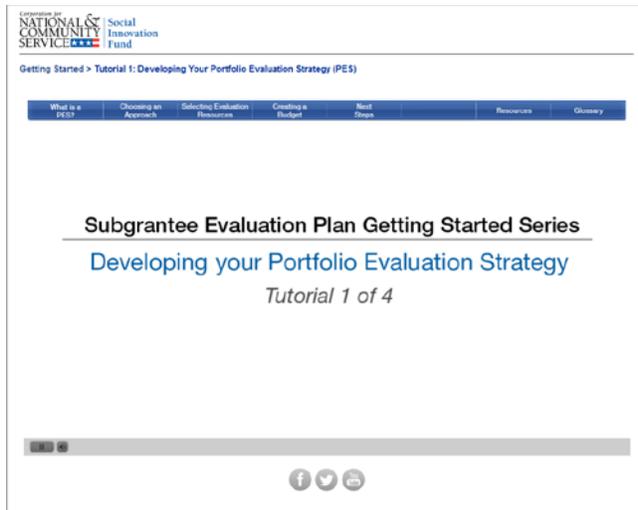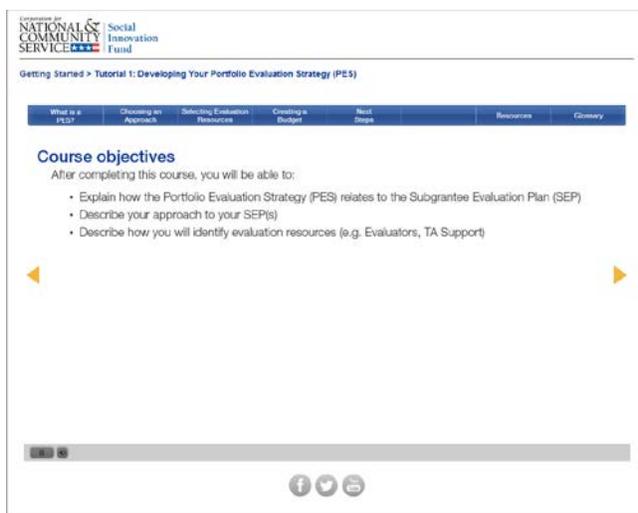# SEP TUTORIAL 1 – DEVELOPING YOUR PORTFOLIO EVALUATION STRATEGY (PES)

SCREEN 1

Narrator: Welcome to the SEP Development Tutorial Module 1: Developing Your Portfolio Evaluation Strategy.

SCREEN 2

Narrator: This course provides a broad introduction to the portfolio evaluation strategy and subgrantee evaluation plan documents required by CNCS.

Additional Screen Text:

Course Objectives – After completing this course you will be able to:

- Explain how the Portfolio Evaluation Strategy (PES) related to the Subgrantee Evaluation Plan (SEP)
- Describe your approach to your SEP(s)
- Describe how you will identify evaluation resources (e.g. Evaluators, TA Support)

SCREEN 3
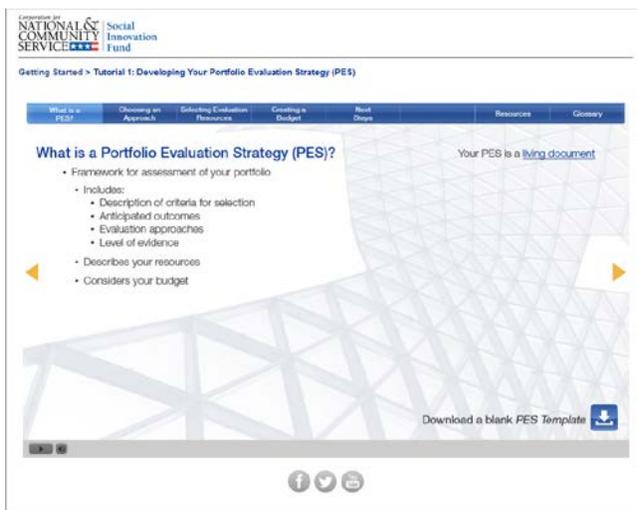
Narrator: The Portfolio Evaluation Strategy, or P.E.S., is a starting point and framework that helps you think through the components needed for a thorough and comprehensive assessment of your portfolio.

These components include:

- a description of the criteria for subgrantee selection,
- the anticipated outcomes for the portfolio as a whole,
- what evaluation approaches are most appropriate for your subgrantee portfolio,
- and what level of evaluation evidence is possible, given both your specific subgrantees and the available resources.

The PES asks you to describe your evaluation related resources, including access to evaluation expertise and budget estimates. You will also plan for how the budget will be distributed throughout the portfolio during the course of the SIF evaluation period.

Finally, the PES requests your input on the kinds of assistance CNCS and JBS can offer to support your work throughout the process.

Additional Screen Text:

Your PES is a Living Document: A living document is a document that has no "end." You should work with CNCS to update your PES as needed throughout the course of your grant.

Download a *Blank PES Template*: http://sep-tutorials.org/docs/Program_Evaluation_Strategy_Blank.docx

SCREEN 4
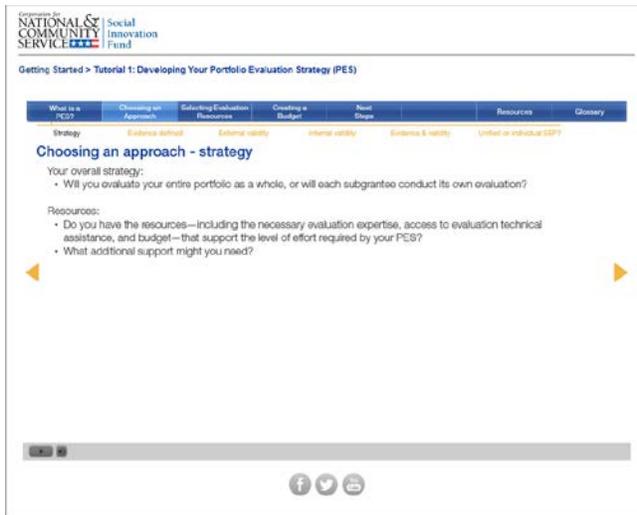
Narrator: As you develop your PES, you will need to consider these key, interrelated factors into your strategy.

Additional Screen Text:

### Choosing an approach: strategy

Your overall strategy:

- Will you evaluate your entire portfolio as a whole, or will each subgrantee conduct its own evaluation?

Resources:

- Do you have the resources—including the necessary evaluation expertise, access to evaluation technical assistance, and budget—that support the level of effort required by your PES?
- What additional support might you need?

SCREEN 5
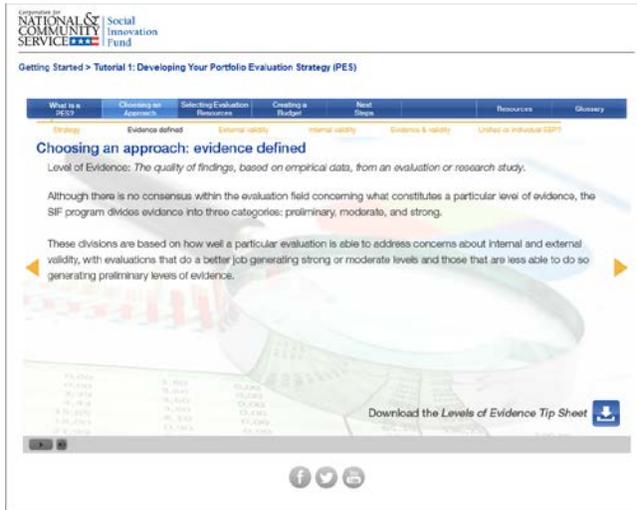
Narrator: CNCS expects that your program will achieve a moderate or strong level of evidence by the end of the subgrant period.

The term *level of evidence* is defined in the guidance document and glossary, and is directly related to validity.

Additional Screen Text:

Choosing an approach: evidence defined

Level of Evidence: The quality of findings, based on empirical data, from an evaluation or research study.

Although there is no consensus within the evaluation field concerning what constitutes a particular level of evidence, the SIF program divides evidence into three categories: preliminary, moderate, and strong.

These divisions are based on how well a particular evaluation is able to address concerns about internal and external validity, with evaluations that do a better job generating strong or moderate levels and those that are less able to do so generating preliminary levels of evidence.

Download the *Levels of Evidence Tip Sheet*: http://sep-tutorials.org/docs/2_LevelsofEvidenceTipsheet.pdf

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SCREEN 6

Narrator: High external validity suggests that findings from your evaluation can be scaled-up, or generalized, to the state, regional, or national level.

To achieve this, your evaluation should take into account diverse members of the population, and apply to other people, settings, sites, or institutions. How well does your study *demonstrate* that your program will work for not only the exact people that you're working with but also the broader population of people who might need that service? In designing your SEP, you should strive for high external validity.

SCREEN 7

Narrator: Evaluation designs with high internal validity are more likely to lead to better, or stronger, evidence that the impact you see is directly due to the program itself and not to something else.

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Research designs are thought to have good internal validity if they limit the extent to which the changes seen in the study could be caused by things other than the program intervention being measured. These could include: Who participates in the program and how long they stay, outside events unrelated to the program, a weak evaluation process, and evaluator decisions. You will try to reduce or eliminate these threats to the greatest extent possible.

SCREEN 8
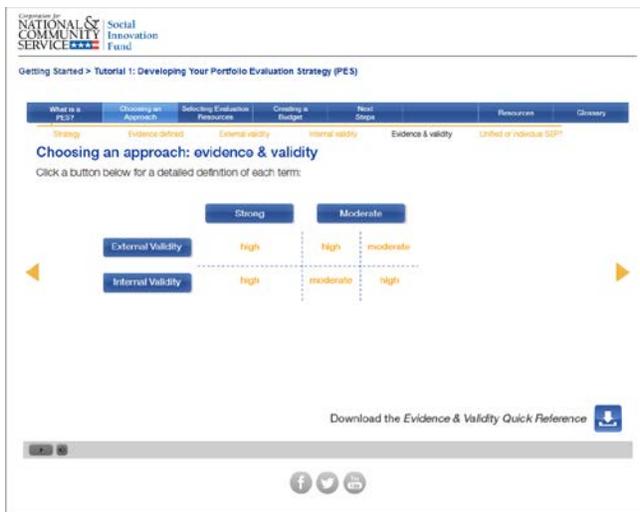
Narrator: Now that we've reviewed internal and external validity, we can see how they relate to your level of evidence. Studies with high internal and external validity demonstrate a strong level of evidence.

Module 2, Introduction to the SEP, provides more information on validity and levels of evidence.

Additional Screen Text:

Choosing an approach: evidence & validity

Click a button below for a detailed definition of each term.

Strong evidence: Strong evidence means evidence from studies whose designs can support causal conclusions (i.e., studies with high internal validity), and studies that in total include enough of the range of participants and settings to support scaling up to the state, regional, or national level (i.e., studies with high external validity).

The following are examples of strong evidence:

(1) More than one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study or well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study that supports the effectiveness of the practice, strategy, or program; or

(2) One large, well-designed and well-implemented randomized controlled multisite trial that supports the effectiveness of the practice, strategy, or program.

Moderate evidence: Moderate evidence means evidence from studies whose designs can support causal conclusions (i.e., studies with high internal validity), but have limited generalizability (i.e., moderate external validity), or studies with high external validity, but moderate internal validity. The following are examples of studies that could produce moderate evidence:

(1) At least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental or quasi-experimental study supporting the effectiveness of the practice, strategy, or program, with a small sample size or other conditions of implementation or analysis that limit generalizability;

(2) At least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental or quasi-experimental study that does not demonstrate equivalence between the intervention and comparison groups at program entry, but that has no other major flaws related to internal validity; or

(3) Correlational research with strong statistical controls for selection bias and for discerning the influence of internal factors.

External validity: The extent to which evaluation results, statistically, are applicable to groups other than those in the research. More technically, it refers to how well the results obtained from analyzing a sample of study participants from a population can be generalized to that population.

The strongest basis for applying results obtained from a sample to a population is when the sample is randomly selected from that population. Otherwise, this generalization must be made on extra-statistical ground – that is, on a non-statistical basis.

Internal validity: For a given design, the extent to which the observed difference in the average group outcomes (usually program participants versus control or comparison group members) can be causally attributed to the intervention or program.

Randomized controlled trials allow for high causal attribution because of their ability to rule out alternative explanations (usually unobserved characteristics) other than the intervention as the reason for the observed affect.

Download the *Evidence & Validity Quick Reference*: http://sep-tutorials.org/docs/Evidence.pdf

SCREEN 9
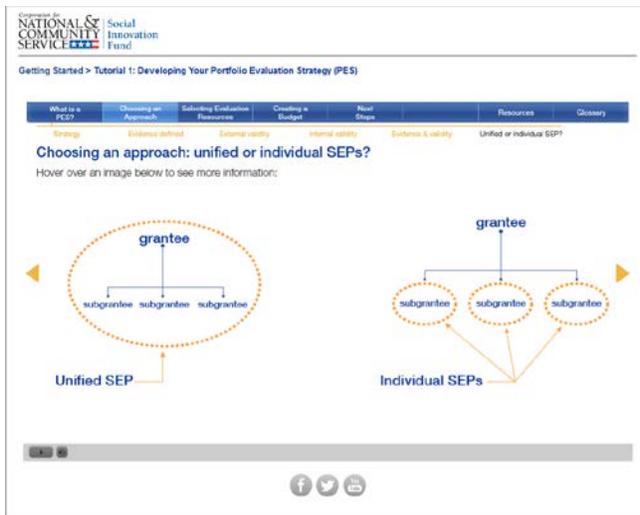
Narrator: A key decision grantees must make is whether to develop a Unified SEP that evaluates all of their subgrantees as a whole, or to employ Individual SEPs for each subgrantee.

What you choose will depend on your organization as well as your subgrantees.

Individual SEPs entail evaluating your portfolio at the individual subgrantee level. Each subgrantee can tailor the SEP process to its individual needs. The individual SEP approach works best for organizations whose subgrantees are diverse and work in very different ways.

A unified SEP entails evaluating your portfolio from the grantee level, evaluating all subgrantees using one evaluation design. This type of approach works best for organizations whose portfolios are uniform, and for whom one evaluation strategy can apply to the entire group. Its advantages include a large sample size, which can strengthen external validity, and a higher degree of control by the grantee and evaluator over the evaluation process.

Additional Screen Text:

Choosing an approach: unified or individual SEPs?

Hover over an image below to see more information.

Unified SEPs:

- Definition – Evaluations completed at grantee level
- Design options – Single; same evaluation for entire portfolio, applied at high level, rather than individual level
- Evaluators – Selected by grantee

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- Advantages – Works for organizations whose subgrantees have similar program models and outcome measures

Individual SEPs:

- Definition – Evaluations completed at subgrantee level
- Design options – Multiple; each subgrantee conducts a separate evaluation
- Evaluators – Singe evaluator selected by grantee or multiple evaluators selected by the subgrantees
- Advantages – Works for organizations whose subgrantees are diverse, working toward the same large goal in different ways; allows for tailored approach

SCREEN 10
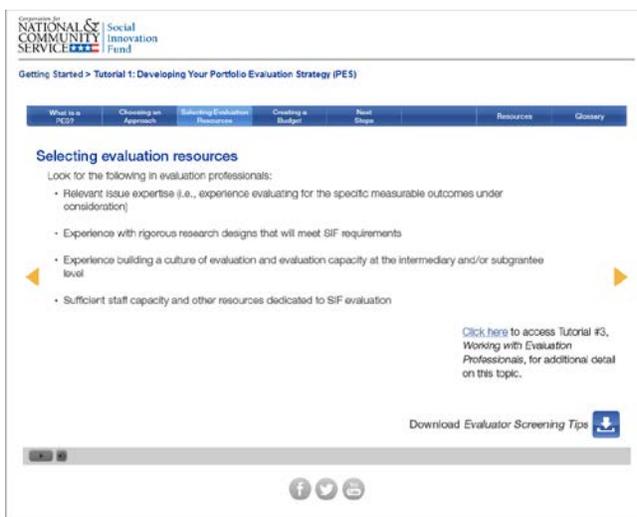
Narrator: It's important to select qualified evaluators and evaluation TA providers. If your subgrantees will use individual SEPs, you are responsible for advising them in this area as well.

There are many approaches to finding qualified evaluators—often programs have evaluators that they have worked with for many years. For the SIF, however, you will need to find an evaluator who can carry out an evaluation that can provide a moderate or strong level of evidence. This usually involves collection and analysis of quantitative data, often from a control group. Not all evaluators (even some very good evaluators) do this on a regular basis.

See Tutorial 3:* Working with Evaluation Professionals* for more information

Additional Screen Text:

Selecting evaluation resources

Look for the following in evaluation professionals:

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- Relevant issue expertise (i.e., experience evaluating for the specific measurable outcomes under consideration)
- Experience with rigorous research designs that will meet SIF requirements
- Experience building a culture of evaluation and evaluation capacity at the intermediary and/or subgrantee level
- Sufficient staff capacity and other resources dedicated to SIF evaluation

Download *Evaluator Screening Tips*: http://sep-tutorials.org/docs/3_EvaluatorScreeningTips.pdf

SCREEN 11
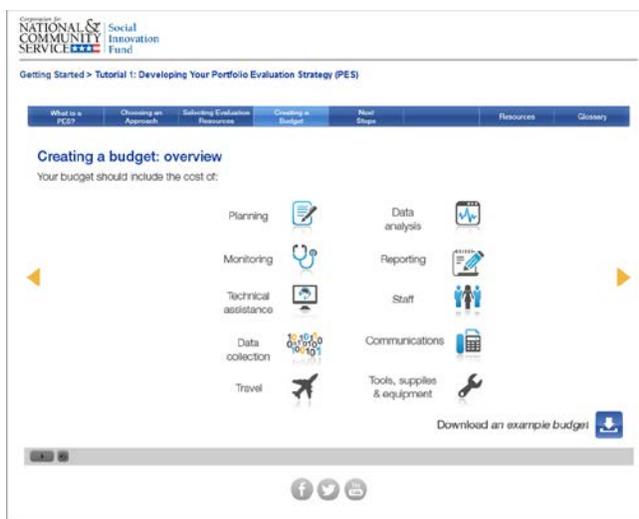
Narrator: Your PES is completed at the grantee level, and should include your budgetary approach to the entire process, including evaluation planning, monitoring, technical assistance, data collection and analysis, and reporting. This budget determines what type of evaluations you can perform, the technical assistance you can provide for subgrantees, and to some extent, the levels of evidence your portfolio can attain.

Your budget will also depend on whether you plan to develop SEPs at the grantee level or at the subgrantee level. Will subgrantees need to commit financial resources? How much? Be sure to factor all of these questions into your budget plan.

Additional Screen Text:

Download an example budget: http://sep-tutorials.org/docs/1_Example_SEPBudget.pdf

SCREEN 12

Narrator: Here are the next steps you will want to take. Be sure to take the next tutorial in this series and review the resources page. Visit the Knowledge Network for answers to questions as they arise, or check with your program officer.

Additional Screen Text:

Next steps:

1. Today – Get started developing your strategy. Ask questions early.
2. ASAP – Complete Tutorial 2: Introducing the SEP
3. Late Fall – CNCS will release final guidance outlining written plan expectations
4. Winter – Share your written PES plan with CNCS
5. Winter – Meet with CNCS to review your plan
6. As needed – Update your plan and share with CNCS