Growing a Program from Scratch:

Planting the Seeds of Evaluation in a Small Business Program

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THE SMALL BUSINESS DILEMMA

Like most utilities, Consumers Energy has a large **small business** customer base...

but small businesses are **more difficult to engage in energy efficiency programs** than mid-sized or large businesses.

Consumers Energy was **already offering successful programs for small businesses**, including a trade ally driven program and direct install program,

but wanted to reach a **larger number of customers.**

THE CONCEPT

Consumers Energy's Idea:

Provide free, walk-through energy assessment to small businesses

Lighter "touch" than existing energy efficiency programs, reaching far more customers

Provide recommendations for energy savings and drive customers to other efficiency programs
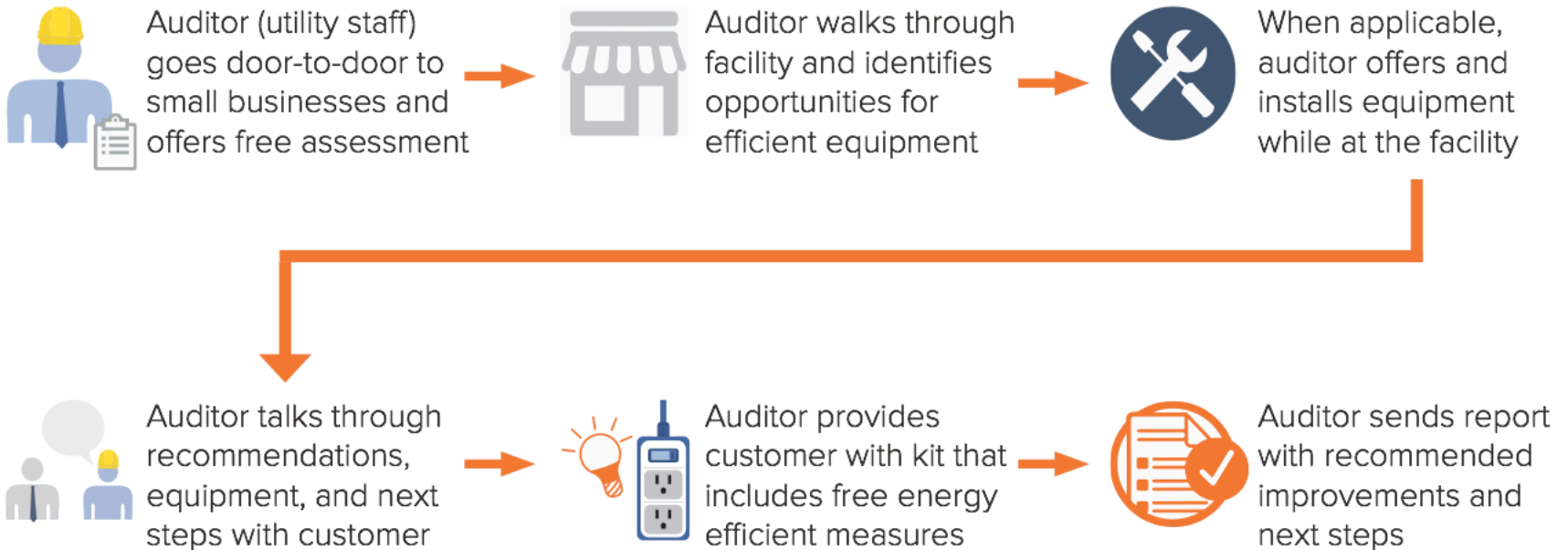
EMI Consulting Involvement:

Involved in planning and design from first concept

Provide evaluation and research support *throughout* program life

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PROGRAM DESIGN

Auditor (utility staff) goes door-to-door to small businesses and offers free assessment

Auditor walks through facility and identifies opportunities for efficient equipment

When applicable, auditor offers and installs equipment while at the facility

Auditor talks through recommendations, equipment, and next steps with customer

Auditor provides customer with kit that includes free energy efficient measures

Auditor sends report with recommended improvements and next steps

EVALUATION NEEDS

Because program was
innovative and new...

Evaluation needed to be
incorporated early

Because program was broad-
reaching...

Evaluation needed to provide
rapid feedback

Because program design ever-
changing...

Evaluation needed to be
iterative and agile

Because program goals were
ambitious...

Evaluation needed to be
prospective and actionable

EVALUATION DESIGN

EMI Consulting designed a developmental evaluation to suit the program's needs.

de·vel·op·men·tal e·val·u·a·tion:

An evaluation approach coined by Michael Quinn Patton that supports the development of innovations occurring in dynamic, complex environments, where knowing "what to do to solve problems is uncertain and key stakeholders are in conflict about how to proceed".

Sources: Crohn, K., E. Steiner, and M. Galen. 2014. "Comparing Traditional Process Evaluation with Developmental Evaluation Approach: Experiences with HVAC Programs as Part of a System for Change." ACEEE Summer Study on Energy Efficiency in Buildings.

Patton, M.Q. 2011. Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use. New York: The Guilford Press.

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EVALUATION DESIGN

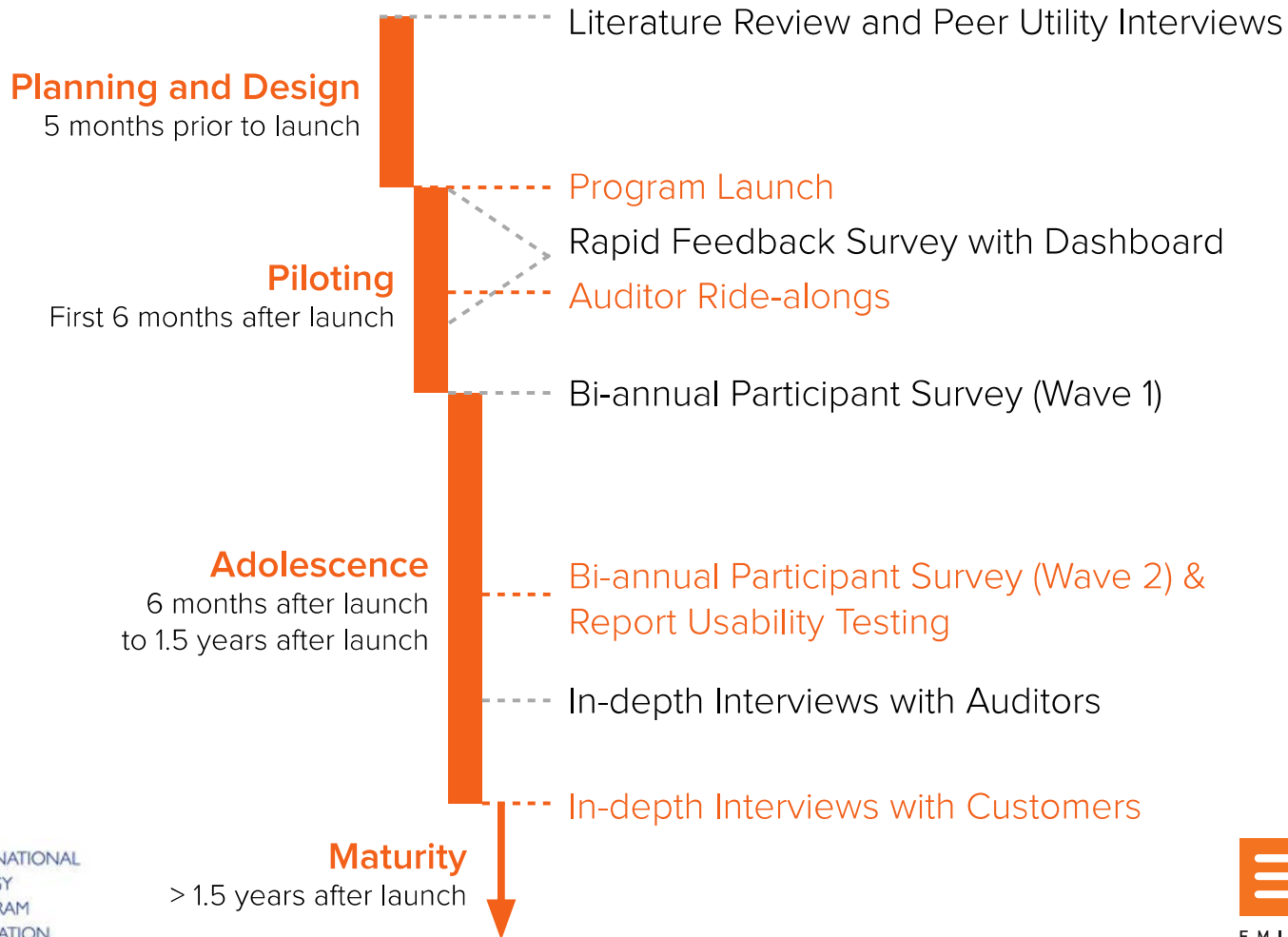*How is developmental evaluation different from traditional evaluations?*

1. Primary focus is adaptive learning, not accountability to outside sources.

2. Evaluator is key member of the team; relies upon trust and relationship-building between evaluators and program staff.

3. Role of evaluator extends beyond data collection and analysis; evaluator helps shape development, inform decision-making, and facilitate learning.

4. Approach is flexible, and evolves as understanding of the situation and the initiative's goals emerge.

Patton, M.Q. 2011. Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use. New York: The Guilford Press.

Dozois, E., M. Langlois, & N. Blanchet-Cohen. 2010. DE 201: A Practitioner's Guide to Developmental Evaluation. Montreal: The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

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EVALUATION DESIGN

How did developmental evaluation work for the Small Business Assessment program?

NEW — New program design or research question

Design evaluation research

Conduct and analyze research

Recommend program improvements or additional research

PROGRAM LIFE AND EVALUATION

Planning and Design
5 months prior to launch

Piloting
First 6 months after launch

Adolescence
6 months after launch
to 1.5 years after launch

Maturity
> 1.5 years after launch

Literature Review and Peer Utility Interviews

Program Launch

Rapid Feedback Survey with Dashboard

Auditor Ride-alongs

Bi-annual Participant Survey (Wave 1)

Bi-annual Participant Survey (Wave 2) &
Report Usability Testing

In-depth Interviews with Auditors

In-depth Interviews with Customers

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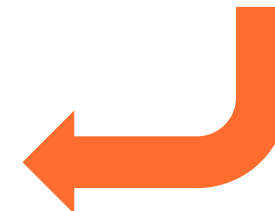
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EVALUATION CYCLE EXAMPLE

NEW Question from previous research: *Why do some customers say the program is not useful?*

Design evaluation research: *Ride-alongs with auditors*

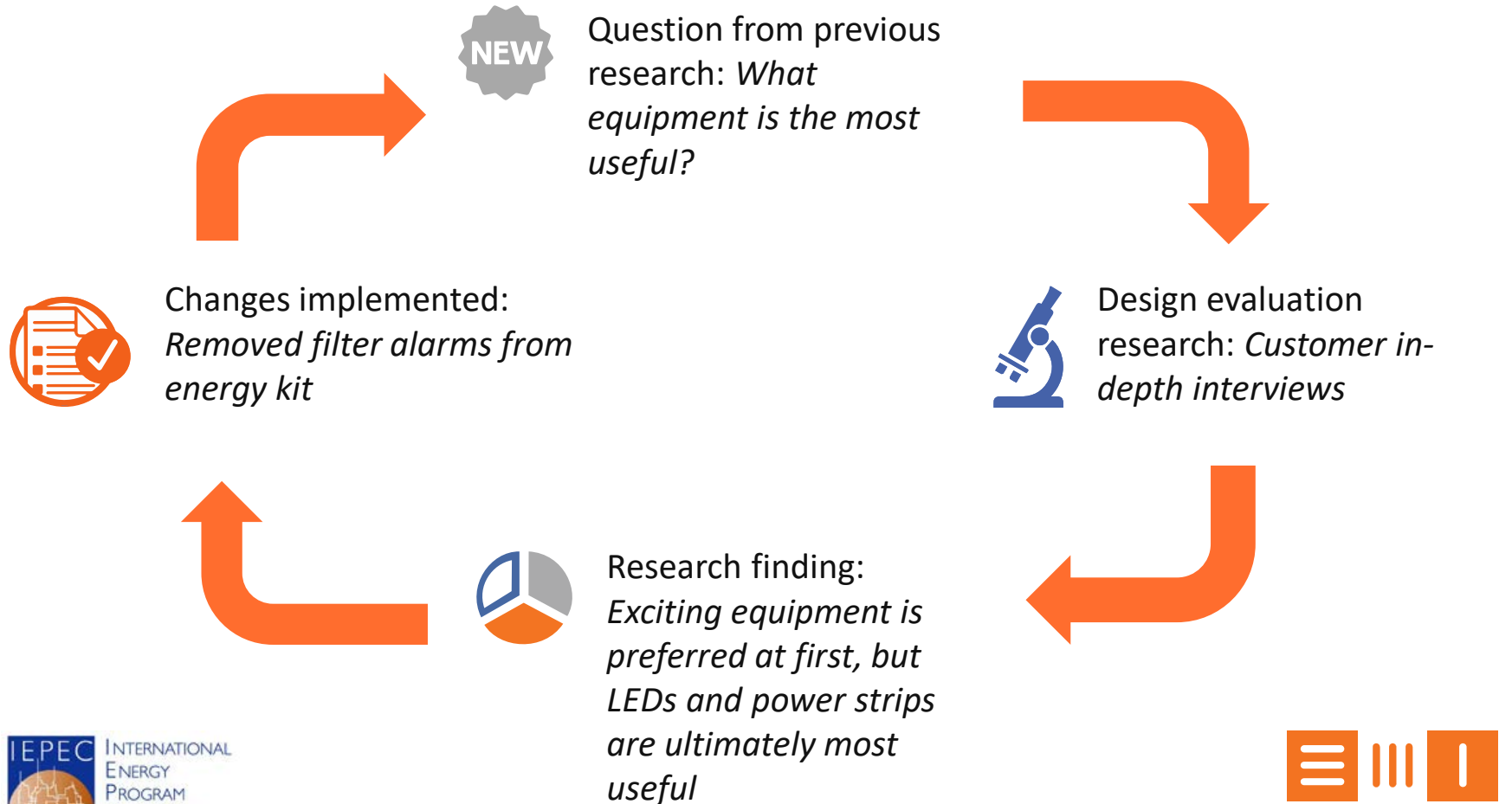Research finding: *Some customers have extensive upgrades & no opportunities*

Changes implemented: *Added energy kit with free measures to increase usefulness*

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EVALUATION CYCLE EXAMPLE

Question from previous research: *What equipment is the most useful?*

Design evaluation research: *Customer surveys & auditor interviews*

Research finding: *Participants and auditors give conflicting answers*

Research designed: *Added customer interviews to understand conflict*

EVALUATION CYCLE EXAMPLE

NEW Question from previous research: *What equipment is the most useful?*

Design evaluation research: *Customer in-depth interviews*

Research finding: *Exciting equipment is preferred at first, but LEDs and power strips are ultimately most useful*

Changes implemented: *Removed filter alarms from energy kit*

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KEYS TO SUCCESS

What qualities make a program a good fit for a developmental evaluation?

Program is new, or program processes are still in development.

How to use: Integrate into program development, design early research and make adjustments based on results.

Utility and evaluator relationship is well-developed.

Why important: Evaluator needs to be trusted member of the team.

Ability to receive program data quickly and frequently.

Why important: Evaluation needs to be iterative and responsive.

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KEYS TO SUCCESS

How can evaluators design successful developmental evaluations?

Engage client frequently and keep open channels of communication.

Why important: Increases trust and understanding of key questions.

Connect various evaluation efforts into synthesized, holistic findings.

Why important: Prevents changes being made based on narrow understanding, or only one viewpoint.

Allow for flexibility in scope and methods, and carefully select timing.

Why important: Need to adapt research to best suit client needs and be able to answer key research questions.

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COST EFFECTIVENESS

Potential concern: multiple evaluation activities could strain budgets.

In traditional evaluation, would still want to speak to multiple actors and gather data on program processes.

Traditional evaluations delay feedback; typically over a year to get results.

Delay in feedback is also a risk; programs are more costly to implement than to evaluate, and could be spending program funding ineffectually.

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THANK YOU

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