**Value Chain Coordination: Evaluation Guide**

This guide and the accompanying evaluation template are designed to help Value Chain Coordination Professionals design and implement an evaluation plan that is aligned with your values and unique role in your community. The guide includes prompts for reflection and space to write out your values, your unique role and activities, and includes an accompanying template where you can build your evaluation plan. Prompts are included throughout to illuminate how a given activity contributes to racial equity or perpetuates inequalities. Regardless of where you are in your journey, these questions can help you align your work and impact with your values and intentions.

**What is Value Chain Coordination?**

Local and regional food systems need more than food hubs, trucks, and processing facilities to grow and thrive. Connecting local farmers to regional markets requires developing and facilitating networks of trusting relationships. **Value chain coordination** is a set of roles and activities that foster connections, knowledge, skills, resources and relationships between the individuals, businesses, communities, and broader regional economies that make up a value chain.

**Who is this for?**

This guide and the accompanying evaluation template are designed for Value Chain Coordination Professionals. Value Chain Coordination Professionals serve multiple roles in the food system, combined in a way that is unique to the needs and resources of the community they serve.

**Roles of Value Chain Coordination**



The process of value chain coordination (VCC) generally falls into these nine roles (above). Because the work of value chain coordination includes such a variety of roles, and these roles may change over time, identifying and measuring the impacts of this work can be particularly tricky. This guide and the accompanying template are designed to help Value Chain Coordination Professionals build and implement an evaluation plan to document the impact of your unique role. This process will help you build an evaluation plan that honors your vision and values and includes the perspective of your community and partners.

**How to use this guide**

This guide and the accompanying evaluation template are intended to be tailored to your unique work, values, roles, and activities. We recommend working through this process with your colleagues rather than completing it solo. Use this guide to capture notes as you answer questions in the orange boxes below. These questions can also be used as prompts for meetings with your board, organization, or partners to help make strategic decisions about your work. This thinking will lay the foundation for your evaluation plan which will be developed using the Excel template in step 5. The Excel template contains sample metrics and tools for tracking progress toward your goals.

This guide was developed by the Wallace Center’s Food Systems Leadership Network team with input from VCC professionals and consultants with expertise in evaluation and racial equity.

**Before You begin: How can evaluation be in service of equity?**

Evaluation, like any other part of an organization’s processes, can either contribute to racial equity or perpetuate inequities. There is a growing body of resources and case studies on how evaluation practices have been harmful in the past, particularly to Black people, Indigenous people and other People of Color (BIPOC), and how evaluation can be more equitable in the future. Check out [this framework](https://www.equitableeval.org/framework) from the Equitable Evaluation Initiative for more information and resources on the praxis of equitable evaluation. Some main characteristics of equitable evaluation are:

* Evaluation strategies and tools are multi-culturally valid and oriented toward participant ownership.
* Evaluation is tied to the larger context of the work and acknowledge historical disparities.
* Evaluation captures the impacts of programming on different demographics.
* Evaluation tracks progress toward long term systemic change.

**Step 1: Listing Your Values**

Your values are your North Star, or the guiding principles that shape how you conduct your work. Ultimately, your evaluation results should reflect your core values. Before you start to build out your evaluation plan, take time to write out…

**Is racial equity reflected in these values? Why or why not?**

**The values that guide my work are…**

**Step 2: Defining community**

We use the word “community” throughout this guide, defined as the people you are accountable to and the intended beneficiaries of your work. Taking time to define what “community” means to you will help you throughout this process.

**Describe the community you serve and are accountable to. Does this include farmers or consumers? What is the racial and socioeconomic makeup of the community?**

**Step 3: Linking values to strategy**

Now that you have written down the values that guide your work and the community you serve, we will work from a high level of describing the impact of your work to more specific outcomes. In the next section you will narrow your focus on roles. There are also questions in this section to prompt you to think about how community input is integrated and reflected in your work.

Helpful definitions for this section:

**Outputs:** Counts from activities

**Example**: Number of introductions made, number of attendees at a training

**Outcomes:** Effects of outputs on beneficiaries or partners

**Example:** Business transactions resulting from introductions, attendees that applied lessons from

a training to their organization

**Impacts:** Progress toward your long-term goals

**Example:** Increased number of BIPOC-owned food businesses, improved population health, reduced

greenhouse gas emissions

**Flowing from the values listed above, what is the ultimate impact you want to have through your VCC work in 5-10 years? If you were successful, what would the food system in your community look like?**

**How were community members involved in developing and endorsing this impact statement?   
If community members *were* involved, did you modify what you were doing because of their input?   
If community members *were* *not* involved, how could you get more community input?**

**What shorter term (1-2 years) outcomes would help you reach the impact above?**



**One good way to think through the impact your work will have on different groups is to consider the questions: *Who will benefit if you achieve these outcomes? Who will bear increased burden?***

***Who benefits:***



***Who bears the burden:***



**Step 4: Identifying your primary roles**

Researchers, USDA staff, and the Wallace Center (in partnership with Value Chain Coordination Professionals), have categorized the work of VCC into nine roles. These roles can be used to meet a variety of outcomes, and most value chain professionals focus on a few roles based on the partners and resources in their community, and their values and desired impact.

* As you review the list below, consider:
* *Which VCC roles and activities/outputs would help you meet the outcomes above?*
* *Which roles are you or your organization best suited to perform?*
* *Which of these roles are being performed by others in your network?*

Use the boxes below to identify the roles you can focus on to best meet these outcomes. Fill in your main activities for those roles you select. But keep in mind that no value chain coordination professional does all of these roles (and lives to tell the tale), so you do not need to fill in activities for each role! To help you see how your work complements others, you can fill in where partners and fellow value chain coordination professionals are fulfilling roles that you do not select as your priorities.

Once you have entered your activities in your main roles below, go back and highlight the top three roles you would like to evaluate. It can be tempting to develop metrics for each one, but it is best to prioritize a few to work through first.

**View** [**this quick sheet**](https://foodsystemsleadershipnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Roles-of-Value-Chain-Coordination-Quicksheet.pdf) **for an overview of the VCC roles used below.**

**Primary VCC Roles**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Market Matchmaking | |
| Our activities/outputs: |  |
| Partners fulfilling this role: |  |
| Providing Technical Assistance | |
| Our activities/outputs: |  |
| Partners fulfilling this role: |  |
| Convening Stakeholders | |
| Our activities/outputs: |  |
| Partners fulfilling this role: |  |
| Innovating and Catalyzing New Ideas | |
| Our activities/outputs: |  |
| Partners fulfilling this role: |  |

**Facilitating VCC Roles**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Resource Prospecting | |
| Our activities/outputs: |  |
| Partners fulfilling this role: |  |
| Policy Advocacy | |
| Our activities/outputs: |  |
| Partners fulfilling this role: |  |
| Research, Assessment and Education | |
| Our activities/outputs: |  |
| Partners fulfilling this role: |  |
| Fostering and Maintaining Relationships | |
| Our activities/outputs: |  |
| Partners fulfilling this role: |  |
| Facilitating Accountability and Negotiation | |
| Our activities/outputs: |  |
| Partners fulfilling this role: |  |

**As you outline activities for your main roles and activities, consider these three questions:**

|  |
| --- |
| What historic racial equity contexts are relevant to this role? For example, if you are focused on market matchmaking, have specific racial groups been excluded from these markets in the past? |
| What current racial equity conditions are relevant to this role? For example, if you are focused on fostering and maintaining relationships, have you taken time to consider who is and is not at the table, and why? |
| How might you ensure you are not perpetuating the racial inequities? How might you proactively counteract them? |

**Step 5: Considering your levels of change**

For any complex, long-term project like value chain coordination, it is helpful to think in terms of outputs, outcomes, and impact. These terms are common in the nonprofit world and are essentials of grant applications and reports. Mission-driven for-profits can use this exercise to tie their day-to-day activities (outputs) to the ultimate change they aim to make in the world (impact). That box of local sustainably grown potatoes you shipped is contributing to a better world, right? You’ll want to track each of these levels of change to tell the full story of your work, and there are fields to track this in the evaluation template in the next step.

An example to tie it all together: Below is a chart that includes metrics from a fictional value chain coordinator and how their results play out over time (months or years from now) and scope (from individual, business, value chain, to the whole community). As you complete your evaluation template in the next step, consider these dimensions of change and how your metrics are distributed across them. You don’t need to have a metric for each box, but it is helpful to have metrics at different time horizons to build toward your long-term impact. The chart below includes example metrics that can help you think through levels of change.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Short term (less than 1 year) | Medium term (1-2 years) | Long term (2+ years) |
| Individual | * Number of individuals who plan to make business improvements as a result of participating in an activity * Number of people interviewed, connected with | * Number of individuals trained | * Demographic breakdown of partners included in policy steering committees/advisory groups |
| Business/Organizational | * New business contacts and   customers   * Number of new customers | * Gross sales in dollars * Number of introductions made resulting in business partnership * Number of new innovations in products and processes * Number of grants awarded to partnering producers | * Number of ongoing sales after initial transaction * Producer and supplier satisfaction with new partnership * Racial diversity of suppliers * Value of purchases from BIPOC suppliers and producers |
| System or Community | * Number of meeting attendees * Number of introductions made * Number of active partners in food systems networks | * % of BIPOC producers engaged in local procurement * Formalized partnerships made * Value of food traded through community networks | * Economic impact of increased sales * $ of investments into BIPOC-owned innovations |
| Value Chain | * Number of introductions made between vendors/non-profit partners * % of BIPOC owned supplier/customer businesses involved in planning conversations | * Source-identified products brought to market * % of supported policies analyzed from an equity standpoint | * Demographics of business ownership of source identified products introduced to the market |

**Step 6: Completing your evaluation template**

In this step you will use your notes and thinking from steps 1-4 to build your evaluation plan! Keep your notes handy as you work through the template provided below. Start small, keep improving and revising. You don't have to start off perfect or comprehensive. Having a couple of intentional questions you hold throughout your work and a thoughtful set of metrics can go a long way!

**Putting it all together**

The Wallace Center has developed an evaluation template which includes metrics linked to the roles above, a template for an evaluation dashboard to organize your metrics, and an example tracking system to collect data over time. [Use this link to access the evaluation template.](https://foodsystemsleadershipnetwork.org/announcing-the-value-chain-coordination-evaluation-guide-and-template/) Using the template, you can establish 3-5 key metrics to evaluate your work. As you consider which metrics to focus on, use these questions to help you narrow down:

* What would you like to be able to say about the impacts of your work?
* What data is important to those you serve, partners, and funders?
* Which roles are most important to achieving your vision?
* Which metrics allow you to tell a story about your core values?
* Which metrics are feasible for you to collect?

**Evaluation is cyclical**

Once you have collected evaluation data, it is time to reflect on the data, how your impact is aligned with your values, and what you learned through the process. Once you have established your evaluation system, set up a time for a regular check-in with your team about monitoring, evaluating, and learning from your work. The more often you revisit your evaluation plan the more refined, informative, and valuable it becomes to your organization. These learnings can lead to shifts in your programming and evaluation systems. You can also share your learnings and evaluation data with the community you serve to build trust and accountability.

**It’s not just about the numbers**

* To complement these metrics and gain a more comprehensive picture of your impact, consider capturing stories of your work. The Food Systems Leadership Network has used this [Value Creation Stories framework](https://foodsystemsleadershipnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Wenger_Trayner_DeLaat_Value_creation.pdf) to develop a [set of questions](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QC9u9VkmA_3BfksJSyafHMCTrc8Hgbm9/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=106128493125347269927&rtpof=true&sd=true) that we use to capture stories about the longer-term and difficult to quantify impacts of our work. Feel free to adapt to gather stories about your own work.

* Questions or ideas for improvement for this guide? Reach out to [fslninfo@winrock.org](mailto:fslninfo@winrock.org?subject=VCC%20Evaluation%20Guide) with ‘VCC Evaluation Guide’ in the subject.

**Definitions**

* **Values:** The guiding principles for which you stand; the ideals you refuse to compromise as you conduct your work.
* **Outputs:** Counts from activities. (*Ex. Number of introductions made, number of attendees at a training*).
* **Outcomes:** Effects of outputs on the overall network and it’s beneficiaries or partners. (*Ex. business transactions resulting from introductions, attendees that applied lessons from a training to their organization*)*.*
* **Impact:** Progress toward your long-term goals. (*Ex. Increased number of BIPOC owned food businesses, wealth created by BIPOC farms and businesses, improved population health, reduced GHG emissions*).

*References for outputs, outcomes, impact*: [Stanford Social Innovation Review](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/getting_results_outputs_outcomes_impact), [Analytics in Action](https://analyticsinaction.co/definition-output-outcome-impact-with-examples)

*Reference for values*: <https://donorbox.org/nonprofit-blog/nonprofit-values/>

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