

# Planning for and Implementing Effective World Language Program Evaluation

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# What is the AELRC?

The Assessment and Evaluation Language Resource Center (AELRC) is one of 16 Title VI Language Resource Centers (LRCs) in the U.S. The AELRC is directed collaboratively by researchers at Georgetown University, ACTFL, and The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL).



# Outcomes for this webinar

In today's session you will:

- Gain foundational knowledge about the purposes and uses of language program evaluation
- Learn about methods for collecting data about the effectiveness of language programs
- Discuss considerations for analyzing and reporting results
- Consider next steps for language program evaluations in your own contexts

# Evaluation Overview

# What is language program evaluation (LPE)?

A process of asking questions about our language programs, gathering evidence and data about these questions, answering our questions, making changes and improvements, and then asking more questions

# Internal & External

- May be initiated internally and driven by programmatic goals or decisions
  - Often focus on supporting practical questions within the program
- May be required by an external group, such as a funding agency, accreditation group, or institutional administration
  - Externally mandated program evaluations for accreditation or program review purposes are common in post-secondary contexts

# Who conducts language program evaluations?

- Typically led and managed by small teams
- Can include those within the program (e.g., administrators, program leaders) and/or external evaluators

Today's webinar focuses on principles for practical and useful language program evaluations that can be applied across different contexts and evaluation purposes



# Background & Current Approaches

- History of LPE in the field of language education and applied linguistics (see Alderson & Beretta, 1992; Lynch, 1996; Norris, 2016)
- Prevalence of utilization-focused approaches (Patton & Campbell-Patton, 2021; Norris, 2009, 2016) that aligns decisions and evaluation processes to user needs



# Quick Poll...

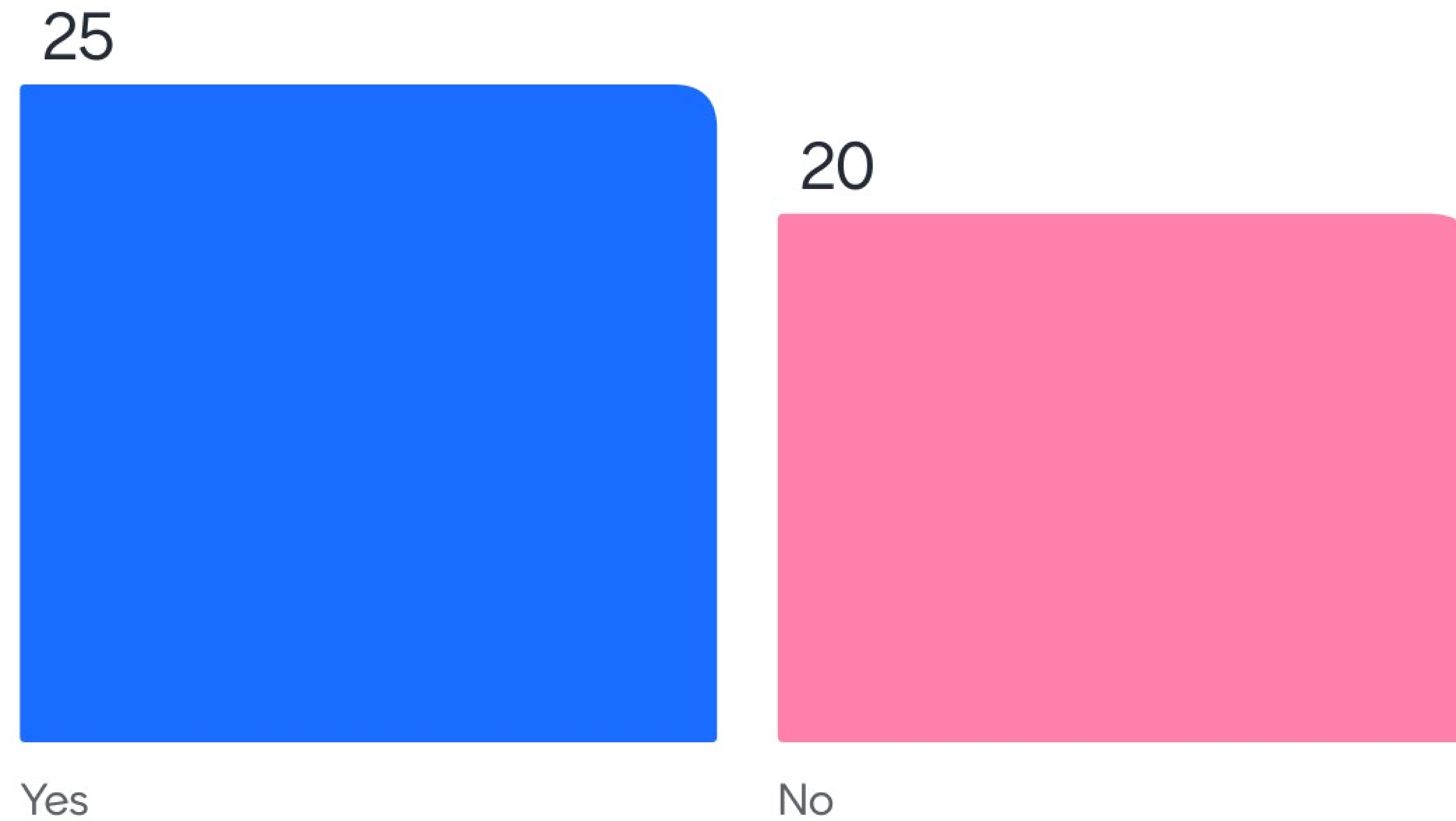


I have been a part of a language program evaluation in the past

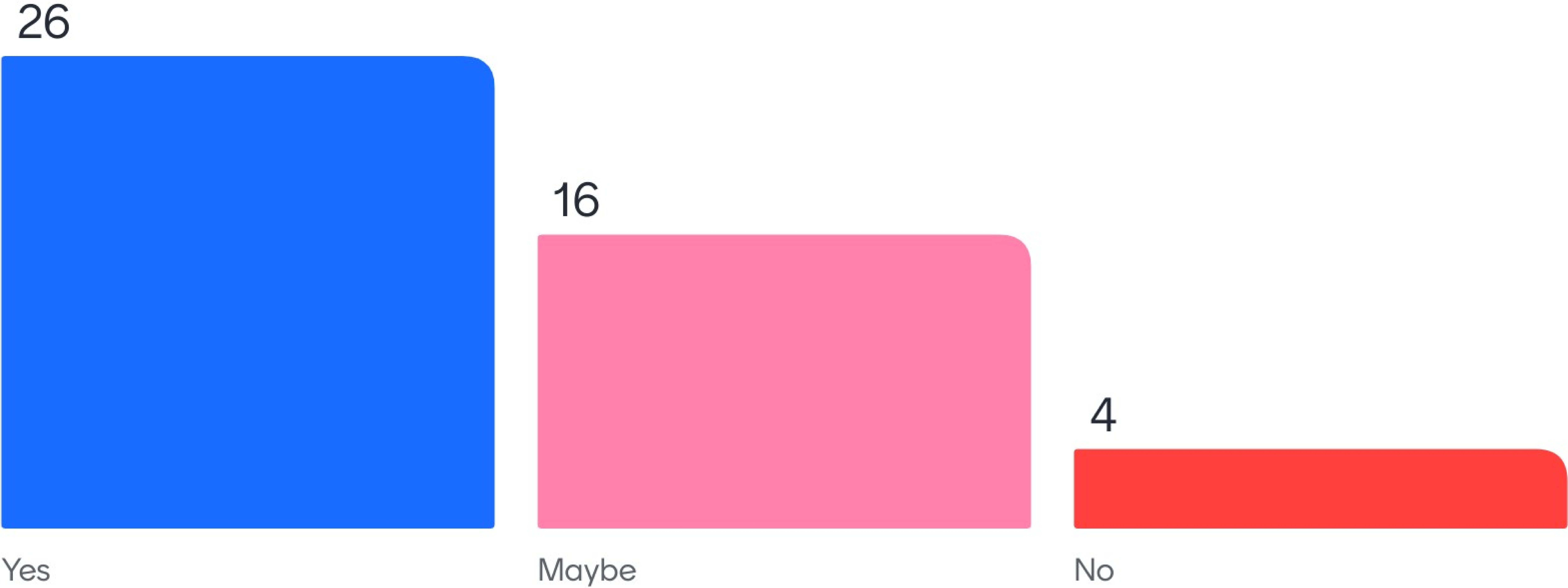
I want to conduct an evaluation of my program in the future

How would you rate your understanding of language program evaluation?

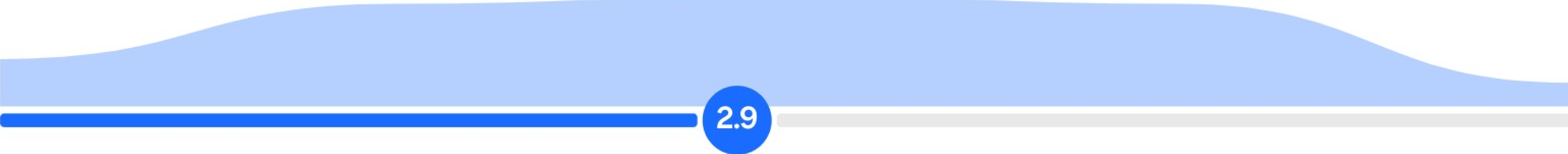
1. I have been a part of language program evaluation in the past.



2. I want to conduct an evaluation of my program in the future.



### 3. How would you rate your understanding of language program evaluation?



Don't know anything about it

I'm an expert!

# What BIG QUESTIONS do you have about your program?

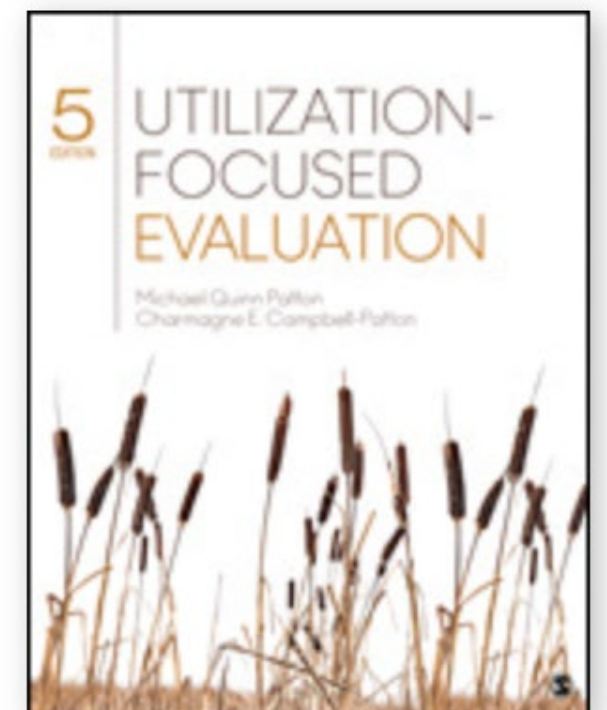
Are students who exit our program reaching the right level? And how do I know what that should be?

Why don't students continue taking classes after the introductory level? Can we change this?

# What is (language) program evaluation?

“the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and results of programs to make judgments about the program, improve or further develop program effectiveness, inform decisions about future programming, and/or increase understanding”

Patton (2008), p.23







# What are the purposes for program evaluation?

Purposes are the reasons for why evaluation is happening

- Formative
- Summative
- Process-oriented

What about evaluations that are imposed through external requirements?

# What are the uses of a program evaluation?

Uses are specific actions that intended users will take as a result of the evaluation findings

–Should be feasible and concrete

–Examples:

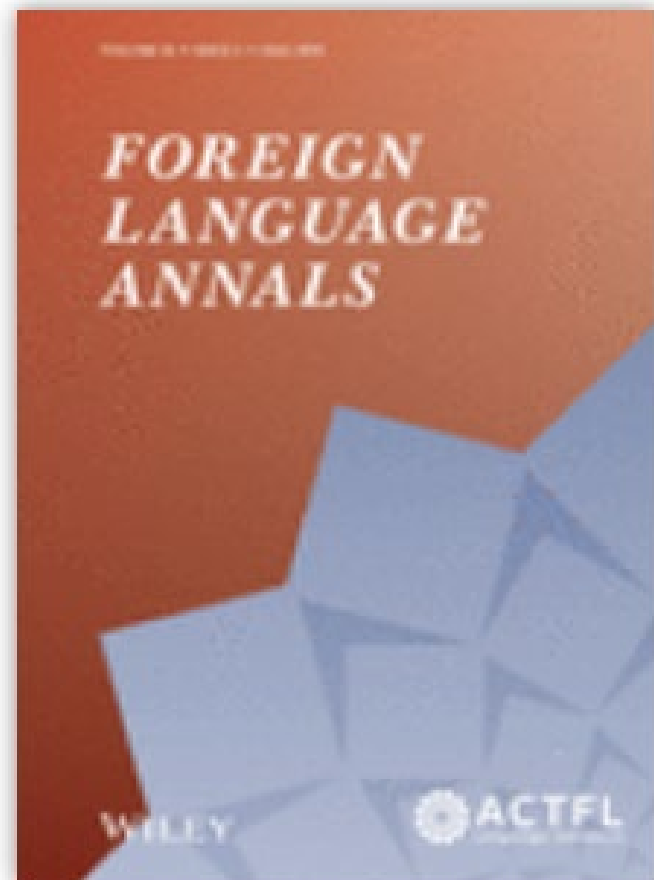
- “Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program so we can revise our curriculum”
- “Understand students’ needs and instructors’ expectations so we can recommend changes”
- “Increase awareness and engagement among stakeholders”

# Why is language program evaluation important?

- Answer the “big” questions
- Support the decision-making process
- Determine effectiveness of program practices & support improvements
- Sustain long-term program health
- Increase community buy-in for the program

# What research says about K-12 educators and program evaluation

Malone, Pineault, & Stevenson (2024). **A National Survey of K-12 World Language Program Evaluation**. *Foreign Language Annals*.



# Example Evaluation

# Example Program Evaluation: Arlington Public Schools

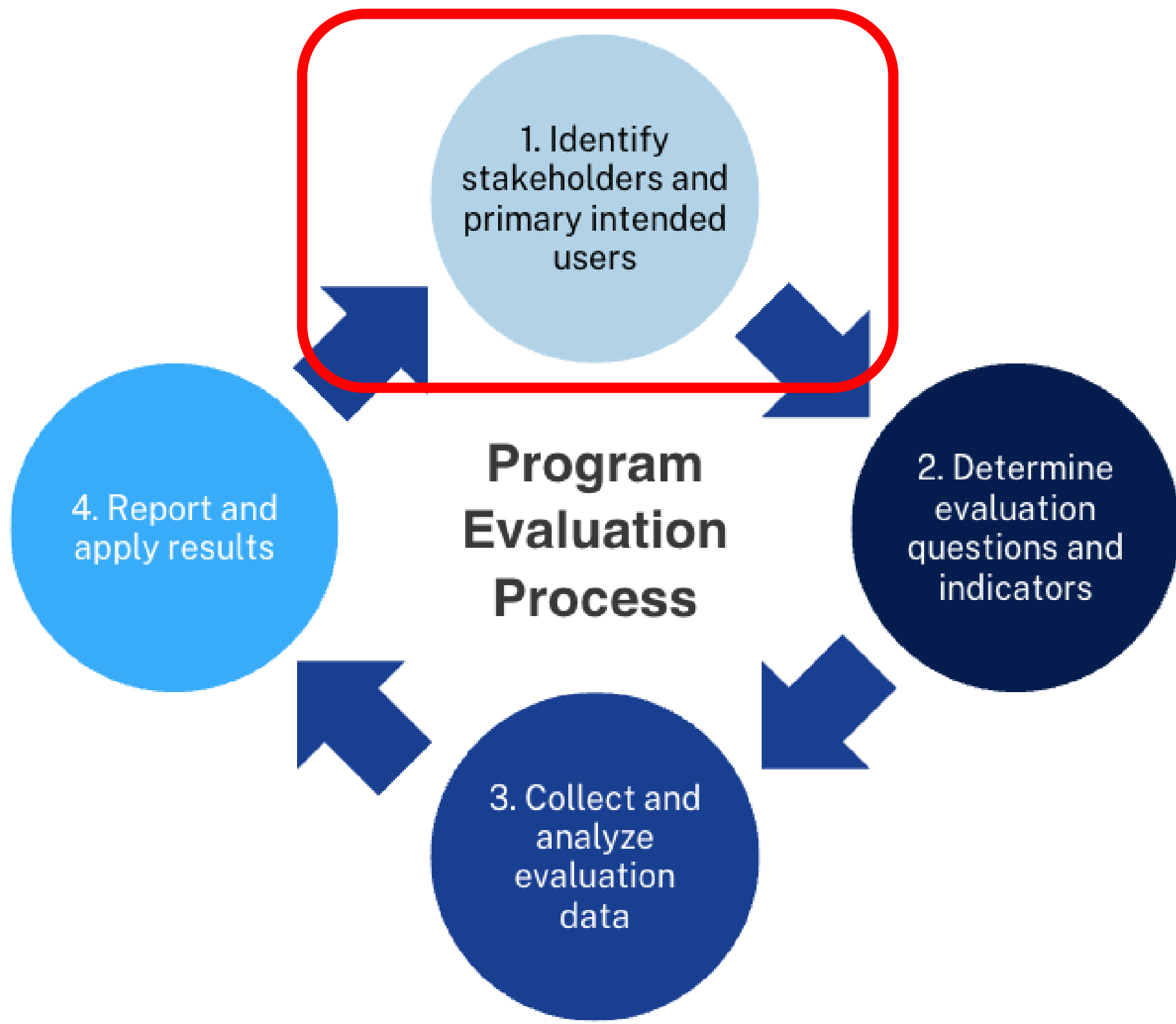


Context	Elementary and secondary world language programs in Arlington County public school district; 2015-2020
Evaluation Approach	Utilization-focused approach
Questions	How effectively was the world languages program implemented? What were the outcomes for the targeted populations? How satisfied were the users and clients?
Methods	Classroom observations, teacher and school counselor focus groups, parent survey, enrollment data, test scores

Q&A



# The Evaluation Process: Stakeholders & Evaluation Questions



# Stakeholders

Stakeholders: individuals or groups that will take an interest in or be affected by evaluation findings

- Students
- Teachers
- Administrators
- Parents
- Community leaders
- Funders

# Primary Intended Users

Primary intended users: Smaller group of individuals who will be responsible for taking actions on the basis of results

- Often administrators or educators who are in a position to make programmatic decisions
- Ideally bring a perspective reflecting program diversity and have a demonstrated interest in and commitment to using evaluation findings

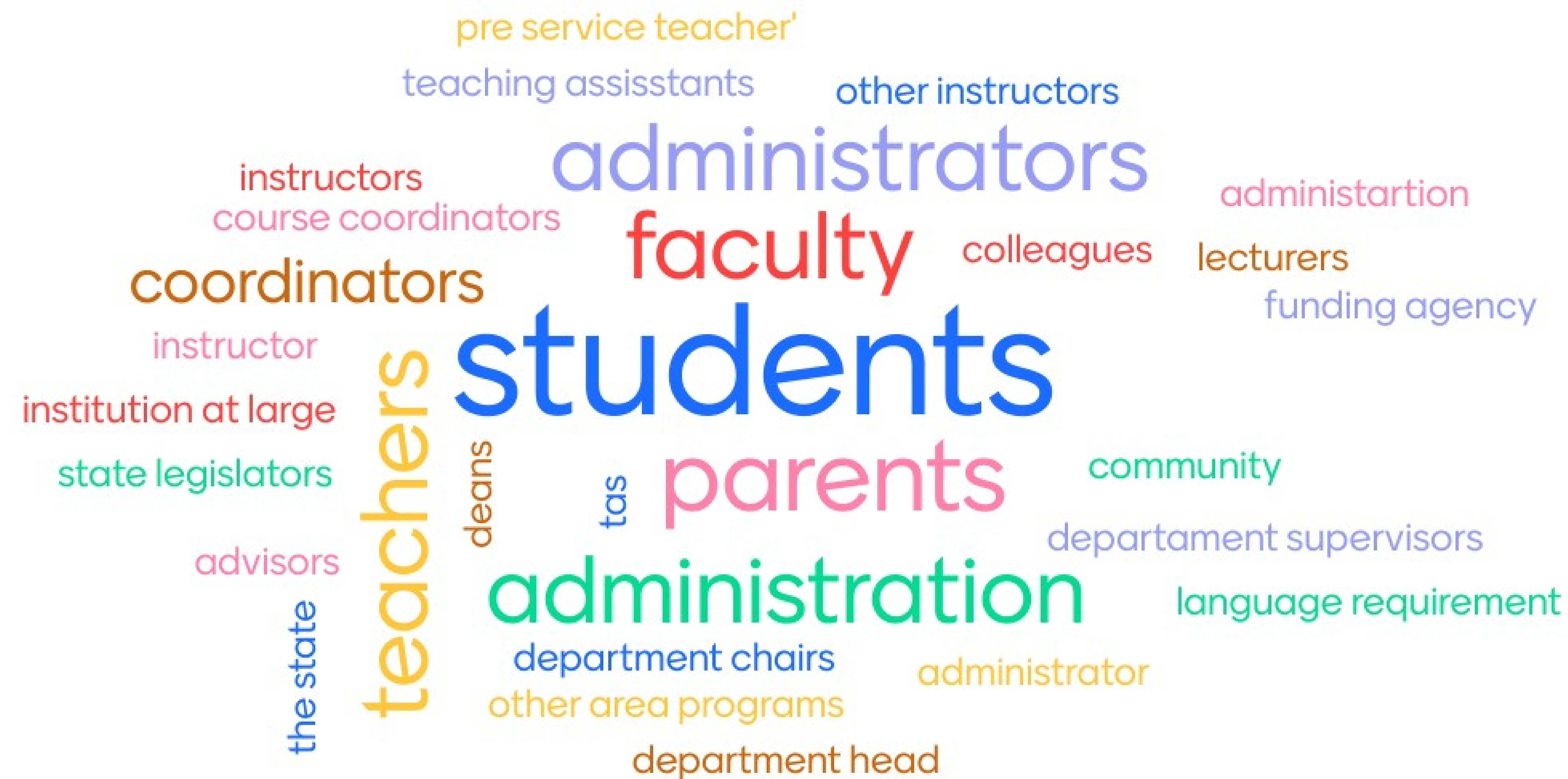
# Quick Poll...

Think about your own (possible) language program evaluation:

- Who are the stakeholders?
- Who are the primary intended users?

# In your evaluation context, who are the stakeholders?

68 responses



# In your evaluation context, who are the primary intended users?

65 responses

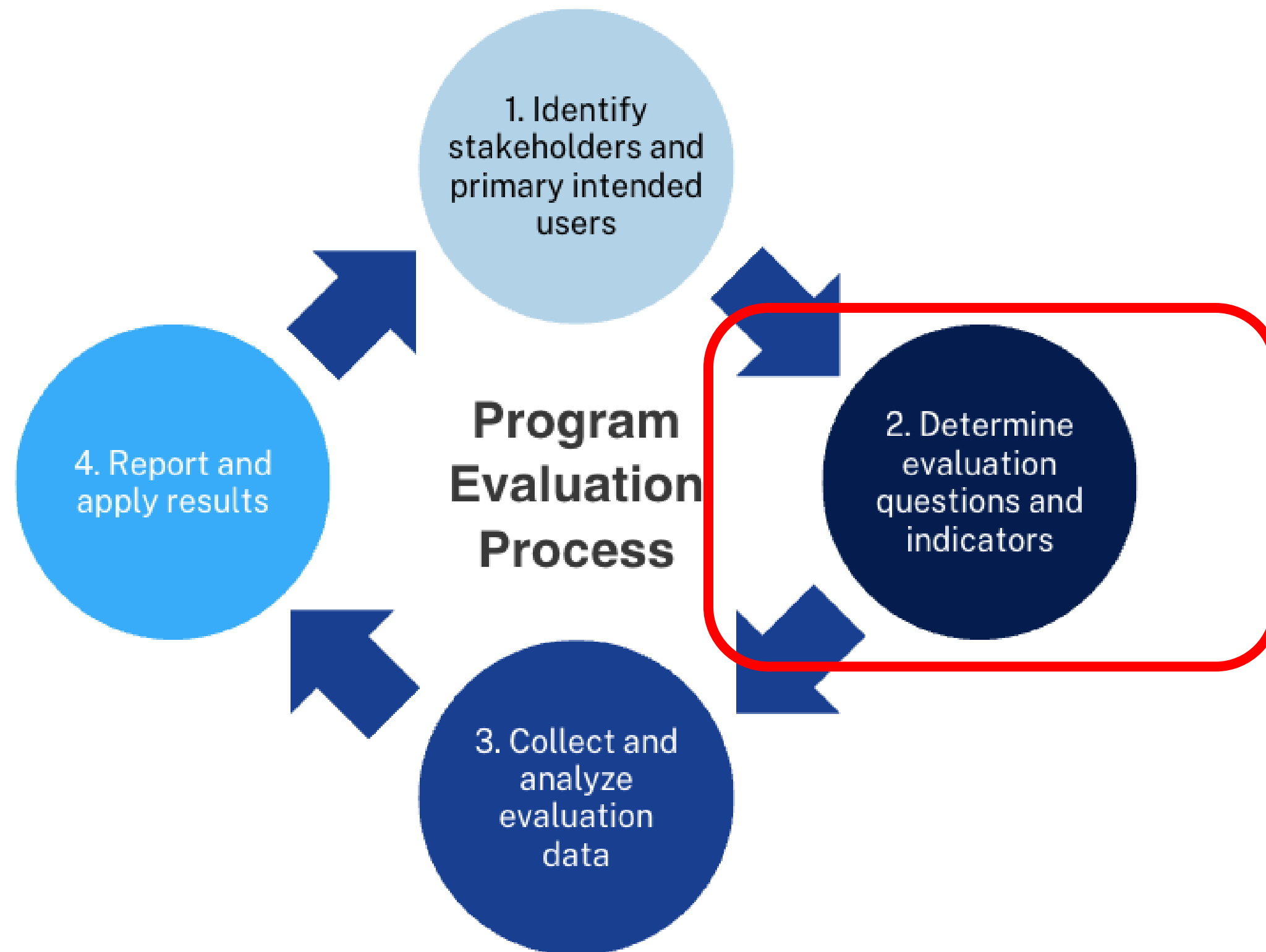




# How do I involve stakeholders throughout the evaluation?

- Include stakeholders or group representatives in initial discussions and planning to help determine or prioritize evaluation uses
- Provide input on evaluation questions
- Contribute to data collection and interpretation
- Participate in planning for use of results





# Primary Intended Users Determine Evaluation Purposes

- Discuss potential purposes with primary intended users
- Ask the following questions:
  - What are the reasons for conducting the evaluation?
  - What immediate concerns do we have about the program?
  - What do we want or hope to achieve with the evaluation?
  - What are our short-term goals for the program?
  - What are our long-term goals for the program?

# How do I determine my uses for program evaluation?

- Work with primary intended users to determine the concrete actions or decisions that will be taken using evaluation findings
- Consider the following prompts:
  - “We need to do this evaluation in order to \_\_\_\_\_.”
    - Identify strengths and weaknesses of...
    - Find out how well...
    - Help teachers/students to improve...
    - Make changes to...
    - Better understand...
    - Demonstrate/promote quality of...

# What are program evaluation questions?

- Evaluation questions:
  - are the focus of the evaluation expressed as a question
  - guide the evaluation toward a clearly conceived goal
  - enable a rational process of data collection, interpretation, reporting

# Sample Evaluation Questions

- How satisfied are parents with the program?
- To what extent is the program improving students' language skills?
- How well are new teacher orientation practices helping new teachers prepare for their duties and role?

# Good evaluation questions...

- ✓ Address program elements that stakeholders care about
- ✓ Address issues for which there is no immediate or obvious answer
- ✓ Are clear, specific, straightforward, and comprehensible
- ✓ Are 'researchable' or answerable
- ✓ Are feasible and practical for your program
- ✓ Are stated in non-threatening ways

# What are program evaluation indicators?

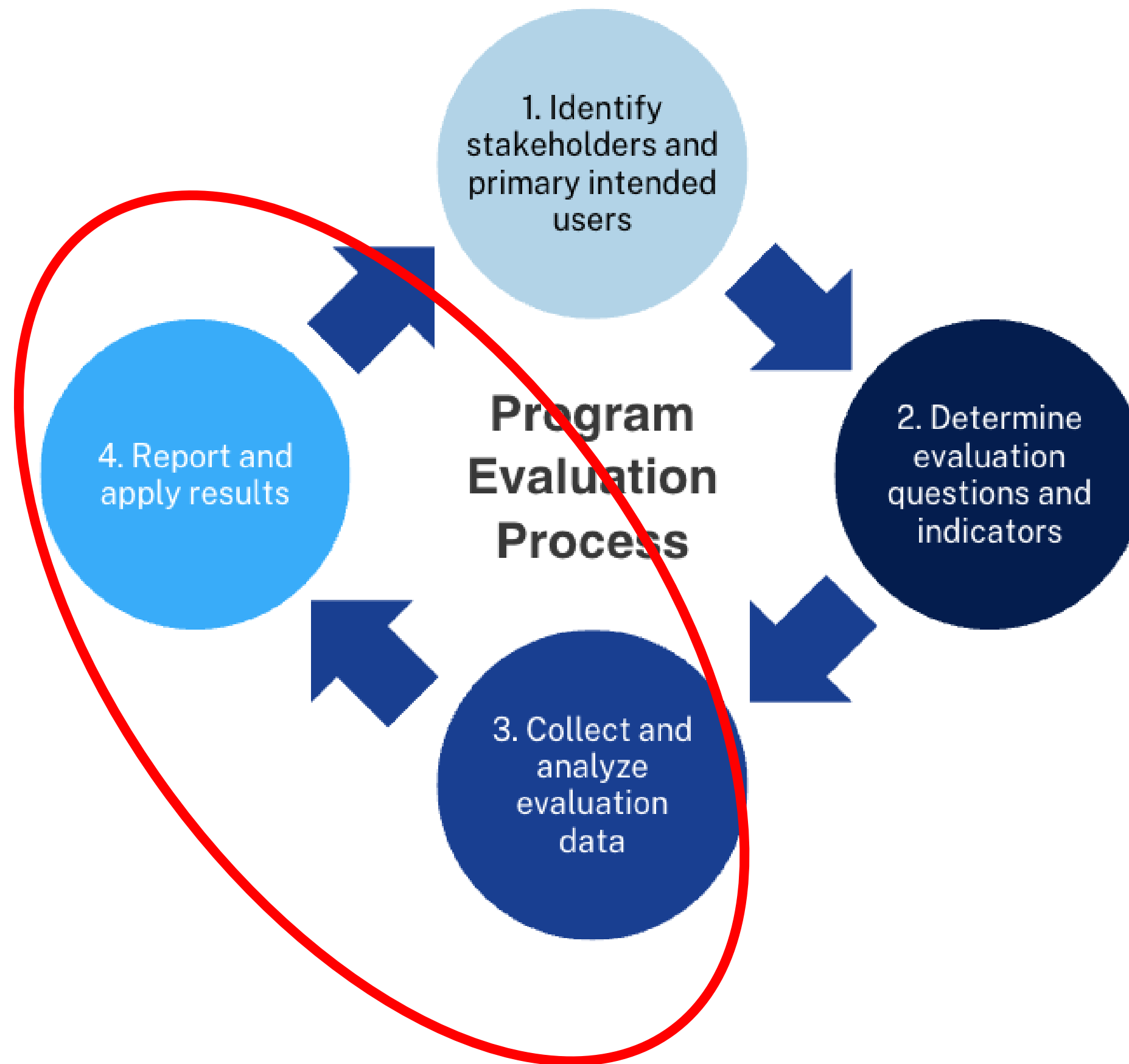
- Specific and observable data or evidence that align to evaluation questions
  - Ask “how will we know” in conjunction with an evaluation question
  - Express what will be measured, captured, or described
  - Help to select relevant and meaningful data collection methods



Example Evaluation Questions	Example Indicators
To what extent are exiting students meeting the program's language proficiency targets?	Proficiency test scores Student portfolio data Student self-assessment results
To what extent does the program prepare students to use the language in professional contexts?	Post-program job-placement data Student perceptions of preparedness
What factors are contributing to instructor turnover?	Instructor turnover rates Instructor concerns
Do people who would benefit from the program know about it?	Social media engagement Enrollment targets and growth

Q&A

# The Evaluation Process: Collecting & Analyzing Data and Reporting



# What type of data could answer this question?

Example Evaluation Question	Example Indicator
What factors are contributing to instructor turnover?	Instructor turnover rates <b>Instructor concerns</b>

# Sources of evaluation data

- **Questionnaires (Surveys)**
- **Focus groups**
- **Interviews**
- **Assessments & Tests**
- **Observations**
- **Document analysis**

# Example: Arlington Public Schools



Focus Groups	
Use of focus groups	Investigate school counselors' perspectives and guidance provided to students about world language classes
People	Seven middle and high school guidance counselors
Methods	90-minute focus group conducted in January 2020
Focus group topics	How language learning factors into course selection Counselors' perceptions of their influence on students' language learning choices Counselors' suggestions for the World Languages program

# Characteristics of data collection methods

	Questionnaires	Focus Groups	Interviews
Data collection and analysis is quick and efficient	✓		
Useful for gathering quotes	✓	✓	✓
Respondents remain anonymous	✓		
Probing, clarifying responses		✓	✓
Can be used for post-hoc follow-up	✓		✓
Response rate impacts results/generalizability	✓		
Numerical, quantitative data provided	✓		
Findings can be generalized to populations	✓		



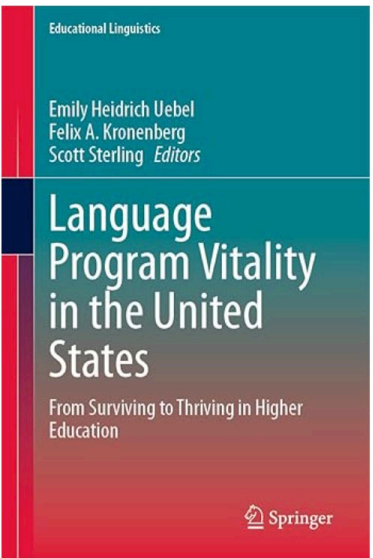
# Characteristics of data collection methods

	Questionnaires	Focus Groups	Interviews
Information obtained easily from remote respondents	✓		
Interaction, co-constructed knowledge		✓	✓
Offers in-depth, detailed, rich information		✓	✓
Helpful for identifying patterns across individuals	✓		
Information is free from interlocutor bias, influence	✓		
Potentially face-threatening		✓	✓
Requires “people skills”		✓	✓
Data can be collected from numerous respondents	✓	✓	

# Analyzing & Reporting Results

- Focus on your evaluation questions
- Minimize any threats to data accuracy and trustworthiness
- Use familiar, accessible, and practical tools for analysis
- Collaborate with primary intended users on interpretation
- Plan for disseminating your results (reports, memos, presentations) in ways that communicate respect and allow for feedback
- Goal is to make decisions and improvements and support ongoing useful evaluation

# Example Program Evaluation: University of Arizona



Context	Portuguese language program at the University of Arizona
Evaluation Approach	Utilization-focused approach
Purpose	To evaluate the Portuguese language program under the backdrop of declining national enrollments in Portuguese classes
Methods	Analysis of institutional enrollment analytics + four rounds of student satisfaction questionnaires

## Results and Program Changes

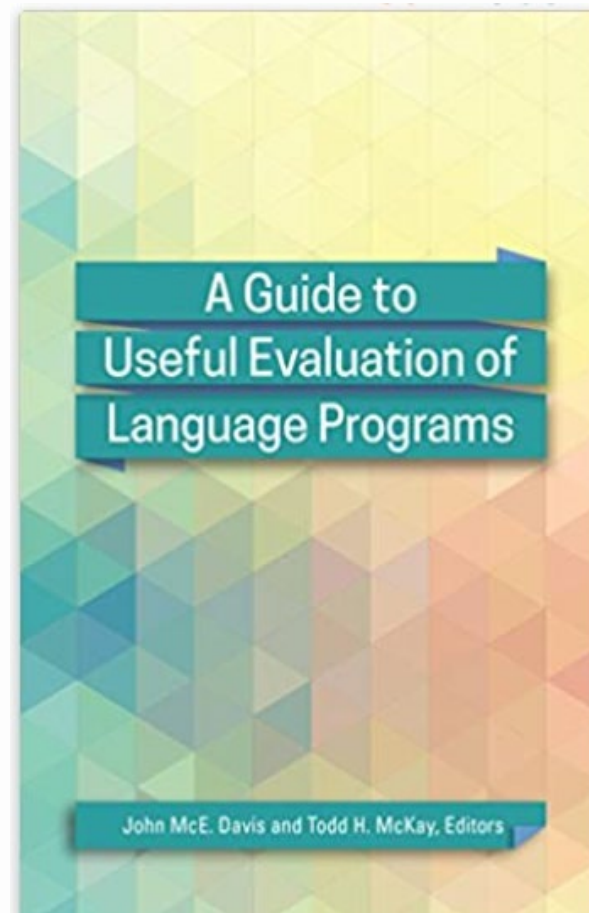
Program Composition	Spanish heritage speakers composed more than half of the program; program health did not rely on Spanish majors
Pedagogical Applications	Instruction became more focused on students' linguistic profiles and career interests; addition of literacy-oriented activities
Recruitment Strategies	Created online/hybrid courses to accommodate scheduling difficulties; expanded Portuguese for Specific Purposes offerings
Departmental Accountability	Keeping track of student satisfaction rates is crucial to maintaining enrollments, especially for LCTLs

# Conclusion & Recommendations

- It's ok to start small!
- Evaluation is an iterative, cyclical process
- Be people-centered: keep stakeholders and users at the heart of each step
- Commit to transparency and follow-through with excellent communication
- Develop evaluation mindset in programs
- Publish and share data when you can



# Where can you learn more?



Davis, J. M., & McKay, T. H. (Eds.). (2018). *A guide to useful evaluation of language programs*. Georgetown University Press.



Free resources on the AELRC website  
<https://aelrc.georgetown.edu/resources/evaluation/>



Handout from today's talk

Q&A

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