waiting until the end of the program to involve stakeholders often leads to misaligned expectations and missed opportunities to demonstrate relevance.

How to Avoid It:

Engage stakeholders during the planning phase. Ask what success looks like to them and what they would need to see to consider the training effective. Their input can help shape relevant evaluation metrics from the start (Lim, 2025).

Pitfall #5: Reporting Data Without Meaning

The Mistake:

Providing charts, percentages, and numeric data without interpreting what it means or how it connects to business goals.

How to Avoid It:

Tell the story behind the numbers. Use visuals, testimonials, and a clear narrative to explain what the data shows, why it matters, and what actions are recommended. Make results easy to understand for non-technical stakeholders (Brinkerhoff, 2006).

Pitfall #6: Treating Evaluation as an Afterthought

The Mistake:

Planning evaluation at the end of the training cycle limits what you can measure and often leads to superficial results.

How to Avoid It:

Integrate evaluation from the start. Build it into the training design process. Define what success looks like early on so your evaluation tools are ready and relevant when training is delivered (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Lim, 2025).

Pitfall #7: Ignoring Collected Feedback**The Mistake:**

Collecting data—but never analyzing it, sharing it, or using it to improve future training.

How to Avoid It:

Use your results. Share findings with stakeholders, discuss lessons learned, and apply the insights to improve content, delivery methods, or follow-up support. Evaluation is most effective when it operates as an ongoing feedback cycle rather than a procedural requirement (Brinkerhoff, 2006).

Final Thoughts

Avoiding these common pitfalls is less about perfect execution and more about intentional practice. When evaluation goes beyond surface-level reactions, engages stakeholders, and connects findings to meaningful outcomes, it strengthens both the credibility of the results and the value of the training itself. By treating evaluation as a strategic, iterative process rather than a final step, professionals can generate insights that improve learning, demonstrate organizational impact, and uphold the principles of quality and utility emphasized in the evaluation field (American Evaluation Association, 2018 & Lim, 2025).

Chapter 8: Final Thoughts & Call to Action

“Great Training Changes People—But Great Evaluation Proves It and Improves It”

Evaluation begins before training is delivered, shaping design, clarifying delivery, and guiding adjustments that build confidence in outcomes. Effective evaluation proves training doesn’t just feel good—it works.

This guide introduced practical models, tools, and methods for measuring training in ways that are meaningful, manageable, and aligned with real results. As you apply them, keep these principles in mind:

- Evaluation is about **progress**, not perfection.
- You don’t need complex systems, just the right questions and **useful data**.
- Small, consistent adjustments create **lasting impact**.
- Data only matters if it drives **growth** in programs, learners, and organizations.

Your Call to Action: In the next training cycle, select a tool to apply, focus evaluation on the most critical questions, and include stakeholders throughout the process.

Daily News

From foundational models such as Kirkpatrick’s Four Levels (2006), Phillips’ ROI framework (1997), Brinkerhoff’s Success Case Method (2003), and Stufflebeam’s CIPP Model (2003), to the guiding principles of the American Evaluation Association Standards (2018), training evaluation has evolved into both a science and a professional responsibility. By applying these approaches with a focus on utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability, evaluation becomes not just a measure of training, but a strategic driver of meaningful and measurable impact.

References

- American Evaluation Association. (2018). *An evaluation roadmap for a more effective government*.
<https://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=57>
- Brinkerhoff, R. O. (2003). *The success case method: Find out quickly what's working and what's not*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Brinkerhoff, R. O. (2005). The Success Case Method: A Strategic Evaluation Approach to Increasing the Value and Effect of Training. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 7(1), 86-101.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422304272172>
- Brinkerhoff, R. O. (2006). *Telling Training's Story: Evaluation Made Simple, Credible, and Effective*. Berrett-Koehler.
- Kirkpatrick, D. L., & Kirkpatrick, J. D. (2006). *Evaluating training programs: The four levels* (3rd ed.). Berrett-Koehler.
- Kirkpatrick, J. D., & Kirkpatrick, W. K. (2009). *Implementing the Four Levels: A Practical Guide for Effective Evaluation of Training Programs*. Berrett-Koehler.
- Lee, C., Jeon, D., Kim, W., & Lee, J. (2017). Evaluating training for new government officials: A case study using the Success Case Method. *Public Personnel Management*, 46(4), 359–376.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0091026017721571>
- Lim, W. M. (2025). *What Is Qualitative Research? An Overview and Guidelines*. SAGE Open, 15.
- Mehale, K. D., Govender, C. M., & Mabaso, C. M. (2021). Maximising training evaluation for employee performance improvement. *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v19i0.1473>
- Phillips, J. J. (1997). *Return on investment in training and performance improvement programs*. Gulf Publishing.
- Phillips, J. J. (2007). Measuring ROI Fact, Fad, or Fantasy? *T+D*, 61(4), 42–46.
- Phillips, J. J. (2007). *Measuring ROI: The process, current issues, and trends*. ROI Institute.
- Phillips, J. J., & Phillips, P. P. (2016). *The value of learning: How organizations capture value and ROI and translate it into support, improvement, and funds*. Wiley.
- Stufflebeam, D. L. (2003). *The CIPP model for evaluation*. In T. Kellaghan & D. L. Stufflebeam (Eds.), *International handbook of educational evaluation* (pp. 31–62). Kluwer Academic Publishers.