

CHAPTER 8

Designing and Framing TIER

Evaluation is a lot like herding cats, but the cats are all afraid you'll judge them, so they hide under beds, even more than they usually do. Now to decide which cats to pursue . . .

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

In this chapter, we challenge you to think about who the “right” team is, who the “right” funders are, and who the “right” partners could be for your study projects. We assert that how you frame your evaluation or research study is essential for paving the way to include trauma-informed practices. Then, we encourage you to frame your study in values that will inform your choice of method/approach. We emphasize grounding your design in values that allow you, your team, and your community to make sound and appropriate judgments about a program’s effectiveness and integrity. Although we don’t tell you how to convene and frame a study, we give you many things to think about and hope that you and all involved will carefully consider and discuss the issues we bring up here.

Power and the Purse: Issues of Power, Oppression, and Funding

An evaluator or researcher might think that being trauma-informed centers on how we collect data. Indeed, as we have noted before, the bulk of evaluation literature focuses on doing no harm during the data collection process to avoid retraumatizing participants. However, the implications of researchers’ actions with traumatized individuals and communities must be considered from day one. In fact, the

design of a study often starts even before an evaluator is hired. That is, the funders often dictate the terms and set out some of the basic parameters of study design in their request for proposals, demonstrating their power of influence. The language they use and the constraints they set often dictate real design limits, which may or may not be beneficial to traumatized groups of stakeholders. Considering that most funders, especially governments, are not even remotely trauma-informed, limiting our ability to integrate TIER is more common than not.

While some of us believe we are indeed agents of good and that we promote equity in and through the work we do, these sentiments may cover a darker reality. Beyond just the practicalities of avoiding discomfort for participants, clients, and researchers alike, there are deep issues of (in)justice when it comes to the economic, corporate, and neocolonial interests at the heart of the nonprofit industrial complex. It is a system from which many evaluators benefit, perhaps not always to the benefit of the people we would ultimately hope to serve. Market forces are commanding, and these forces shape our values, not the other way around, unfortunately.

The nonprofit industrial complex is powerful and drives evaluators to operate in ways that may ultimately not be ethical or beneficial to those whom we would like to think we are serving. Ahrens and colleagues (2023) assert that the neoliberalism that has defined the current sources of funding in evaluation leads to the definition of success as it aligns with the goals and objectives of the funders and at the hands of researchers who are usually not well versed in the context they seek to evaluate. They assert that this leads to the increased marginalization of communities through deficit-based conceptions held by evaluators and their clients. Unfortunately, the meritocratic system of awarding evaluation contracts is tilted toward the already powerful, systematically placing the flow of capital in the hands of the already privileged. This also influences whose values are used to deliver judgment and determines whose evaluative questions are asked.

We have been guilty of participating in these systems ourselves. Both of us have been involved in evaluations where midway through the project, we walk into a hornets' nest of bad blood between traumatized communities and the questionable motives of funders and grantees.

Having lived in this tension, our experience has led us to believe that these are dynamics that every evaluator should take seriously and that striving for *power with* is critical to a trauma-informed approach. While we all would like to live in a world where evaluation would be a simple comparison of weighing the "plain facts" or determining "what the data say," that is simply not the case. An evaluator being insensitive to the dynamics of historical and ongoing trauma can do real harm to the claims, outcomes, and conclusions of an evaluation—and to its participants. A perception that the evaluator or funder is out of tune or out of step with the community can lead even the most methodologically air-tight of projects to come to naught, all because of optics. We cannot wish these dynamics away.

Trauma-Informed Convening

So, what is an evaluator or researcher to do? We hope that we can offer some practical advice for contracting and convening in at least trauma-neutral ways, and hopefully in ways that promote resilience.

The Right Team for the Job: Confronting Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

The first step in trauma-informed convening must involve serious self-reflection. As we said in Chapter 7, an evaluator or researcher must be open to the possibility that they are not the right person for the job. We developed a series of questions in Table 8.1 to help make this determination. We know that there are no easy answers and no simple heuristic. However, when one honestly considers these questions, one should be able to arrive at a wise and reasonable answer. Any one of your answers may or may not be disqualifying, but we challenge you to have honest conversations with yourself and others to determine whether you are the right person for the job before the start of any contract. However, if your answers indeed lead you to step back from a proposal or contract, the appropriate remedy may be instead to expand your team to include more people with a wider range of backgrounds and experience, including lived experience. Take a look at Table 8.1, reflecting on our questions and our possible considerations. We hope that these will guide your decision making and leave you with greater confidence in yourself and your team's ability to handle your evaluation participants with care.

As you can see, there are a dizzying number of factors to consider before even starting an evaluation with traumatized groups. As stated before, a reasonable step for rounding out deficiencies in an evaluator's own experiences and perspectives may be in building a well-rounded team. Chapter 6 emphasized that including others from the groups involved can go a long way toward building trust and avoiding pitfalls of mistrust and retraumatization.

However, we have some concerns. First, there is a history of those in power gaining access to those with less privilege for exploitative purposes, including **trauma porn** (see Chapter 11). Second, evaluators must guard against the impulse for tokenism, which is the symbolic inclusion of people of a disadvantaged background for the purpose of gaining favor or credibility. Unfortunately, such tokenism can ultimately do more harm than good and cause moral injury to the individuals that we tokenize.

How can we then avoid these problems? What sets tokenism apart from inclusion? We suggest that the answer here is true and meaningful partnership. Shared leadership is different from tokenism in that it offers real decision-making power and agency to our partners. Rather than a symbolic involvement, real partnership involves ceding some control. It may involve some discomfort, knowing that

TABLE 8.1. Reflection Questions before Beginning an Evaluation

Category	Question	Possible considerations
Identity	“What are the dimensions of my identity that may interact with the identities of others involved in this project?”	In most cases, belonging to a particular group will not preclude an evaluator from working on that project. However, one should acknowledge the challenges that may arise and seek to head them off by making sure the team is well balanced to maximize psychological safety for participants. In some cases, identity <i>may</i> be grounds for limiting contact with participants (e.g., a male evaluator with women in a domestic violence shelter). Don't let ego get in the way of sound judgment here.
	“Are there situations in which my identity could cause serious disturbances or discomfort in others?”	
	“Am I a part of a group that represents historical traumas or historical oppression to stakeholders?”	
Internal prejudices, biases, and insecurities	“Do I have unspoken, unconscious, or conscious bias against the groups involved in this project?”	Internal biases are often difficult for us to recognize in ourselves. A frank discussion with a trusted friend, team member, or therapist may help expose and process any biases, recognized or not. Beyond eliminating bias (which may not be entirely possible), one must be ready to graciously accept correction in situations where prejudices may be exposed.
	“Is there a chance I might reveal these prejudices in a damaging/retraumatizing way to the people I'm working with?”	
	“Are there blind spots in my views, experiences, and judgments?”	
Past trauma	“Are there traumas in my own past that I have not addressed?”	Evaluators should do the necessary work to ensure that their own trauma reactions do not put the project in jeopardy. Working with a therapist to process past traumas is a great way to ensure adverse reactions do not hijack interactions with participants. If you are not confident in this, make sure your team can cover your weaknesses.
	“Am I capable of not making my experience and my trauma the center of this project, instead centering the experience of key stakeholders?”	
Training and competence	“Do I have the requisite training and expertise to identify the key issues at hand in this evaluation as it pertains to the historical traumas experienced by the stakeholders?”	There are plenty of resources (including this one!) for building competence in working with traumatized populations. Evaluators may look for online courses in mental health first aid, trauma response identification, and more. And as always, build a good team with diverse skillsets.
Tact and skill	“Even if I have all the right content knowledge, do I have the skills and tact to have sensitive conversations?”	This may not come naturally to everyone. If you don't have a basic level of confidence and comfort, make sure others on your team do.

you may not be calling all the shots anymore. This is the equity-focused trauma-informed approach described in Chapter 6.

We must also balance the considerations of identity with the expertise needed for the study. We do this by finding partners with deep expertise that are also representative of the populations we are working with. Simply including someone on the team because of their identity without regard to their requisite skills is not the answer. We may have to cast a broader net to find true experts, but they are out there for sure! It may also cost us a little more money to do so. But also remember: A person's background and lived experience are also strong contributors to expertise.

The Right Funders for the Job: Avoiding Corporate Reputation Laundering

In addition to thinking about the integrity of the evaluation team, it is also important to vet the funders of the study, as they will have ultimate control over the product, the parameters, and the distribution of the final product. We must ensure that we are partnering with funders who are open to hearing our opinions; willing to engage in trauma-informed evaluation practices (or learn about them if they do not know); and not simply working to save face or engage in **corporate reputation laundering**, the practice of using evaluation or research to improve public perception without genuine commitment to addressing underlying problems or harm. Yes, perhaps if you are a funder reading this, it resonates. But the painful fact is that some research and evaluation is done to “prove” what funders want to show, not what really is—especially when it comes to racial inequities.

Evaluators who allow themselves to become compromised in such a way risk being co-opted, operating as de facto public relations operatives rather than independent evaluators. This undermines both the integrity of the evaluation and its potential to create meaningful change for traumatized communities.

Assessing Funder Integrity

How do we avoid such situations? Below is a list of suggested questions to ask yourself when considering a funder's integrity:

1. What is this funder's history with traumatized populations? If there is a questionable or blatantly negative history with traumatized populations, is there credible evidence that the organization has sufficiently made repairs, or is in the process of such repairs?
2. Is there any evidence of an attempt at **corporate reputation laundering** through evaluation or research?

3. Is there any evidence of internal knowledge of, or at least openness to, trauma-informed evaluation practices?
4. Is there evidence that the funders are willing to accept your influence, or is it their way or the highway?
5. Are the funders on a tight deadline that limits the ability of the evaluator to build real relationships with stakeholders, especially those in the community being studied?

If an organization follows standard evaluation contracting practices without considering these factors, many of these questions will raise red flags for the trauma-informed evaluator. These questions are valuable to consider before deciding whether to respond to a request for proposals. It is encouraging when we see funders who are willing to try innovative methods, allow ample time for community engagement, and share decision-making authority in their evaluation processes.

Systemic Constraints and Bureaucratic Challenges

Beyond individual funder intentions, evaluators often work within bureaucratic systems that can constrain trauma-informed practices in both direct and indirect ways. Indirectly, the pace of funding cycles, political attention spans, and review processes can place significant pressures on evaluators and limit their ability to implement TIER principles effectively. More directly, many governmental and nongovernmental agencies require preestablished evaluation frameworks that may not align with trauma-informed approaches.

For example, evaluators working with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) must employ the Development Assistance Committee Criteria (2019). Many other frameworks are required by various nongovernmental agencies and governmental departments. Although these frameworks are not inherently incompatible with TIER, evaluators need to consider how to adapt and enhance them to meet trauma-informed standards while satisfying institutional requirements.

Advocating for Change

This matters because a funder's priorities and objectives (which often respond to political, social, financial, and other environmental factors) can significantly constrain both the process and outcomes of an evaluation. Just as the slightest difference in a rocket's trajectory at launch can cause it to miss the moon entirely, small compromises in evaluation design can lead to significantly different outcomes for the communities we serve.

We acknowledge that implementing TIER principles requires more resources than traditional evaluation approaches. Building authentic relationships, ensuring adequate compensation, conducting thorough stakeholder engagement, and maintaining trauma-informed practices throughout the evaluation process all demand additional time, funding, and expertise. However, we argue that these upfront investments often prevent costly mistakes, reduce the risk of community backlash that can derail projects, and ultimately lead to more valid and useful findings. The cost of doing evaluation poorly (in terms of wasted resources, damaged relationships, and potential harm to traumatized communities) often far exceeds the additional investment required for trauma-informed practices.

Funders often have much more latitude than they lead evaluators to believe. We should advocate from the outset for adequate time and resources to engage with traumatized populations in respectful and healing ways. This means learning how to have difficult but necessary conversations with those who fund our work. If a funder claims to want an equity-focused study but refuses to allow adequate time for community engagement or funding to appropriately compensate participants, they may simply be checking boxes rather than facilitating genuine change in communities, similar to what many organizations did with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

As trauma-informed evaluators, we have a responsibility to push back against systems and funders that would compromise our ability to do no harm and promote healing in our evaluation practice.

The Right Partners for the Job: Including the Community

As we emphasized in Chapter 6, equity-focused TIER focuses on community engagement and engaging the right stakeholder groups in the right ways. This takes time and money. When considering whom to involve and how, we must consider aspects of adequate compensation, meaningful participation, and safety.

Adequate compensation means that if we are expecting trauma-affected people to give us their thoughts, time, and input, we (and our funders) should be willing to compensate them for it. Some have argued that paying participants, or compensating them with gift cards, could amount to coercion. We think that this is a convenient excuse and that most people would appreciate some gesture of compensation for their time, especially if they have a choice about the kind of compensation they receive.

When Martha interviewed victim/survivors of domestic violence, she and the funder discussed a variety of ways to compensate the women for their time and contributions. They decided to offer them choices of gift cards, some for groceries, some for clothes, and some for whatever they wanted. There are online platforms that make this process easy. The women appreciated being empowered to choose compensation based on what they needed most at the time. Please don't assume that everyone loves Starbucks gift cards.

The Right Approach for the Job: Ensuring Safety

We also need to engage with traumatized stakeholders in a way that is safe, both emotionally and physically. As of late, emotional safety has taken a front seat. Although it is good that people are becoming more aware of trauma and traumatic stress, we are still seeing practices that reinforce avoidance and fragility, which in fact are core PTSD symptoms. When we as communities avoid tough topics or conversations in the name of safety, the message we are sending is twofold: (1) Words can be irreparably damaging and harmful and (2) people who are traumatized are damaged and cannot recover (see our discussion on hypersensitivity/avoidance).

Although they may be coming from a place of good intentions and sensitivity, these limiting beliefs are not trauma-informed. These ideas are effectively disempowering and operate to keep people stuck. So, from our perspective, trauma-informed convening is *not* avoiding difficult conversations or excluding people. If trauma-affected people are not at the table, we risk misunderstanding them and doing more harm. In our experience, safety looks like this:

- Expressing confidence in people's ability to tell tough stories and have hard conversations
- Pushing through and managing our own discomfort when hearing these stories (self-regulating in the moment)
- Creating space for the participants to decide whether to engage in a conversation
- Creating space for participants to give us feedback on how/when/where/in what manner we ask difficult questions
- Communicating and believing in the healing power of sharing

The one caveat we have here is that there may be situations in which sharing one's story, or even being approached, may do real physical harm or cause significant distress to people. Consider the example of people in conflict or war-torn regions, where associating with people from a certain background (e.g., a white American evaluator) could mean very real risk of physical harm or even death (Cohen, 2012). Weiss (2025) points out that situations of ongoing traumatic circumstances, suffering, or extreme power imbalances may also complicate participation for people:

Members of these communities with ongoing suffering and instability may not be receiving sufficient psychosocial support, may be prone to have higher hopes for research, may be likelier to feel like they are at a disadvantaged end of a power differential with the researcher, and may also be burnt out from interviews by other researchers, aid organizations, or journalists. For example, participants in political violence research may hope that the research will draw attention to a conflict or crisis and lead to the end of the conflict or crisis. (p. 10)

Weiss makes clear that evaluators and researchers in such circumstances have a higher bar to meet in terms of providing significant support, such as on-site counseling, if the decision is made to move forward with the study.

Outside of these trying circumstances, we must ask ourselves if our decision to exclude trauma-affected people is truly about our participants' safety or, rather, our own discomfort. If it is the latter, perhaps we are the ones who need to be excluded from the process. In fact, research has demonstrated that participation in evaluation activities can be a very positive experience, even for those who have experienced the very worst of traumas. For instance, Campbell, Adams, Wasco, Ahrens, and Sefl (2010) report that in a study of female rape victims, 88 out of 92 women expressed that participating in the process was positive (p. 69). Weiss (2025), in a scoping review of trauma-affected participants' perception of engaging in research, found that "a majority of participants—including those who experienced distress during the research—report being glad that they participated or chose to complete their participation" (p. 20). This is a call to do our own personal work, include others, or get out of the way.

So, how do we approach our community partners and invite their collaboration? We suggest the following steps:

1. Identify any severe safety issues. For instance, is the evaluation taking place in an area of significant violent conflict, such as a war-torn area, or gang activity? If so, excluding certain groups may be warranted.
2. Once basic safety is assessed, evaluators should conduct inventories of stakeholder groups' readiness for involvement (Andrews, Pepler, & Motz, 2019).
3. Invite involvement. If the main concerns are simply emotional discomfort, participants should be allowed to decide whether to participate.
4. Make agreements. Participants should be given information about what it would mean to participate. Evaluators should expect to make amendments to their plans to accommodate the needs of stakeholders.

There is one more thing to consider during this phase of a study, and that is ensuring that values and ethics are agreed on and lived into so that no one is traumatized, especially the evaluator or researcher. The following case study teaches a valuable lesson.

CASE STUDY 8.1 Ethical Riders in Your Contract

STEPHANIE EVERGREEN

Toward the end of a project, my client told me, "We met as a group and have decided we'd like the dashboard's graphs to be red if the metric is trending bad and green if

the metric is trending in the right direction." The client is asking for a change that would make the work inaccessible to people who are red-green colorblind! What

do you do? Just do it because they are paying you? Push back? I pushed back. Here's what I said:

"I strongly advise against this. You told me during our initial conversations that a key tenet of your [name-drop-worthy] foundation is equity. Choosing red/green makes you inequitable. Like I recommended in my initial sketches of the dashboard, let's use orange and blue instead. Need another reason? Your logo is red. So assigning red to the bad data would conflate 'bad' with *you*. Don't do this. You hired me to give you the best possible advice and that's my advice."

They pushed back on my pushback. *They told me to do it anyway.* And that's when I wish I could've quit the project because now we were consigned to create something I would never be able to share. What good is having a name-drop-worthy client if you're so embarrassed by them that you'd never drop the name?

I was venting about this on a call with my students when one of them asked me, "Could you put ethical riders in your contract?" Yes! Of course I can. You can put anything you want in your contract. (Granted your prospective client may retreat from the engagement—but you'd have your dignity intact.)

Inclusion riders are a way for people with privilege to open up space for those

who have been traditionally overlooked. Employment contracts can contain morality clauses that say you can be fired with cause for engaging in acts that damage the company's image or reputation.

With these specific models already laid out for us, I'm curious about what it could look like to apply the same idea more broadly so that I'm not committed to begrudgingly making this inaccessible dashboard. The integrity of aligning our work to our values is too important to give up just because it sounds like it'll be hard. As is so often the case, we often learn we have boundaries after they've been violated.

Note. Adapted from Evergreen (2023).

CASE STUDY 8.1. REFLECTION QUESTIONS

We invite you to—if possible—discuss these questions with others.

1. What would you do—or what have you done—if your client asked you to do something that you know is inequitable or traumatizing? How would you push back? How would you handle the client's pushback?
2. Practice writing your own inclusion rider that clearly defines your commitment to equity-focused trauma-informed practices and what would happen if the client wanted you to violate your principles.

Framing the Evaluation

Building a team and forging relationships does not happen overnight. It takes time, dedication, and attention. But once that team has been built and relationships have been forged, the next step is the framing of an evaluation. We see the framing as consisting of several parts:

- Selecting the overarching approach to be used based on the study questions
- Selecting who will speak into the parameters, and how
- Setting the parameters for the study

Engaging Evaluation Theory and Frameworks and Selecting an Approach

The world of evaluation theory and approaches can be dizzying. Even the most seasoned evaluation scholars and professionals can get lost in the sea of acronyms, and new approaches are always emerging. We can get whiplash from the focus on utilization-focused evaluation shifting to one on empowerment- or transformative social justice-oriented practice. Yesterday's evaluation craze is now passé, or even worse, falls short in matters of equity and social justice. It can certainly feel hard to keep up.

We encourage you to look back at Chapter 3 on TIER-leaning evaluation approaches. As we will see in the next sections, the approach we select may have real implications for how we think about valuing, which is not inconsequential to trauma sensitivity. We recommend selecting an approach that is not only sensitive to issues of justice, oppression, and equity but also emphasizes a clear theory of valuing, as this will guard against the tacit yielding to the values of those in power.

The “J” Word: Judgment, Valuing, and Trauma

It's time for a word about **judgment**. It does not make us feel warm fuzzies. It may even seem to us to be counter to trauma-informed practice. We hear admonitions from every corner not to be judgmental. (Ironically, in a very meta way, this happens to be a judgment of judgment itself!)

However, we as humans cannot get away from judgment. Every time we make a decision, we are judging two or more options to determine which might be better. And when it comes to trauma-affected populations, making informed judgments is critical. When social scientists make determinations as to the efficacy of a trauma intervention (such as EMDR or trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy), they are making judgments. And these matter greatly. We want to know about judgments of **relative merit**, such as therapy X works better than therapy Y. We may want to know **absolute merit**, like therapy Z reduces trauma symptoms by such and such amount. Failing to judge effectively would be to subject trauma-affected people to ineffective or even harmful treatment practices. Just think of the controversy around reparative or conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ people. It was the deployment of sound judgment that highlighted the damage that these harmful practices wrought.

When it comes to nonexperimental studies of social programs, we are judging. What is our judgment of the program in terms of its treatment of the end users? Was it worth the money we spent on it? Even if it was effective in moving the intended outcomes in the right direction, were unintended effects minimal and tolerable?

However, sound judgment is not like an equation, where the facts lead neatly to a conclusion. One cannot simply “look at the data” to judge the value of an intervention. Imagine, for instance, a universe in which conversion therapy in fact

did “heal” a great number of LGBTQ+ people of their queerness. Would we then consider it a success? For most of us reading this book, likely not. For others, sadly, yes. What’s the difference between the two groups? The difference lies in the values we apply to arrive at our judgments.

The Importance of Values

Evaluation at its core involves the application of values to make determinations about an object (i.e., a program, a therapist–client interaction, etc.). Whether we like it or not, we see the identification and application of **values** as core to what it is that evaluators are doing, and if one is not facilitating the judgment, one is not evaluating.¹ We caution against approaches that do not acknowledge the role of values and put them front and center. Why? Because if we don’t, the risk of tacitly using the values of the powerful rather than the marginalized and traumatized is great. This may lead to judgments that are harmful and add to the burden of trauma.

Evaluators can guard against this by being clear about their judgments, how they arrived at them, and the source of **criteria**. Criteria should be sourced from the intended beneficiaries, not just the program managers or funders. This tacit co-opting by those in power is more likely in the case of some approaches than others.

Consider, for example, a theory-driven evaluation. Many are familiar with the use of logic models to evaluate programs. A logic model operates from two sole criteria: program fidelity and the desired/expected outcomes. Evaluations of this type are almost exclusively developed from the perspective of program managers who are looking for a specific set of outcomes. However, it leaves little room for the voice of the stakeholders to show up in terms of how success or failure is determined. The result could be an evaluation that is deemed a success when it, in fact, harms those involved. Or, conversely, it could result in the cancellation of a program that was enormously beneficial to service recipients; it’s just that the beneficial outcomes were not detected by the logic model because they were unintended effects.

One example of this would be a library that happens to be a significant resource for people experiencing homelessness and mental illness. If that library’s program theory does not recognize this service as core to the mission and funding gets cut, a community could see a gaping hole open in its social infrastructure, all because the values of the key beneficiaries were not identified. If one were instead to adopt an approach such as goal-free evaluation, or utilization-focused evaluation, and was sure to include all relevant stakeholders in determining the criteria of success for the library, such regrettable outcomes may be less likely to occur. Again, this is not to say that one must use a particular method. Rather, we ask that

¹We consider the topics of values and criteria to be core concepts for everyone in the evaluation field. We would direct all of our readers to the work of Rebecca Teasdale (2021) for an accessible overview of the roles of values, valuing, and criteria in evaluation.

one do so with caution and make sure to pay specific attention to whose values are centered in the development of criteria.

Identifying and engaging values is essential to judgment and evaluation. While there is too much literature on value theory to cover here, it is important to gesture toward some significant scholarship on this issue. Sadler (1997) defines values as “descriptions or conditions that guide human action and are praise- or blameworthy” (p. 541). Schwartz (2012, p. 3) offers a detailed six-part value theory of the features that all values have in common. Although all six parts may be of interest to those wishing to go deeper into value theory, the most applicable to the conversation at hand are the first two points, which are relevant to much of our work:

1. “Values are beliefs linked inextricably to affect. When values are activated, they become infused with feeling. People for whom independence is an important value become aroused if their independence is threatened, despair when they are helpless to protect it, and are happy when they can enjoy it.”

2. “Values refer to desirable goals that motivate action. People for whom social order, justice, and helpfulness are important values are motivated to pursue these goals.”

It is not a new concept to ground a project or process in values. Restorative justice scholars and practitioners propose that humans share 10 common values: love, respect, inclusivity, generosity, courage, trust, sharing, empathy, humility, and honesty (Pranis, Stuart, & Wedge, 2013). It is not surprising that values are deeply personal and context dependent. They also have profound effects on the results of inquiry, both scientific and evaluative, as they drive what we find worthy of investigation, whose opinions we deem trustworthy, and the lenses through which we determine success. Schwandt and Gates (2021) give the example of various think tank institutions and how the underlying values behind their inquiry lead to vastly different findings regarding important socioeconomic issues such as abortion, climate change, tax policy, and drug regulations. The facts may be the same, but the conclusions, illuminated by their very different values, could not be more divergent.

So, as evaluators, how do we approach values in a way that advances the cause of trauma-affected people and communities? What would our study designs look like if we intentionally infused the 10 common values? From our perspective, values can be infused into a study in three different ways:

1. **Explicit infusion:** Values and their application are most transparent when they are explicated in the evaluation process from the get-go.
2. **Implicit infusion:** Values may be present and identifiable but not explicitly stated.
3. **Tacit/obscured infusion:** Values are hidden or not openly acknowledged.

The evaluators or funders may try to pass such an evaluation off as “objective” or value free.

We advocate for the first type—evaluation in which values are front and center. And whose values? We argue the values of those whom we are ultimately seeking to serve. In the design process, we can center values in a trauma-informed way by identifying the values of the funders, identifying the values of the stakeholders, identifying our own values, and identifying any conflicts between these. In doing so, our study can confront and manage any challenges that may arise from holding different values at the end of the evaluation, when judgments about a program and decisions about a way forward are to be made.

WRAP-UP

Once the right team, the right funders, and the right stakeholders have built a trusting, honest, and inclusive relationship and once the team of co-evaluators has identified the values they bring to the table, *then the fun can begin*. Will we use an exploratory and experimental arts-based approach that throws tried-and-true evaluation frameworks in the blender? Are we working toward an experimental approach that values a high level of scientific rigor? TIER is largely agnostic on these questions as long as these design decisions are done with care and critical thinking. *That’s why we spent so much time talking about values and not so much about methods here. It’s up to you. Just remember to always bring it back to the values.*

Case Study 8.2 provides an opportunity for you to integrate the importance of values for generating evaluative findings, along with the conflict that can occur between values—in this case, safety versus expediency.

CASE STUDY 8.2 Values in Action

AARON KATES

I was once contracted by a large national organization with dozens of local affiliates to conduct an evaluation of their policy for the protection of children and vulnerable adults. The policy had come under scrutiny because volunteers and administrators alike found the process for volunteer training and vetting to be onerous and time consuming.

As the evaluation unfolded, it became clear that much of what we were dealing with was a difference in core values between the leadership team and

the implementers at the site level. Those in leadership were (rightly) concerned about the safety and welfare of those in the organization’s care. Those at the local level cared about this too but were also experiencing the realities of mounting administrative burdens and volunteer shortages. This highlighted that those at the local level valued expediency in addition to safety.

Listening to the ground-level stakeholders and what they cared about, we identified some major problems with

elevating only the leadership's value of safety at the expense of easy implementation. It turned out that many of the local affiliates were poorly adhering to the policy and creating their own workarounds. The desire to maximize the value of safety over all else, paradoxically, had led to compromised safety.

In the end, the organization was able to settle on a child protection policy that was just as thorough but had sanded off some of the redundancies and administrative pinch points. Now the organization reports much better adherence to the policy, which may not have happened had we only paid attention to the values of the leaders.

CHAPTER 8 REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Again, we invite you to discuss these questions with others to see what bubbles up.

1. What can evaluators and researchers do to make sure that the values centered and used to make judgments, draw distinctions, and make decisions in the evaluation process are not just those of the powerful?
2. What needs to happen during the evaluation design stage to prepare those who collect and analyze data to deal with trauma and trauma-affected people in resilience-building ways?
3. Consider potential research team members. Whom do you know? Whom do you need to know? What resources are available that can help you know who the “right” people are for various projects?
4. Imagine yourself speaking with a powerful funder. How do you envision a conversation about making their proposed study more trauma-informed? What values can you live into and perhaps introduce? Write out what you might say and practice saying it, so you are ready to speak truth to power.