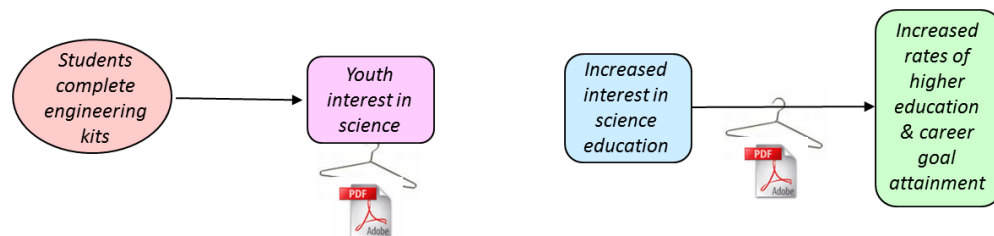


The “Golden Spike”

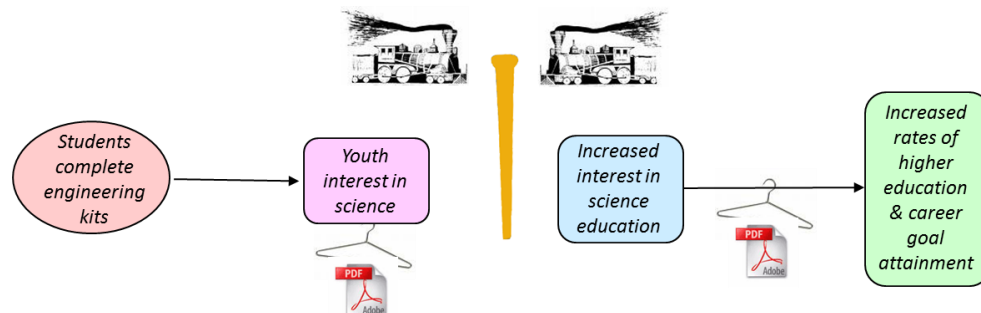
Linking Evidence to Practice

Pathway models can be extremely useful for linking what is (or can be) known through evaluation, to what is known from research. Mapping existing research onto a pathway model helps identify where evaluation is needed in order to fill gaps in the evidence base. In addition, this can reduce the burden on evaluation by clarifying how and where evaluation results connect to an existing evidence base.

The illustration below shows a key “through-line” in a pathway model for a youth science program. The program has a validated survey for measuring youth interest in science (indicated by the pdf icon attached to the short-term outcome), and it has the resources to conduct a pre-post evaluation to assess whether completing the engineering kits is associated with an increase in youth interest in science. It does not have the resources to follow up with participants in the future to see if they are more likely to go on to college. However, there is published research (indicated by the pdf icon) supporting the link on the right side of the model – namely, that increased interest in science education contributes to increased rates of higher education attainment.



Harking back to the construction of the transcontinental railway in the US (in which a ceremonial golden spike was used on May 10, 1869 to make the final connection between the rail-lines coming from the east and west) the “Golden Spike” in evaluation refers to the point where evaluation and research meet.¹ In the example program here, this would be between the short- and mid-term outcomes linking interest in science to interest in science education.



Evidence supporting this link would support a claim that this youth science program contributes to increased rates of higher education and career goal attainment.

¹ Urban, J.B., Trochim, W. (2009). The role of evaluation in research-practice integration: Working toward the golden spike. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 30, 535-553.