



## From Challenge to Change: University of Alberta Students at EC<sup>3</sup> 2025

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The Evaluation Capacity Case Challenge (EC<sup>3</sup>) is a cross-border competition that brings together graduate students and early-career professionals from across Canada and the U.S. to strengthen organizations' abilities to effectively support evaluation practice. Over several months, participants receive training and specialized coaching, and then come together in a 24-hour case challenge to design strategies that enhance an organization's evaluation capacity. Hosted by the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University, EC<sup>3</sup> is about more than competition; it's about collaboration, learning, and reimagining how evaluation can create lasting change.

This past May, two University of Alberta students from the School of Public Health, Marcus Hammond and Elliott Young, participated in EC<sup>3</sup> 2025 in Montréal. Their reflections remind us that evaluation is not only technical work but also relational and community-driven.

**Marcus Hammond**, a registered psychiatric nurse, applied health researcher, and an MSc candidate, first heard about EC<sup>3</sup> through a Health Program Evaluation course. For him, the challenge was more than a competition; it was a space to deepen his understanding of how evaluation can serve communities:



**Marcus Hammond**  
*MSc, University of Alberta*

*“The case challenge highlighted for me the importance of building relationships, thinking beyond the box, and supporting communities along their growth journey. Working alongside North America’s best and brightest reminded me how evaluation can be a tool for accountability and empowerment, not just organizational refinement.”*

Marcus leaves EC<sup>3</sup> committed to fostering a growing “community of evaluative thinkers” who see evaluation as a driver of learning and growth.

**Elliott Young**, a PhD student and member of Ermineskin Cree Nation, EC<sup>3</sup>, affirmed that evaluation can and should be rooted in storytelling and relationships:

*“It showed me that evaluation isn’t just about numbers; rather, it’s about relationships, storytelling, and helping communities shape their own paths. Working with a diverse team reminded me how powerful it is to bring different perspectives together. EC<sup>3</sup> helped me see evaluation as a tool for empowerment, not just accountability.”*



**Elliott Young**  
PhD, University of Alberta

These lessons carry particular resonance for Elliott’s ongoing work with Indigenous communities, where evaluation can support values, goals, and self-determination.

## Why Does It Matter?

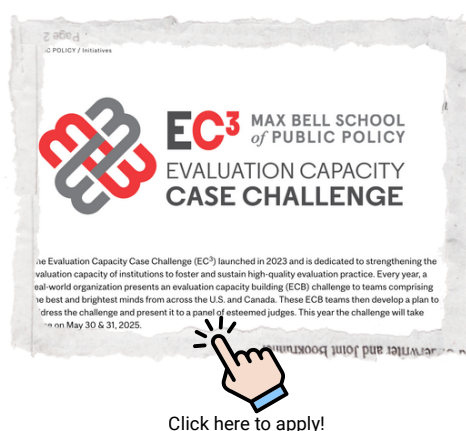
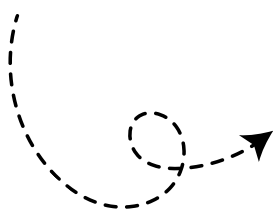
Organizations often collect data to improve their work, document important information, secure funding, or support decision-making. But some aim to go further. They want to move beyond simply tracking key performance indicators; they are looking to understand the deeper *why* and *how* behind the numbers. Others are already on that path but seek ways to make this learning more consistent, integrate it into their daily operations, and create opportunities for leadership and staff to actively engage with insights and apply them meaningfully.

That is where the Case Challenge comes in. Each year, four teams develop tailored strategies for one organization seeking to strengthen its evaluation practices. Organizations have reviewed these plans, selected ideas that align with their culture, and acted on them. Hearing fresh, innovative perspectives on how to create change often sparks inspiration, empowering participants to return to their workplaces energized and ready to collaborate with colleagues to put these ideas into action.

## Interested in Joining EC<sup>3</sup>?

This year's EC<sup>3</sup> will take place May 1-2, 2026, at the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University in beautiful Montreal, Quebec. Individuals in their senior year of undergraduate school, currently pursuing a graduate or professional degree, or early in their career (up to five years post graduation) are welcome to apply. If you reside most of the year in Canada or the US and will have completed one introductory evaluation course (formal academic course or professional development) by January 2026, you are eligible!

Individuals interested in applying to participate on one of the teams can apply starting the first week of October 2025.



Do you work in an organization that would like to enhance its ability to support the planning, implementation, and use of evaluations? If you are interested in being considered as a future case site for EC<sup>3</sup> please contact Dr. Leslie Fierro at [Leslie.Fierro@mcgill.ca](mailto:Leslie.Fierro@mcgill.ca).

