



Front Runner Solutions

Always at the **front** of the leading edge

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To Whom It May Concern:

We, the evaluation team at Front Runner Solutions (FRS), are pleased to have received your request for a proposal to evaluate the *Imagine Canada* Standards Program. The FRS team maintains rigorous standards of excellence and professionalism in evaluation. Making use of our many innovative resources and methods, we are confident that we can effectively evaluate the Standards Program.

The FRS team is thoroughly qualified in research design and program evaluation. We have studied experimental research methods academically, and perfected these skills through conducting many years of cross-discipline evaluations. Of particular interest to this evaluation, we have a proven record of working with Charitable Organizations in the past.

The following evaluation package proposes a comprehensive and concise analysis of the Standards program, including:

- Program Overview
- A Logic Model
- Research Methodology
- An Evaluation Matrix
- An Outline and Timeline of Communication Strategy
- Challenges and Mitigation Strategies
- Competencies for Canadian Evaluation Practice

The FRS team eagerly anticipates your response. If you require any additional information pertaining to our credentials, evaluation strategies, or recommendations, feel free to contact us. Thank you kindly for your time and consideration of this application.

Sincerely,

Front Runner Solutions



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Proposal to Evaluate the Imagine Canada Standards Program



Sick Kids Foundation

Prepared for:

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Program Overview

Imagine Canada is a national charitable organization founded in 2005, which works with other non-profit and charitable organizations throughout Canada. The organization has three key goals: (1) to improve the non-profit sector's collective voice, (2) collect opportunities to connect and learn for each other, and (3) build the sector's capacity to succeed. In addition to working with charitable organizations, *Imagine Canada* also works with government, businesses and other individuals to “strengthen and support Canadian charities and nonprofits so they may better serve and engage individuals and communities here and around the world” (*Imagine Canada Mission Statement*, n.d., para. 3). The organization has a number of initiatives and programs focused on achieving their goals, one of which is the Standards Program.

The *Imagine Canada* Standards Program works to fulfill their goals by providing a means through which member organizations can become accredited. Through consultations with charity and non-profit leaders, as well as a Standards Forum, 73 standards were identified and grouped into five key areas: board governance, financial accountability and transparency, fundraising, staff management, and volunteer involvement.

The goals of the Standards Program are to help member organizations improve on the aforementioned five areas, increase their transparency in these five areas, and strengthen public confidence in the charity and non-profit sector. The process of accreditation is voluntary for organizations, and involves demonstrating competencies in each of the outlined standards, verified through particular data sources and/or other evidence. Based on staff size and annual expenses, three levels of standards were identified to better meet the capacities of individual organizations. Of 266 participating organizations, 150 have become accredited through this process as of mid-2015.

The director of an accredited member organization stated that “*Imagine Canada's* accreditation program builds confidence among donors and prospective donors” (*Imagine Canada Standards Program*, n.d., para. 3). There is also empirical evidence to suggest that donors are more likely to fund charitable and non-profit organizations that are accredited (Bekkers, 2003). In order to assess the program's strengths and weaknesses, *Imagine Canada* has requested that a program evaluation be conducted. In keeping with these requirements, the FRS team proposes an evaluation of the Standards Program, with a focus on three key areas: (1) the **impact** of the accreditation process so far, (2) **how organizations view** the application process and how it could be **improved**, and (3) how to **increase participation** in the program.

Evaluation Approach

Front Runner Solutions (FRS) proposes a **process evaluation** (Fitzpatrick, 2011) of *Imagine Canada's* Standards Program. The evaluation will assess the impact of the program's

accreditation for the charitable organizations that have achieved it so far, how organizations view the accreditation process, ways of improving the process, and ways to increase participation in the accreditation process. FRS will employ a **participatory approach** (Zukoski & Luluquisen, 2002) by assembling an Evaluation Task Force (ETF) comprised of stakeholders (see Figure 1 for detailed information on the stakeholder groups to be represented). The ETF will be involved in developing evaluation questions, developing data collection tools, and interpreting results.

FRS will employ **mixed-methods** (a combination of quantitative and qualitative), and **triangulation** (using multiple methods to assess most evaluation questions) to capture complete answers to the evaluation questions.

Key Stakeholders

Our team has identified the key stakeholders for the *Imagine Canada* Standards Program based on the information provided in the RFP (See [Figure 1](#)). To ensure that all stakeholder groups are actively involved in the evaluation, we propose the creation of an Evaluation Task Force (ETF). The ETF will be composed of at least one representative from each identified stakeholder group, and will participate in all aspects of the evaluation (e.g. identification of evaluation questions, informing questions for surveys/World Café’s and the interpretation of results). It should be noted that while the preliminary stakeholders have been identified below, more stakeholders may be identified as the evaluation proceeds.

Figure 1. Main stakeholder groups of the Imagine Canada Standards Program.





Logic Model

A logic model is a tool used to map out a program's resources, activities and desired outcomes. It is made up of activities, or key tasks of the project; outputs, or direct products of activities; and outcomes, or longer-term changes as a result of outputs. By outlining causal links between program components and outcomes, a logic model provides a visual representation of program theory. For a visual representation of your logic model and significant influences on the achievement of your outcomes, please view [Appendix A](#).

Evaluations Questions

Front Runner Solutions has given extensive consideration to the essential goals of the *Imagine Canada* Standards Program and has chosen to focus on the evaluation questions that our team has identified to be of highest priority (See [Appendix B](#)). These questions may be altered as it will be necessary to consult with the program stakeholders to ensure the questions address the concerns of all parties involved.

Proposed Methods

Literature Review

We will use an academic literature review to determine whether the program theory is supported by empirical evidence. Namely, is there evidence from prior research to suggest that public perceptions of charitable and non-profit organizations are affected by accreditation? It is essential to establish early in the evaluation that the program theory is sound, and that the linkages between program inputs and outputs are plausible. It will also help determine whether different approaches can achieve similar outcomes. Literature review is a cost-effective because it relies on existing data.

Jurisdictional Scan

A jurisdictional scan will determine whether there are similar programs functioning in other areas, and will allow us to compare their implementation to that of *Imagine Canada's*. The Netherlands is the only other country in the world with a non-profit sector larger than Canada's, so we will be certain to investigate accreditation of non-profit and charitable organizations within their jurisdiction. This comparison may allow us to identify potential ways to improve the accreditation process and to improve participation, and to address the cost-effectiveness of the program. Jurisdictional scan is cost effective because it relies on existing data.

Document Review

Reviewing program documents will be useful in helping assessing whether the program is being implemented as planned, whether activities are leading to intended outputs, and whether the



program is cost effective. This is based on the assumption that member organizations collect this data, and provide in to the Standard's Program regularly.

Document review can help assess the impact of accreditation so far. *Imagine Canada* should have administrative data for its membership organizations regarding the **five key practice areas** defined by the Standards Program: board of governance, financial accountability and transparency, fundraising, staff management, and volunteer involvement. We assume documentation would be updated on an annual basis. We can make comparisons between the 150 organizations that have been accredited to the 116 that haven't to help determine if accreditation has helped organizations be more successful in these areas. If documentation has been collected over time, it may be possible to review how organizations have changed after obtaining accreditation. It will also be important to compare membership organizations that have obtained accreditation to those who dropped out of the process. This will help identify barriers that prevent organizations from becoming accredited.

Document review will also help assess transparency of membership organizations. We will review whether organizations have made relevant financial information (i.e. overhead costs, distribution of donations, expenditures) available on their websites, contributing to their transparency. A comparison between accredited and non-accredited member organizations will help determine if accreditation contributes to transparency.

Surveys

Member organizations (online)

Online surveys will be created using Survey Monkey, and will be emailed to *Imagine Canada* member organizations (those who have obtained accreditation, and those who have not). These surveys will assess perceived barriers and challenges associated with obtaining accreditation, obtain feedback on how *Imagine Canada* can increase participation in the Standards Program, and ask questions about how organizations are performing on the five key practice areas described above. This will allow us to compare accredited and unaccredited organizations to help determine if accreditation is positively affecting performance on the five key practice areas. The survey will contain skip logic, and will ask accredited organizations only about the process they undertook, addressing whether the Standards Program is being implemented as planned. Surveys allow us to contact all member organizations relatively quickly, and will serve as a recruitment tool for the World Café sessions, as participants will be asked at the end to indicate if they would be willing to attend a discussion session to further help evaluate the Standards Program.

Surveys of the Public (online and telephone)

We will conduct a survey of the general public to assess perceived confidence in accredited vs. unaccredited charitable and non-profit organizations, and to attempt to measure knowledge of



these organizations as a proxy measure for transparency. The online survey will be advertised on popular websites (social media, government websites). Because we recognize that an online survey might exclude certain demographics, we will also conduct a telephone survey on a random sample of telephone numbers from the phone book for each region of the country. Because of the tight timeline, we do not expect to gain a truly representative sample of the Canadian population. Given the time restraints, we will strive to collect 200 telephone responses, with representation for each province.

World Café

As an alternative to traditional focus groups, which would be more time consuming, FRS proposes the use of World Café sessions with member organizations (Brown, 2002). Participants will be recruited from membership organizations that participate in the online survey. World Café sessions are similar to focus groups but include more people who are broken into smaller groups that rotate around different stations. At each station there is a facilitator that leads each group in a discussion of a given topic. After a set amount of time, the group rotates to the next station, where a facilitator will lead a discussion on a new topic. The FRS team are trained in facilitation, and will conduct World Café sessions in five regions the country: Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax. There will be two sessions in each location except Montreal; one session will include member organizations that have obtained accreditation, and the other will include those who have not. In Montreal, four sessions will be conducted, a French and an English session for each group. We recognize that it may not be feasible for all organizations that wish to participate to send a representative in person, so we will use Lync Teleconferencing to include participants virtually.

The session with accredited organizations will address whether the Standards Program is being implemented as planned, seeking feedback from different organizations regarding the process they went through to obtain accreditation, including barriers or challenges they faced. It will also include questions and discussion to address if and how accredited organizations have improved their practice in the five key practice areas. Sessions with both groups will generate ideas around how Imagine Canada can increase participation in the Standards Program, and sessions with unaccredited organizations will address why they have not sought accreditation, or why they dropped out of the accreditation process.

Key Informant Interviews

FRS will conduct semi-structured interviews with key informants, including stakeholders from *Imagine Canada* (senior staff involved in the development/administration of the Standards program), as well as a small number of stakeholders from membership organizations (staff and volunteers). The membership organization stakeholders will be recruited at the start of the World Café sessions (attendees will indicate on a form whether they are interested in providing



more information in an interview). These interviews will help inform the impact of accreditation so far; specifically, whether accredited organizations have improved their practice in five key practice areas (board of governance, financial accountability and transparency, fundraising, staff management, and volunteer involvement). These interviews will also address whether the program has been implemented as planned. It will be important to get the perspectives of *Imagine Canada's* staff and the staff of organizations who have obtained accreditation, because it will allow us to cross-reference responses to ensure that they corroborate each other. This would help build confidence and validity of our conclusions. If responses did not complement each other, it might indicate that the Standards Program is not being implemented as planned, and require further investigation. Although time consuming, the rich detail we can obtain from interviews is essential. Because of the tight timeline, we aim to interview a small group of stakeholders, but will check for saturation as we go.

PhotoVoice

We will use PhotoVoice to show how accredited organizations have improved their practice in the five key practice areas (Wang & Burris, 1997). We will invite participating organizations to ask program participants/beneficiaries to take pictures (using a provided camera) of aspects of the program in action, things the program has accomplished for them, things they enjoy about the program. It could include things like activities, events, and services in the community, and so on. We feel this will indirectly inform organizations' success, and is a fun and innovative way to obtain the perspectives of program clients/participants/beneficiaries. Often in non-profit and charitable organization, the beneficiaries are vulnerable populations whose views may not be represented, or in some circumstances may experience literacy or communication challenges. The images captured using PhotoVoice also have the potential to serve as powerful tools for increasing awareness of program or for advertising program benefits.

Gap Analysis

Using results from the methods described above, we will design a gap analysis chart for the *Imagine Canada* Standards Program depicting the gap between how the program is being implemented now (including participation levels), and what they aspire for the future. We will follow this with recommendations on how to close the gap. Gap analysis is an easy way to illustrate why ensuing recommendations are needed, and can help stakeholders gain a deeper understanding of the evaluation results.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data (surveys, quantitative findings from lit review) will be analyzed using SPSS, while qualitative data (interviews, World Café sessions) will be analyzed for themes using NVivo software. PhotoVoice data will be analyzed for thematic categories.

Timeline

Figure 2. Anticipated timeline of the evaluation.

Imagine Canada- Standards Program Activities and Timeline	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
Literature Review					
Document Review within Organization					
Evaluation Task Force					
Jursidiction Scan					
Photovoice					
Interviews with IC stakeholder					
Interviews with Organization Stakeholders					
World Café					
Data Analysis					
Report Writing					
Results Dissemination					

Anticipated Challenges and Solutions

Table 1 outlines several anticipated challenges that may occur during our evaluation preparation, and offers innovative solutions to these issues.

Table 1. Anticipated challenges and proposed solutions.

Potential Challenges	Proposed Solutions
<p>Working with a Diverse Population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language Barriers- Charitable organizations in Canada have various language backgrounds (e.g., English, French, Inuktitut) Cultural Diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey materials will be offered in both English and French World Café sessions will be held in French where applicable (e.g. Quebec) and English where applicable (e.g., Alberta, Ontario) PhotoVoice empowers organizations to show how they want to be respected by others (Fortin et al., 2015)
<p>Organization Attrition from Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations that have withdrawn have cited cost and time as factors for dropping out Organizations that have withdrawn have stated they do not see the value of accreditation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inferential statistics used to determine whether organizations from specific tiers are dropping out more. If they are root cause analysis will be conducted. Educate organizations on research showing accreditation increases the amount of donors and amounts donated (Bekkers, 2006) Educate organizations on research showing accreditation increases public trust and volunteer trust in an organization (Bekkers, 2003; 2006)

Potential Challenges	Proposed Solutions
<p>Attribution Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring that our program is the cause of any outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparison of program outcomes (e.g., funds raised, volunteer hours) between accredited and non-accredited organizations Triangulation of objective comparison data with subjective data (e.g., survey results) and grey literature (e.g., annual reports of organizations)
<p>Social Desirability and Behavioural Biases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations may feel pressure to respond positively about the program Organizations may feel pressure to underreport problems with the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide complete information outlining confidentiality and anonymity of responses to surveys Use of honest but direct questioning methods on sensitive topics (e.g., finances) yields most accurate results, and trust (Rosenfeld, Imai, & Shapiro, 2014) Triangulation of subjective data (e.g., self report) with objective data
<p>Public and Organization Knowledge of Standards Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations that withdrew have stated the program and Trustmark are not well known to the public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggestions will be made for successful marketing strategies based on interview data with stakeholders (e.g., what marketing strategies have been used) and interview data with the public (e.g., if/where they heard about the program, if/where they research charities they volunteer with/ donate to)

Conclusion

The team at Front Runner Solutions has proposed an evaluation preparation methodology which is both well thought out and scientifically validated for the evaluation of the *Imagine Canada* Standards Program. Throughout this methodology, we have demonstrated various Credentialed Evaluator Competencies, as outlined below.

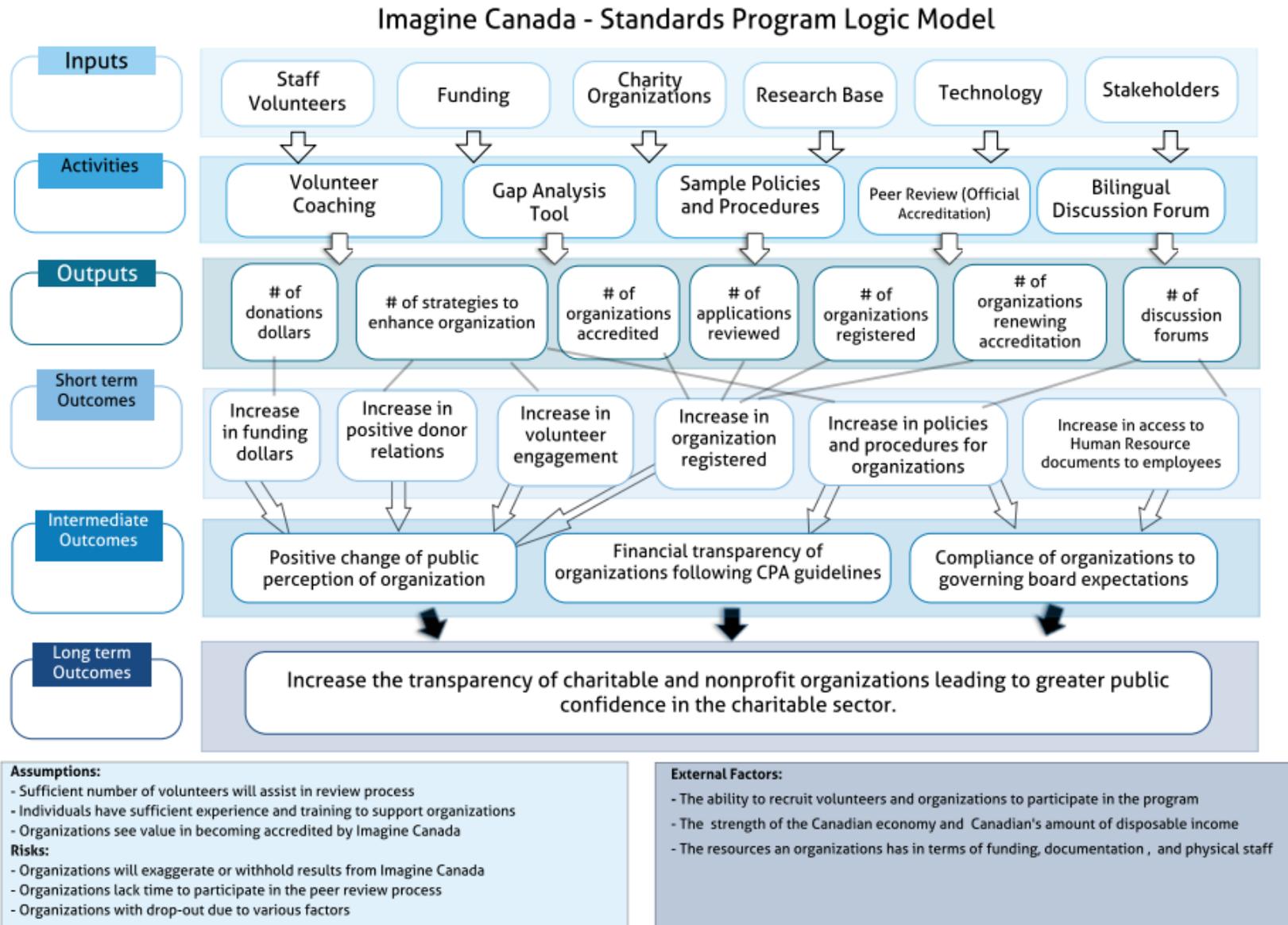
Evaluator Competencies

The Front Runner Solutions team is composed of Credentialed Evaluators, as designated by the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES)’s Professional Designation Program. As such, any research methods contained in an FRS evaluation are designed to uphold the CES pillars: a code of ethics, standards, and competencies (CES, 2010). While we are proud to follow all competencies, we believe our proposal has demonstrated the following competencies in particular:

Table 2. Evaluator Competencies.

Competency	Evidence of Demonstration
<p>Reflective Competency (1.3) Respects all Stakeholders</p>	<p>Acknowledges all input, as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● responding to all inputs (e.g., surveys, World Café) in a timely manner (see Figure 2) <p>Recognizes own biases and Strives to be equitable, as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● acknowledging evaluator expectancies may influence responses ● use of methods that foster honesty in responding (e.g., anonymous survey) ● use of methods that promote cultural diversity (e.g., PhotoVoice)
<p>Technical Practice Competency (2.7) Defines evaluation methods (quantitative, qualitative or mixed)</p>	<p>Identifies combinations of methods, as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Quantitative Methods (e.g., Inferential statistics to analyze differences in drop-out rates) ● Qualitative Methods (e.g., Interviews, PhotoVoice) <p>Challenges conventional methodologies and Develops sound alternatives as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● use of World Café ● use of PhotoVoice.
<p>Situational Practice Competency (3.5) Serves the information needs of intended users</p>	<p>Develops appropriate language for users, as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● use of French and English research methods <p>Develops and disseminates results as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● final report delivered to stakeholders upon completion of the evaluation ● recommendation of strategies for future public dissemination and marketing
<p>Management Practice Competency (4.3) Identifies required resources</p>	<p>Identifies required space, as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● booking locations for World Café <p>Identifies required physical and human resources, as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● creation of appropriate forms and surveys ● defining which team members are suitable for evaluation phases <p>Monitors finances, as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● use of cost-effective methods (e.g., video conferencing)
<p>Interpersonal Practice Competency (5.6) Uses facilitation skills (group work)</p>	<p>Draws on a number of facilitation techniques, as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● use of brainstorming in World Café to allow an open and honest dialogue ● use of graphic recording in World Café to share ideas <p>Integrates diverse perspectives, as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● use of PhotoVoice to allow diverse populations express their organization's personal goals

Appendix A – Revised Logic Model for the *Imagine Canada* Standards Program



Appendix B – Evaluation Matrix for the *Imagine Canada* Standards Program

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Methods
<i>Rationale/ Relevance</i>			
1. Is the program theory empirically supported?	- previous research	- peer reviewed published research and grey literature	- literature search
2. Do other programs with similar objectives exist within the jurisdiction?	- services offered by similar programs in other jurisdictions, including other areas of the world (e.g. the Netherlands)	- documents pertaining to the activities and impacts of similar programs	- jurisdictional scan
<i>Design/ Delivery</i>			
3. What barriers exist that prevent organizations from becoming accredited?	- data on drop-outs - survey and World Café results from member organizations that are not yet accredited - survey results from non-members	- existing data collected on drop outs - survey and World Café sessions with members of Imagine Canada that are not accredited - survey data with non-members	- document review/analysis - online survey - World Café
4. Is program being implemented as planned?	- comparison of planned implementation to actual implementation	- stakeholders of Imagine Canada and a sample of organizations - comparison of present state to ideal state of program	- document review - key informant interviews - gap analysis
5. Are program activities meeting their intended outputs?	- output numbers (e.g. # of organizations served, # of donation dollars, etc.)	- existing program documents - survey of stakeholders of member organizations - World Café sessions with a sample of survey participants	- document review - survey - World Café
6. How can Imagine Canada increase participation in the Standards Program?	- data on drop-outs - survey and World Café results from member and non-member organizations - gap analysis results	- existing data on drop-outs - survey to members and non-members of Imagine Canada - World Café's of members - gap analysis data	- document review - survey - World Café - gap analysis

Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Data Sources	Methods
<i>Impact</i>			
7. Are the accredited organizations improving their practice in the five practice areas (i.e. board governance, financial accountability and transparency, fundraising, staff management, and volunteer involvement)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - data on 150 accredited organizations - results from interviews, surveys, and World Café's with stakeholders of Imagine Canada and accredited organizations - PhotoVoice results from participants of accredited organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - existing data - data from interviews - survey data from accredited organizations - World Café data from accredited organizations - PhotoVoice data from participants of accredited organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - document review - key informant interviews - survey - World Café - PhotoVoice
8. Are the accredited organizations perceived as transparent in these five areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - data on 150 accredited organizations - survey results from general public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - existing data - online and telephone survey data on transparency and public confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - document review - online and telephone survey
9. Is the public confident in charitable and non-profit organizations and the sector as a whole?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - survey results from general public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - survey administered to general public online and by telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - online and telephone survey
<i>Efficiency and Economy</i>			
10. Is the Standard Program cost effective?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - data on current budget and expenditures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - existing data on program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - document review
11. Can a different approach achieve the same or similar outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - comparison of current expenditures to those of other similar programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - existing research and data on other programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - literature search - jurisdictional scan