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From the Director's Desk

Heather B. Weiss
Director, HFRP

I would like to begin by thanking all who responded to our reader survey. We appreciated hearing your comments about *The Evaluation Exchange*—what works and what doesn't—and how we can do better. Our goal is to produce an interactive newsletter, bringing together different voices and providing a forum for readers to share new ideas about evaluation. The information we received through the survey was therefore of great value to us. A brief summary of the survey results is on page 16. In response to your comments, we will be making some changes to the format of the newsletter—look for those in the next issue!

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In this issue, we include several articles on methodological topics, particularly those involving complex initiatives or problems. First, HFRP consultant Julia Coffman writes about using a logic model approach to evaluate a large and diverse foundation initiative, in our Theory and Practice section. We also include two articles on complex methodological issues in our Promising Practices section. The first, by James Kee of George Washington University, explains the difference between cost-benefit analysis and cost-effectiveness analysis, including some basic examples and tips about when to use each. The second, by Ellen Taylor-Powell at University of Wisconsin-Cooperative Extension, discusses what to think about when evaluating collaboratives.

In our Questions and Answers section this time, we speak with Michael Scriven, professor of psychology at Claremont University and immediate past president of the American Evaluation Association, about the challenges to evaluation in the coming years. We highlight two evaluations in our Evaluations to Watch section. The first, by Laura Pinsoneault and James Sass of Alliance for Children and Families, describes an ongoing evaluation of a national replication of the Middle School *Families and Schools Together* Program. The second evaluation, by Donna Peterson and her colleagues at The University of Arizona, describes the organizational evaluation of the Cooperative Extension System's capacity to support programs for children, youth, and families at risk. Our Beyond Basic Training section includes an article by Jill Chopyak on the community action research

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Simplifying Complex Initiative Evaluation

Introduction

Evaluators are increasingly facing the challenge of evaluating complex initiatives that are both multi-site and multi-level. These initiatives typically involve a number of different programs or organizations that have unique strategies and goals but are working toward a broader, common agenda. Both private and public sector funders are increasingly investing in complex initiatives with the intent that through them they will achieve a more strategic impact than they could make by funding individual programs. For example, complex initiatives can act as a catalyst for the connection and integration of different types of services or activities that may be needed to achieve broad-based change. In general, complex initiatives are expected to achieve more in terms of outcomes than would be possible with the sum of their individual parts.

In the last decade much has been learned about ways to evaluate complex initiatives. Theory-of-change and cluster evaluation have recently emerged as developing evaluation approaches that can aid evaluators facing the daunting task of designing and implementing complex initiatives such as comprehensive community initiatives. These approaches have helped evaluators make conceptual leaps in understanding how to address specific design challenges.

However, there is still much to be learned and shared. Of particular importance is achieving progress in describing complex initiative evaluations that are both efficient and effective, with due regard for reasonable time and resource boundaries. Additionally, there is a need for acquiring and sharing information on how to build management and reporting structures that complement these approaches.

In this article, we highlight two major lessons learned from theory-of-change and cluster evaluation about how to evaluate complex initiatives. In addition, within the context of our experiences evaluating the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's (WKKF) De-

volution Initiative,¹ we share tips on how we applied those lessons to meet our own evaluation challenges.

The Devolution Initiative (DI) was created in 1996 to respond to some of the information and governing challenges associated with welfare reform and health care devolution—the passing of responsibility for policy and service development and management from the national level to the state and local levels. Specifically, the

Because the DI was still developing, the stakeholders did not want to articulate too much of the strategic detail or give a sense of false precision by making premature decisions about outcomes.

WKKF saw a need to support states and local governments in their efforts to take on these new responsibilities. Consistent with WKKF's mission to "help people help themselves," the DI strives to help citizens learn what is and is not working in various states with respect to welfare reform and health care so they can participate in the development and implementation of more effective policies in their communities. The more than 25 national, state, and local grantee organizations involved in the DI work toward this goal by building a base of knowledge about the impacts of devolution, disseminating findings to diverse target audiences that include policymak-

¹ Note that this evaluation is still in progress.

ers and citizens, and building the capacity of communities and their citizens to participate in and inform the policy process.

Lessons and Tips from Tested Approaches

Some clear lessons can be gleaned from the work that has been completed on evaluating complex initiatives so far. We present two of these lessons below. For each, we provide practical tips on how these lessons might be applied, based on our experience with the Devolution Initiative.

Lesson: Articulate the Complex Initiative's Theory

It helps immensely to begin a complex initiative evaluation by articulating the broad theory (or theory of change) that weaves together the initiative's many strands. This theory can serve as a framework for interpreting the initiative's various layers and parts. The evaluation literature includes a wealth of information on ways to tease out program theory. The logic model is one of the most frequently used tools for this task, and there are many evaluation resources available on how to develop logic models. The models developed using these resources generally share as common ground the identification of initiative activities and how they relate to short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes.

Tip: Begin with a Broad Conceptual Model of the Initiative's Theory

We began our evaluation by attempting to develop a logic model to articulate the Devolution Initiative's theory of change. We found, however, that our desire to work with stakeholders to build a theory of change that *fully* articulated the short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes for each Initiative layer (individual, community, state, national) conflicted both with our time constraints (we needed to *quickly* develop and begin implementing an evaluation design) and with the fact that the DI was too early in its development to do that.

Because the DI was still developing, the Initiative's stakeholders did not want to articulate too much of the strategic detail or give a sense of false precision by making premature decisions about outcomes.

As a result, rather than enumerating all of the DI's outcomes as a typical theory articulation process might do, we began by developing a broad conceptual model of the DI, one that illustrated its goals (or activities, depending how you look at it) and the general *non-causal* relationships between them (see Figure 1).

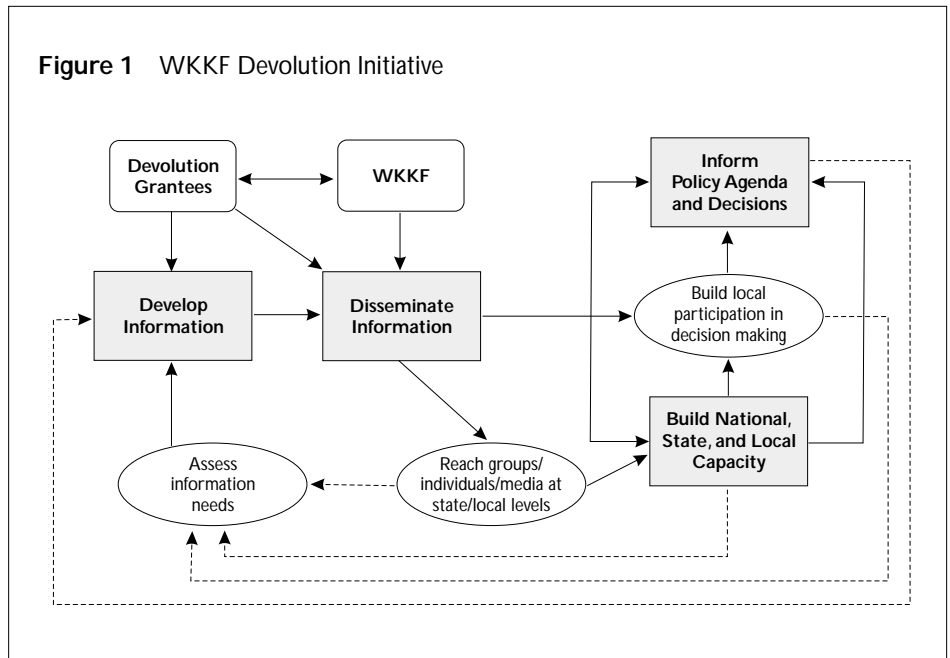
The advantages to using this type of model were substantial. First, the model's early timing and quick development were critical. Because the DI was in its beginning stages, the model served as an effective socialization tool for getting an early shared understanding among stakeholders of what the Initiative was trying to achieve. Using a more traditional model that identified and achieved consensus on specific outcomes at this early point in time would likely have been met with frustration, and might have stalled the evaluation early on.

A second advantage of this model was its simplicity and broadness. Each grantee organization was able to understand how its individual activities fit within the Initiative's broader context.

Another advantage of the model was its usefulness as a starting point for later theory articulation. As we describe below, while the model did not identify specific outcomes at first, we were able to use it later as the basis for identifying outcomes that could be attached directly to the model and further guide the evaluation.

Finally, probably the most important feature of the model was its sustainability. The DI evolved substantially over time,

Figure 1 WKKF Devolution Initiative



both strategically and in terms of the number of organizations involved. Despite these changes, the overall model changed only slightly, because Initiative changes for the most part could be accommodated beneath the level of this overarching structure. This was critical because as we describe below, the model became the organizing structure for the evaluation's design and management.

Lesson: Use the Initiative's Theory as a Framework for Designing the Evaluation

Connecting the evaluation design to the initiative's theory makes sense. The theory typically lays out what needs to be assessed in terms of both process and outcomes. Once you have that necessary focus, you can proceed through standard

evaluation design steps, which may include identifying benchmarks or indicators connected to those outcomes and the methods needed to track them.

This lesson can be difficult to apply, but keeping certain principles in mind will help. For example, you want to make sure that if you focus on the theory's parts (boxes in the logic model), you don't lose sight of their connections (arrows in the logic model). In addition, you want to develop a design that is easy to manage and keeps data collection and reporting focused on what is being learned about the initiative's theory as a whole and not only on its parts.

Tip: Develop Evaluation Objectives Linked Directly to the Model

Our first and most important step in the design process was to break the Devolution Initiative's model into evaluation objectives in order to make the evaluation in general more manageable (see Box 1).

The objectives focused on distinct pieces of the model and their relationships to one another. As a result, the objectives highlighted the importance of examining the links between the main model components. For example, Objective 2 involved several parts of the model. It was concerned with grantee information development and dissemination activities in terms of the types of information developed and the various mechanisms used to disseminate the in-

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BOX 1 Devolution Initiative Evaluation Objectives

- Objective 1: Examine WKKF and Devolution grantee roles in information development and dissemination.
- Objective 2: Examine links between information development, dissemination, and target audiences.
- Objective 3: Examine capacity-building activities.
- Objective 4: Examine the link between building capacity and increasing state and local participation in policymaking.
- Objective 5: Examine the Initiative's success in informing the policy agenda.

At What Price? Benefit-Cost Analysis and Cost-Effectiveness Analysis in Program Evaluation

Introduction

In our current age of accountability, public and private sector funders are increasingly concerned with the relative costs and benefits of the programs they fund. Benefit-cost (or cost-benefit) and cost-effectiveness analyses can be useful quantitative tools to help address these concerns. However, they differ in their purposes, and each has strengths and limitations.

Benefit-cost analysis is an applied branch of economics that attempts to assess service programs by determining whether total societal welfare has increased (in the aggregate, people have been made better off) because of a given project or program. It can be used in evaluations of existing programs to assess their overall success or failure, to help determine whether the programs should be continued or modified, and to assess the probable results of proposed program changes. Benefit-cost analysis consists of three steps: (1) determine the benefits of a proposed or existing program and place a dollar value on those benefits; (2) calculate the total costs of the program; (3) compare the benefits and the costs.

Cost-effectiveness analysis is an alternative to benefit-cost analysis that relates the cost of a given alternative to specific measures of program objectives. A cost-effectiveness analysis helps to compare costs to units of program objectives and may be the first step in a benefit-cost analysis if the analyst then decides to attempt to place a dollar value on the benefits. Unlike benefit-cost analysis, cost-effectiveness analysis does not produce a “net benefit” number, with benefits exceeding costs or costs exceeding benefits. However, a cost-effectiveness analysis can determine that a program which costs \$1 million produces ten units of outcome *x*, twelve units of outcome *y*, and twenty units of outcome *z*. Or,

if the units are alike, it can determine the cost per unit of outcome.

An example of these two methods of analysis using a hypothetical dropout prevention program is presented in Box 2.

Challenges in Conducting Benefit-Cost and Cost-Effectiveness Evaluations

Identifying and Measuring Costs

Identifying and measuring costs, and in the case of benefit-cost analysis, quantifying and placing a dollar value on the benefits, is the biggest challenge to the evaluator trying to conduct these types of analyses. Direct costs (such as personnel, materials, and equipment) are often relatively easy to account for. Indirect costs (such as over-

head, costs to other providers supporting the intervention, and costs to participants) as well as capital costs (such as buildings and computers) can be more difficult to calculate. Finally, intangible costs (such as the value of wilderness) are those for which the evaluator either cannot assign an explicit price or chooses not to. Lack of assigned price does not mean that intangible costs are unimportant; indeed, in presenting any results of these types of analyses, the evaluator should point out the intangible costs and benefits, thereby enabling the decision maker to consider these as he or she examines those benefits and costs that are quantified. When identifying any benefit or cost, it is important to state its *nature* clearly, to state *how* it is being measured, and to list any *assumptions* made in the calculation of the dollars involved.

BOX 2 Hypothetical Cost-Effectiveness and Benefit-Cost Results for Dropout Prevention Strategies

Cost-Effectiveness

The cost-effectiveness of each dropout prevention strategy is determined by dividing the cost for each strategy by its effectiveness (e.g. the percentage increase in the number of students graduating). The result is the cost for each percent increase in the number of students graduating.

Strategy	Costs	Effectiveness	C/E Ratio
Mentoring	\$80,000	10	\$8,000
After-School Sports	\$65,000	5	\$13,000

Benefit-Cost

The benefit-cost for each dropout prevention strategy is determined by calculating each strategy’s benefits (e.g. estimates of future earning increases of participants who stayed in school) and costs (e.g. personnel, materials, equipment) and then subtracting the benefits from the costs to get the net benefit for each strategy. The benefit-cost ratio can also be computed by dividing the dollar value of benefits by the costs (the higher the ratio, the more efficient the program in economic terms).

Strategy	Costs	Benefits	Net Benefits	B/C Ratio
Mentoring	\$80,000	\$95,000	\$15,000	1.188
After-School Sports	\$65,000	\$75,000	\$10,000	1.154

Identifying and Measuring Benefits

Identifying benefits can also be tricky. As with costs, there are direct, indirect, and intangible benefits. In the case of benefit-cost analysis, placing a dollar value on the benefits is also a challenge. The evaluator might choose a market value, when one is available, or a surrogate such as willingness to pay. Because of the redistributive nature of government programs, public agencies and those who evaluate them must be concerned with who benefits as well as the *amount* of benefits in addition to the costs.

Where quantifying benefits is difficult, costly, or viewed as inappropriate, cost-effectiveness analysis can be used. Cost-effectiveness evaluation does not require that the evaluator place a dollar value on the benefits. This is particularly useful in cases where the benefit of a program is “lives saved.” While there are various ways to place a dollar value on a life saved or lost, each is controversial. In contrast to a benefit-cost analysis, a cost-effectiveness evaluation would calculate the cost of the program per life saved without making a judgment about the dollar value of that life. The evaluator would then present the results to the decision maker who must decide whether an outcome is worth the dollar cost when viewed in light of alternative uses for the funds.

A major challenge in cost-effectiveness analysis is the fact that programs frequently generate more than one type of benefit. For example, an education system might target more than one population group in the school system. When conducting a cost-effectiveness analysis comparing programs with multiple benefits, the evaluator may need to place weights on the relative benefits to assist the decision maker in making comparisons. If this is not done, the comparison becomes quite subjective. Yet assigning weights often becomes at least as problematic as assigning dollar values to each benefit: how do the benefits to one population group outweigh those to another, for example?

Boundaries

Another challenge in conducting benefit-cost and cost-effectiveness analyses is determining the geographic scope of an analysis. While the focus may be within a certain jurisdiction, such as a state, there may

be benefits or costs that spill over to neighboring jurisdictions. It might be tempting to ignore spillover effects, but this can be unwise since spillovers often have political consequences. The question for the evaluator is whether to consider only those benefits and costs that accrue to the population within the jurisdiction for which the evaluator is doing the analysis.

Detail

One of the biggest dangers in these analyses, as in many other areas of evaluation, is the “black box” syndrome. Instead of laying out the relevant issues, assumptions, and concerns, the evaluator may be tempted to hide the messiness of the analysis from the decision maker, presenting a concise answer as to the net benefits or costs or cost-effectiveness. However, it is the detail—the assumptions involved and the sensitivity of the analysis to particular assumptions—which may be of most use to the decision makers in judging the value and usefulness of the evaluator’s work.

Deciding Between Cost-Effectiveness Analysis and Benefit-Cost Analysis

Those faced with deciding between the two types of analysis may find it helpful to keep three basic questions in mind:

1. How will you use the results? Benefit-cost analysis enables you to compare strategies that do not have the same outcomes, or to compare strategies across different areas of public expenditure (e.g., health, welfare, justice). Cost-effectiveness analysis is useful for comparing strategies that are trying to achieve the same objective (e.g., increased graduation rates).
2. What resources do you have? Benefit-cost analyses typically require more resources, because they take more time for analysis and involve significant methodological expertise (often in economics), such as the capacity for determining the discounted present value of a stream of benefits and costs.
3. How difficult are costs and benefits to value? While you may want to have as much information as possible on both benefits and costs, you must weigh the value of the increased accuracy gained

from the accumulation of new data against the costs associated with the data collection. Thus, any analysis should begin by assimilating existing data to determine whether it is sufficient.

The more intangible the benefit (for example saved wilderness), the more likely it is that a cost-effectiveness analysis will be of greater use to decision makers. This type of analysis can help them assess whether a cost is justifiable, when compared with other uses of the same funds.

It is important to note that benefit-cost analysis and cost-effectiveness analysis could lead to different conclusions about the same program, depending upon how benefits are valued in dollar terms. However, if the evaluation is concerned with a program with a single objective (or closely related objectives), programs or alternatives achieving the highest cost-effectiveness should also achieve the highest benefit-cost ratio.

Neither benefit-cost analysis nor cost-effectiveness analysis is a panacea. Both require judgments on measurement issues that should be brought to the attention of the decision maker. However, both techniques are useful to provide a format for analysis that can lead to better decisions. ♦

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For Further Reading

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Evaluating Collaboratives¹: Challenges and Practice

During the past years, the faculty and staff of University of Wisconsin-Cooperative Extension have increasingly found themselves engaged in collaborative work, playing unfamiliar roles or interacting in new situations with new players. The venue might be a community-based initiative, an inter-agency partnership, or an interdisciplinary work team in the area of agriculture, family living and nutrition education, 4-H and youth development, or community and economic development. Familiar evaluation practices—ones largely built on a discrete or distinct program delivered by one agency—do not fit this new context.

Collaboration is widely heralded as a mechanism for leveraging resources, dealing with scarcities, eliminating duplication, capitalizing on individual strengths, and building capacities. It offers the possibility for increasing participation and ownership, strengthened by the potential for synergy and greater impact. Yet, for all of us working in and with collaboratives, the challenges are numerous. Several, in particular, are stretching us to think about evaluation in new ways.

Evolving Nature

Collaboratives are dynamic and flexible, changing as they develop. They may look different from year to year. The membership or the roles of members may change, bringing new direction and emphasis. Some collaboratives have a clearly defined start and finish time, but many do not. They may not even start out being a collaborative. There is no grand plan. Rather, the work and direction of the group are invented as

the members work together. Implementation may never be complete and is often difficult to track.

In this setting, *process* becomes particularly important. Conventional program evaluation and many current funders focus on activities that are delivered. We find, however, that special attention must be paid to the workings of the collaborative if it is to successfully deliver activities and programs. This includes the capacities, operations, and climate of the collaborative. In this outcomes era, we are finding it necessary to educate our constituents and fun-

Collaboration is widely heralded as a mechanism for leveraging resources, dealing with scarcities, eliminating duplication, capitalizing on individual strengths, and building capacities.

ders about process and the linkage between process and outcomes.

Integrating process evaluation into a collaborative provides information for internal decision making, visibility, legitimization, and accountability. There are several ways in which this has been done. In one case, a community-based initiative guards 15 minutes at the end of every meeting to engage in a “how are we doing” process. Members facilitate a question-and-answer period on a rotating basis and write up and share the results. Accomplishments and issues being worked on are

featured in a quarterly column in the local newspaper. In another case, an interdisciplinary work team has enlisted one member to evaluate its process and progress. This member summarizes the minutes of meetings and uses content analysis to keep track of decisions, actions, and achievements; observes team interactions and discussions; and conducts an annual survey of members to assess levels of satisfaction, capacity development, and operations. Ongoing feedback is provided to the team, and annual reports are submitted to administration. In yet another example, a community partnership is using the group member survey developed by Cooperative Extension to engage members in a process of self-assessment and learning. Members were informed of the evaluation opportunity and they committed to completing the survey. Teams of members volunteer to present and discuss the results at a series of meetings that engage the full group in interpretation and action related to the findings.

Broad Goals and Expected Outcomes

Collaboratives form for many reasons. Some seek to develop and sustain resilient families or communities. Others are initiated to provide a particular service, to leverage resources, to coordinate efforts, or to effect greater integration of activities or services. Other collaboratives instigate social activism, or seek to create consensus around politically charged issues such as land use or school improvements. Often groups may not have a clearly defined or single purpose or one that all agree to or understand.

Coming to a shared understanding of the collaborative’s goals and expected outcomes is critical. Time is needed to discuss and negotiate this vision as the collaborative forms and as the collaborative evolves, since initial expectations, context, or membership may change. Creating a logic model—*mapping the collaborative jour-*

¹ A collaborative is defined as a group working together to achieve a shared vision. Members engage in a process where they constructively explore their differences and search for (and implement) solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible. [Gray, Barbara. (1989). *Collaborating: Finding common ground for multi-party problems*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.]

ney—makes explicit the ideas members hold about what results are desired and how to achieve them. We have found that drawing the logic model, either individually or as a group, is a fun and useful process. We use newsprint and allow members to use any metaphor, design, or thought process to show the chain of events and desired final outcomes. Members then share their pictures; similarities and differences are noted and discussed as the beginning of building consensus on expected outcomes and the strategy for achieving them. Stakeholders are involved in the process to spread understanding and ownership.

Multiple Outcomes

Collaboratives often struggle with defining and measuring outcomes. As part of the logic modeling, differentiating among types of outcomes—which outcomes; for whom—helps members set realistic expectations. There may be *outcomes for individuals* that include changes in attitudes, knowledge, skills, behavior, actions, and/or lifestyles for clients, community residents, collaborative members themselves, and/or service providers. There may be *outcomes for groups* such as changes in interactions, values, or behaviors of families, the work group, the community group, or the collaborative itself. Often, collaboratives are focused on *agency or organizational outcomes* such as changes in service delivery, resource generation and use, practices, and policies. Some collaboratives are interested in *system outcomes* in which agencies, departments, or whole organizations work in new ways, behave differently, share resources, and provide services in an integrated fashion. Finally, collaboratives may be focused on *outcomes for communities*, including changes in norms, policies, or actions at a community-wide level. Collaboratives may lead to the institutionalization of change or the empowerment of individuals or groups. We find that collaboratives often have impact in more than one area, and the unanticipated outcomes are significant in terms of human and social capital development.

Asking questions about outcomes—*what outcomes, for whom, when might we see them, how will we know it, what else is happening that we didn't anticipate?*—helps us detect and document results. One example of this is a family preservation

and support initiative that collects longitudinal data through a series of interviews with participating families to document their evolving ability to deal with stress, access community resources, and reduce family isolation (family outcomes). In another case, a collaborative of youth-serving agencies, working to open up membership to youth, compiled membership data before and after the two-year effort to assess changes in membership (agency outcomes). In yet another example, a community gardening initiative collects data through observation, interviews with participants and leaders, a sample survey of residents, and logs kept by staff to assess interaction among neighbors and changes in attitudes, helping behaviors, and responsibilities concerning the neighborhood (community outcomes).

Individual Performance

Collaboratives are built on the premise that the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts, but individuals make up the collaborative and many have performance appraisal systems that require evidence of individual performance. How can one assess individual performance without undermining the essence of the collaborative?

Collaborative members, who need to report to their supervisors or are concerned with personal accountability, are using a variety of techniques for defining their own contribution to the team effort and outcomes. These include using a log book or diary to track one's inputs, activities, outcomes, and impact; using meeting minutes or other documentation to determine the role and influence of individual members; engaging members in evaluating each other in a nonjudgmental process; and using surveys, group discussions, or interviews with key stakeholders to collect data on member contributions and influence on outcomes. When individual members are responsible for a particular activity, it might also be possible to evaluate that event/activity and link the results to the member's effort.

Collaboration as a Panacea

Collaboratives are being promoted, expected, or required everywhere. Yet, it seems that a critical initial question is often overlooked: *Is a collaborative warranted—*

is it the most appropriate approach? Some groups and/or communities are not ready for collaboration; some problems do not need a collaborative approach; and sometimes an individual's background and/or the agency's mission do not fit that of the collaborative. As we look at this dimension, a variety of evaluative questions emerge that relate to the context and readiness for collaboration in the community and external environment, in the organization, and among stakeholders.

We think about this as feasibility evaluation that typically occurs at the beginning of an initiative and is often informal. Some collaboratives are using a readiness questionnaire to ascertain a number of factors, such as the willingness of the community and/or individuals to work together, levels of cooperation and trust, history of previous work, potential barriers to success, and the availability of leadership. Besides the initial feasibility evaluation, each time the collaborative changes, adds new members, or begins a new initiative, it seems important for the group to discuss the feasibility of each—the potential for success, the resources needed, and the compatibility. Again, we are finding it important to help partners and funders consider whether collaboration is the best approach and what technical assistance may be necessary.

Our approach as partners in collaboratives across Wisconsin is to view evaluation as learning and as a shared process among members and stakeholders. Evaluation in the collaborative context becomes a collaborative process itself. The purpose, direction, and expectations for evaluation are negotiated among the collaborative members. When evaluation becomes a part of the collaborative, it provides the focus, feedback, and learning to support continuous progress and growth. ♦

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Parts of this article are taken from Ellen Taylor-Powell, Boyd Rossing, and Jean Geran. (1998). Evaluating collaboratives: Reaching the potential. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Cooperative Extension. (available at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdandel/evaluat.html>)

Interview with Michael Scriven

In this issue, we speak with Michael Scriven, professor of psychology at Claremont Graduate School and immediate past president of the American Evaluation Association. Dr. Scriven has written or edited books, periodicals, and articles in the areas of philosophy and psychology, word processing, turbine engines, artificial intelligence, critical thinking, and evaluation. In this article he shares with us some of his insights about the challenges facing evaluation, about evaluation as a distinct discipline, and about links between evaluation and practice, including organizational learning.

(1) What do you see as some of the major challenges facing evaluation and evaluators in this new century?

I think the biggest challenge we have is developing recognition of evaluation as an autonomous discipline. We know that in evaluation, there is a body of knowledge, a common logic that people will have to master to do this work well. We have increasingly been recognizing the highly specialized skills that are also required, but we need to go beyond that.

For example, knowing when to use what type of evaluation approach is a skill—and it's a skill that takes some knowledge of the underlying logical distinctions between grading, ranking, and apportioning. On the other hand, cost analysis is a skill that has been developed very well by specialists, although it is still not widely practiced in a sophisticated form by most evaluators. So there is room for improvement in the basic skills as well as the logical skills. Another skill, one that is still not well developed anywhere, is knowing how to set standards after you determine performance levels. Increasingly, however, we are realizing that evaluation is different from the standard scientific par-

adigm in that in evaluation, we rely on investigative skills rather than on hypothesis testing. Finally, evaluation has a set of ethical standards unique to its work.

I think another challenge we have is that we must break from the widespread attachment to the idea of interactive or collaborative evaluation as the standard model. While collaborative approaches to evaluation are important, some very good evaluations are done completely separately from the program being evaluated—they are not in any sense collaborative. In some cases, this is out of sheer necessity (e.g. in historical evaluation), but in other cases it may be a more deliberate choice (e.g., in contexts where the preservation of independence is crucial).

(2) Should evaluation be considered a separate discipline?

I think the importance of evaluation as a separate discipline is slowly being recognized. The field of statistics evolved out of

mathematics in the same way. But there are as yet no universities that are developing evaluation departments or even chairs in evaluation. It is important, I think, that we went from 9 to 23 national associations of professional evaluators worldwide in the past year. To get greater recognition for the field of evaluation we still have to improve our professional training. For in-service

training, there are now certificates of advanced study and summer institutes in which evaluators can upgrade their skills. We need to improve on that system with graduate degrees that involve a major in evaluation, not just in educational evaluation or policy analysis.

Partly because we are still treating evaluation as simply a “tool” discipline, we have so far virtually overlooked two other important areas in evaluation: the use of

evaluation in other disciplines (such as physics) and meta-evaluation (evaluation of evaluation). Physicists have to evaluate everything they deal with: theories, data, instruments, scientific papers and proposals for funding, candidates, and students. They learn how to do this as part of their scientific training; but, unlike everything else in that training (e.g. the mathematics they use), it is never explicitly addressed as a logical discipline. The history of science makes it clear that very large improvements in practice occur from explicating implicit principles. We already see this in the improvements in proposal evaluation that have been shown to be possible in the sciences.

(3) Some argue that evaluation needs to be better linked to the policymaking process. What is your opinion about this?

I do agree that program evaluation needs to be better linked with policymaking about the program evaluated. But our duty in this area is to produce valid, comprehensible, and appropriate evaluations. The evaluator's business is simply that of determining the merit, worth, or significance of what he or she is looking at. The service we provide is telling what is or is not working and, sometimes, finding the reasons why. I don't think we should be in the business of telling policymakers what they should be doing next—that is the role of policy analysts. These people look at the broader picture—taking into account the decision makers as well as the many other variables involved in a political decision. These variables are not addressed in program evaluation. I do think the program/policy analyst needs better evaluation skills, but this is still the person who has the responsibility and the knowledge to make policy recommendations.

For example, I was sole evaluator for a community foundation. They asked me to look at their youth leadership program, a program that trained youth to be leaders in the community. In my evaluation, I found

To get greater recognition for the field of evaluation, we still have to improve our professional training.

several things: there was no evident need to train youth in the community; the approach they used had no basis in theory; and there was no data from three years of work that the program had any effect. My tendency was to say, "Shut it down." However, in reality the situation depended on some political matters. The board of trustees for this foundation is completely unpaid. As a result, the members each implicitly get a "wildcard"—a program they like and want to fund because they think it is a good thing, without debate. That was the case with the youth leadership program—no matter what the evaluator says, the program is not going to be abandoned. This is the reality of the political process, of real decision making.

That is not to say that evaluators can have no influence or should not seek to inform the policy process. Evaluation has a major contribution to make, but we need to reach the right audience and we need to be realistic in our ambitions. What we should be good at is servicing policymakers who need answers about what works and why. We can also inform policymakers through legislative evaluators, those state and federal legislative offices that do program evaluation or policy research for legislators. These are the unseen beavers who get the dam built. They respond to committee and legislator requests for information on particular topics. If evaluators want to get their stuff out there and see it better used, these are the folks that they ought to be reaching—and these are the folks who are often more accessible.

(4) Some argue that evaluation needs to be better linked to on-the-ground practice. What is your opinion about this?

I think we are a remarkable discipline in that the usual academic versus application distinction has been almost entirely absent. It's still true that there is room for improvement in codifying best practices. There need to be mechanisms (e.g., research secretaries on each project), to link evaluation findings to methodological work in a field. Some are trying by linking with training and higher education institutions. But we also need to take some action on our own—publish in other journals beyond academic ones, make sure our findings reach program/policy analysts, and attend congressional hearings.

(5) How do you think evaluation (and accountability requirements) can be better used for organizational learning and continuous improvement of programs?

People involved in "organizational learning" reforms need good program evaluation skills and good personnel evaluation skills. The detail of this learning is tricky—how do you really decide what the lesson was? How do you design a study to learn results? What is the methodology involved? These are tough evaluation questions, and the skills are not taught in business schools.

Organizations have to develop a plan to integrate policymaking and programming—what questions they want answered, how data will be reviewed, how data will be used. A good evaluator helps with these questions. One of the most recent changes

has been the focus on performance measurement. I don't think this focus on outcomes is bad—I've seen programs take years to get up and running, and then have nothing to show for their work. Performance measurement is important—it is the bottom line. However, performance measurement as it has become lately is inflating one aspect of evaluation into the whole. We used to make exactly the complementary error, in the guise of process evaluation. I think you need to balance the two; you cannot ignore how you got to the outcomes. The most important way to do that is to negotiate expectations early on in the contracting process. ♦

***Karen Horsch
Research Associate
HFRP***

JOB OPENING

Research Associate

The Harvard Family Research Project, a research department at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, is hiring a full-time staff member to direct research efforts for its quarterly newsletter, *The Evaluation Exchange*, and to conduct research on other projects related to evaluation. The Research Associate will:

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- Develop and implement plan for expansion of newsletter audience and for development of "spin-off" evaluation-related products, including working papers, reports, evaluation tools, and articles for publication in professional journals.
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A Master's degree and five or more years of professional experience are required, with a doctorate preferred. Applicants should also have experience with program evaluation and/or participatory research and familiarity with qualitative research methodology and/or current evaluation theory, as well as excellent writing skills and publication record. The Research Associate reports to the Director and works closely with other research staff. The position is grant-funded through 6/30/01, with strong likelihood of continuation.

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Evaluating the National Replication of a Prevention Program for Youth and Their Families: Middle School *Families and Schools Together*

Introduction

In 1997, the Alliance for Children and Families, with major support from the DeWitt Wallace–Reader’s Digest Fund, began replicating and evaluating the middle school adaptation of the *Families and Schools Together (FAST)* program. This program adaptation was developed in 1991 by staff of Family Service in Madison, Wisconsin, as part of a Center for Substance Abuse Prevention High Risk Youth Grant. Middle School *FAST* is a school-based, whole-family program intended to increase the likelihood of youth success in the home, in the school, and in the community. Program activities build positive, respectful, and supportive relationships for middle school youth, their parents, and other family members.

Middle school youth are recruited for the program and begin participation in a school-based youth group facilitated by a youth advocate. Four weeks into the youth group, the whole family begins attending 10 weekly, multiple-family meetings at which they engage in research-based activities designed to be fun, to strengthen the family unit, and to build support networks. At the end of the 14 weeks, families graduate into FASTWORKS, a parent- and youth-led multiple-family group that meets monthly for the next two years to continue building on the bonds created during the weekly sessions of *FAST*.

As of May 1999, 29 Middle School *FAST* program cycles have been implemented and evaluated. Family- and child-serving agencies in eight states conducted these cycles in 23 middle schools. Ninety-one percent of the families who began the Middle School program attended eight or more sessions, and graduated. The average age of the youth participants is 12 years, with the largest proportion of youths in sixth (42%) or seventh (30%) grade. About 56% of the youths are male and 44% are

female. Approximately half of the graduating youths are Caucasian, and one-quarter each are African-American or Hispanic. Two hundred three (203) youths and their families have completed evaluation data.

Evaluation Design

The evaluation design for Middle School *FAST* is based on the design for the elementary school *FAST* program (Billingham, 1993; McDonald and Billingham,

Thus far, from this design we have learned lessons in four areas: response rate, parent-school involvement, long-term outcomes, and asset-based measurement.

1992). It is a nonexperimental pre-test/post-test design focusing on initial outcomes and protective factors. At the initial recruitment visit, the parent(s) and the youth give written consent to participate in the evaluation. The youth completes one pre-/post-instrument, and a qualitative questionnaire at the post-test. The parent completes four pre-/post-instruments, and family demographics and qualitative questionnaires at the post-test. (The youth and parent qualitative questionnaires assess the participants’ program experiences.) The evaluation procedures encourage collecting all pre-tests prior to the start of the youth group meetings, but permit parent forms to be collected before the start of the first

multiple-family meeting. Post-tests are administered within two weeks after graduation. In addition to the measures collected from the youth and their parents, an academic information form is submitted to the school.

Instruments

As an early intervention/prevention program, Middle School *FAST* focuses on factors that exhibit high correlations with the onset of school failure, violence, delinquency, or substance abuse in later adolescence and adulthood. These factors are family environment, youth behavior, and parent-school involvement.

Family Environment. Families complete two forms that measure characteristics of healthy families. Both youths and their parents complete the Family Relationships Index of the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1994) to assess the quality of family relationships. The Family Relationships Index (27 items) consists of three subscales: Cohesion, Expressiveness, and Conflict. Pre-test/post-test comparisons show significant improvements on three subscales for the parents and on one subscale for the youths. Parents also complete the Isolation subscale of the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1995). This subscale is a six-item measure of the parent’s sense of a lack of social support.

Youth Behavior Problems. To assess behavior problems, *FAST* uses the six scales of the Revised Behavior Problem Checklist (Quay and Peterson, 1987): conduct disorder, socialized aggression, attention problems, anxiety/withdrawal, psychotic behaviors, and motor excess.

Parent-School Involvement. Middle School *FAST* now uses 21 items of the Parent Survey (Witte, 1991) to assess changes in parent contact with the school, school contact

with the parents, parental involvement in school organizations, and parental participation in school-related activities with their child.

Discussion

Evaluation has been central to the *FAST* process since the program's inception. In order to facilitate the use of evaluation within *FAST* communities, standardized instruments that are easily administered and understood by families were selected to measure multiple outcome areas linked to risk and protective factors. Notwithstanding the usefulness of the current package, the middle school evaluation is still in the development phase. Thus far, from this design we have learned lessons in four areas: response rate, parent-school involvement, long-term outcomes, and asset-based measurement.

Response Rate. The current, more concise version has received a better response than did the original evaluation package, which contained five pre/post measures for the parents and three for the youth. The increased response rate is attributed to decreased resistance from team members in administering the evaluation instruments, and reduced fatigue from families. The overall response rate has been about 80 percent across the 29 program cycles. However, the response rate for academic data has been much lower. The 14-week *FAST* cycle does not easily fall within a typical semester's grading period. Furthermore, there is no national set of academic and behavior standards that can be used to create a set of national *FAST* outcomes. Schools have provided academic data for less than 5 percent of the program youth. Therefore, *FAST* has been unable to track outcomes in academic achievement. This low figure

indicates a need to establish improved forms and procedures for collecting academic data. The immediate solution has been to permit communities to create their own forms for assessing academic indicators, but the national consistency has been lost.

Parent-School Involvement. The Parent Survey (Witte, 1991) replaced an earlier measure that assessed parents' satisfaction with the middle school. The connection between satisfaction and program goals is tenuous at best. As program sites noted, a parent who becomes more actively involved with a school may also become less satisfied with that school. The Parent Survey, using items similar to those on the National Education Longitudinal Study, directly assesses the amount of parent contact and involvement, but does not measure the quality of contact between parents and schools.

Long-Term Outcomes. Evaluation reports based on the initial 14-week outcomes have been a vital tool for Middle School *FAST* program sites in securing funding and assessing program quality and effectiveness. Still, longitudinal data are necessary to evaluate Middle School *FAST*'s effectiveness as a prevention program for youth and their families. A longitudinal evaluation component addressing maintenance of the changes that occur at *FAST* is important to the future of the program. Due to the maturational changes that occur during adolescence, control and/or comparison groups will be critical for capturing the long-term effects that can be attributed to the program. Alliance members and Middle School *FAST* communities are working to seek out additional funding resources for more longitudinal research.

Asset-Based Measurement. Two of the evaluation measures explicitly focus on deficits or problems (Abidin, 1995; Quay and Pe-

terson, 1987). Although the measurement of deficits is common in social service assessment, this approach is not consistent with *FAST*'s emphasis on building on the strengths already present in families. Thus, asset-based measures (e.g., Epstein, 1998; Lengyel, Thompson, and Niesl, 1997) deserve serious consideration as tools for evaluating Middle School *FAST*. ♦

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- For more information about this evaluation, please contact Jim Sass at (414) 359-1040, ext. 3612; jsass@alliance1.org.*

Got a Puzzling Evaluation Question?

In our next issue, we will be launching a new section entitled Ask the Expert. In this section, we will ask evaluators to answer tough evaluation questions sent to us by our readers. If you have a question you would like answered, please e-mail it to us at hfrp_gse@harvard.edu. Be sure to reference *The Evaluation Exchange* in your subject line or in the body of your message. Please note that the number of questions answered and the length of the answers will depend on the volume of requests we receive, and we may not be able to answer all questions.

Cooperative Extension's Capacity to Support Programs For Children, Youth, and Families At Risk: The Organizational Change Survey

Introduction

In 1991, the Cooperative State Research, Education, Extension Service (CSREES), responding to pervasive conditions in America that place children and their families at risk for not having basic needs met, introduced the Children, Youth and Families At Risk (CYFAR) National Initiative. The Cooperative Extension System is based in land-grant universities and has a mission of disseminating, through educational programs, research-based knowledge to communities in order to improve their economic, environmental, and social conditions. CSREES utilizes national initiatives to give direction and special attention to the development of educational programming within the Cooperative Extension System.

Through the CYFAR Initiative, the Cooperative Extension System made a commitment to support programs for at-risk children, youth, and families. This initiative emphasizes a holistic approach to educational prevention programs that facilitate the development and maintenance of healthy, happy environments in which those at risk are enabled to develop life skills necessary for contributing, fulfilling lives. While Cooperative Extension had the knowledge base and the resources to make a significant difference in communities, it needed to find effective ways to expand its educational programs to at-risk audiences. Thus, the CYFAR Initiative involved a significant expansion of constituencies for Cooperative Extension nationally.

Given this organizational shift in programmatic focus, the CSREES, under contract with The University of Arizona, initiated an evaluation collaboration with state Extension systems implementing CYFAR programs. As a result, the Organizational Change Survey (OCS) was developed to assess states' abilities to develop and sustain effective programs for children, youth,

and families at risk. The survey was implemented from late 1997 to early 1998 to document the current state of Extension systems and to establish a baseline. It will be repeated in 2000-2001 to assess any changes that have been implemented. Ultimately, if the broader organizational changes were effective, Extension professionals will feel better equipped and supported in carrying out program-level goals for serving at-risk audiences.

Survey Design

OCS was loosely based on the national surveys conducted by the Search Institute in 1993 and 1996 to evaluate the National 4-H Council's Strengthening Our Capacity to Care (SOCC) Project. The development of the OCS was also informed in part by the literature on organizational learning, organizational niche expansion, intra- and inter-organizational relations, and evaluating organizational transitions.

Ultimately, the survey needed to assess six organizational components (derived from research on effective programs for at-risk children, youth, and families) that are key to CYFAR programs:

1. Develop and implement a common vision and strategic plan for programming for children, youth, and families at risk.
2. Train, support, and reward Extension salaried and volunteer staff for implementing programs which accomplish the CYFAR mission.
3. Recognize Extension professionals as critical resources in research and education for children, youth, families, and community issues.
4. Promote diversity, inclusivity, and pluralism in Extension programs and staff.
5. Promote (internal) collaborations of Extension 4-H, Family and Consumer Science, Agriculture, Community Development, and other University depart-

ments in programming for children, youth, and families at risk across the state.

6. Promote joint (external) collaborations of community, county, state, and federal agencies and organizations to strengthen programs and policy for children, youth, and families.

To aid in the development of the OCS and to strengthen its validity, a 15-member work group was formed. The members of this group had diverse interests and expertise, and represented USDA-CSREES, the University of Arizona, other land-grant universities including county Extension programs, and the National 4-H Council. After receiving permission to adapt the SOCC survey, the work group members were given a copy of the 1996 SOCC version and six organizational components. The work group members were asked to: (1) categorize the items from the survey under each of the components; (2) determine which questions were essential to each component; and (3) determine gaps in addressing each component.

After a frequency distribution of survey items for each of the six components was calculated, the work group held a face-to-face meeting to come to consensus on the items which best address each component and to discuss survey methods and procedures. A draft of the OCS was then developed and sent out for review to the work group members. Based upon reviewer comments, the survey was revised and piloted with a small sample in Arizona. This copy of the survey, along with supporting documents and survey procedure, was sent to two members of the work group for a final review. After receiving additional feedback via individual interviews with these members, the survey and procedure were sent to CSREES for approval.

The final version of OCS contained 74 items that assessed each state Extension

system's status relative to the six organizational components, utilization of technology, program sustainability, and respondent characteristics. Sample items from the OCS include:

- "Our State Extension system has a strategic plan in place for expanding and strengthening CYFAR programming in our counties."
- "We are provided the resources (time and money) necessary to engage in collaborative efforts to better serve children, youth and families at risk."

A two-part response assessed the current and ideal status for items, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Two open-ended questions assessed the factors facilitating program sustainability.

Survey Procedure and Response Rates

Evaluation collaboration members at The University of Arizona coordinated the survey process. Materials were sent to each state Extension director, and a contact person in each state was then identified as the individual responsible for implementing the survey. Each state was responsible for selecting participants from among eligible Extension professionals.

Forty-five states or territories implemented OCS from late 1997 to mid-1998. Dillman's (1978) Total Design Method was utilized as a framework for this survey. An introductory letter alerting respondents to the coming survey was mailed one week before the survey itself. A cover letter informing respondents about the purpose of the project and providing directions on returning the completed survey accompanied each questionnaire. All responses, identified only by code numbers, were returned directly to Arizona for analysis. To ensure confidentiality, Arizona did not have a list of respondents and their matching code numbers. Arizona provided the state contact persons with a list of code numbers from returned surveys to facilitate the mailing of reminder letters. One week after the survey was mailed, all eligible respondents were sent a follow-up postcard thanking those who had responded and encouraging others to do so. Two weeks later, a reminder letter was sent to all nonrespondents. Finally, four weeks later, a reminder

letter and another copy of the survey packet were sent to all individuals who still had not responded. Response rates ranged from 70% to 99% in 43 of the 45 participating states or territories. The survey procedure also enhanced the validity of the project by minimizing social desirability bias and non-response bias.

Data Analysis and Reporting

Initial data entry was performed with the use of a computer software program that allows a standard image scanner to read filled-in bubbles directly from a survey and convert them to numbers for statistical

Perhaps the most important result of this survey is the very positive picture of organizational learning that is taking place in Extension across all states ...

analysis. Each state's data were saved in a separate file. A state-specific report was prepared for each participating state. These data files were then aggregated for analyses for a national report (available at <http://ag.arizona.edu/fcr/fs/cyfar/>). In the national report, states were the unit of analysis; in other words, each state served as an individual case. The report included tables containing quartile ranges of state percentages, means, and standard deviations for various items, which allowed states to compare their own data to the national trends.

Results from the Organizational Change Survey provided valuable information about Cooperative Extension's ability to work with at-risk children, youth, and families. Perhaps the most important result of this survey is the very positive picture of organizational learning that is taking place in Extension across all states; generally, a majority of respondents reported that their state Extension system is successfully implementing the six organizational compo-

nents. Also, the discrepancies between what is currently happening and what would be ideal for all six organizational components revealed strong support for further expanding and strengthening this system in working with children, youth, and families at risk.

In-depth interviews are currently being conducted with a subsample of randomly selected respondents to gain additional insight into some of the issues raised by the survey responses. For example, while most respondents reported that one of their roles in Extension is to educate policymakers and other community leaders on children, youth, and family issues, they feel they lack knowledge on policy and legislation affecting children, youth, and families at risk. Thus, one interview question examined ways to reduce this gap. Additionally, five evaluation bulletins covering the organizational components (one theme per bulletin) are being published on the Internet (http://ag.arizona.edu/fcr/fs/cyfar/bulletin_intro.htm). By presenting questions that can be addressed, lessons learned, and additional resources, these bulletins encourage states to further examine their survey data.

It is important to reiterate that the intent of this survey was to examine the "system" rather than how the "individuals" were doing within the system. Thus, the lessons learned from this process will inform the Extension system as it strives to expand and better support its efforts around at-risk issues. The assumption upon which the survey and report are based is that Extension as a system will better support community-based programs for children, youth, and families at risk when the following conditions exist: personnel have a vision and plan for programming; staff and volunteers are trained, supported, and rewarded appropriately; Extension professionals are viewed as critical resources in research and education; diversity, inclusivity and pluralism are valued; and staff collaborate with their colleagues in Extension and the university, and also with others in the community, county, state, and nation. ♦

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Community-Based Research: Research for Action

Think of a typical “scientist” and what image comes to mind? How about a housewife wearing blue jeans who tests local water quality? Or a group of high school students conducting studies on the health effects of diesel exhaust fumes in their neighborhood? Across the globe, a quiet movement is gathering momentum—one which involves lay citizens in conducting research in response to community-defined needs. “Community-based research”—research that involves laypeople working with professionally trained scientists in a community-driven process—has become a powerful tool for community activists and individual citizens. Through this approach, communities are given a voice in a process that has traditionally been left to professional researchers in universities and federal institutions. Community-based research provides the opportunity for individual citizens to collaborate with professional researchers in defining a problem, conducting the research, interpreting results, and using the results to effect constructive social and environmental change. Community outreach and education are built directly into the research process.

History

Pioneered several decades ago by practitioners who challenged conventional top-down approaches to development, community-based research expanded the traditional research process to make it relevant to real-life problems. In the early 1970s, researchers—primarily in Asia and Latin America—began to question the inability of most research to solve the myriad of problems individuals within these societies were facing. Working with oppressed communities, researchers began to collaborate with community members in designing and implementing research projects that had direct relevance to their struggles.

Since the 1980s, community-based re-

search has become a well-known and widely practiced research methodology as well as a powerful tool for social change in countries around the world. In addition, community-based research practitioners have begun to collaborate through networks in order to improve their work and share

A quiet movement is gathering momentum—one that involves lay citizens in conducting research in response to community-defined needs.

resources. The most developed network is in the Netherlands, where the Dutch have pioneered a national network of “science shops.” Located at or near each of the nation’s 13 universities, the 38 science shops conduct research on questions posed by citizen groups, trade unions, and public interest organizations. Some science shops are general and others are specifically focused on disciplines such as chemistry, biology, and history. Paid staff members and student interns in each shop screen questions and refer challenging problems to university faculty members and students.

During the formative years of the shops, faculty generally performed the research; however, currently graduate and undergraduate students do much of the work, under faculty supervision. Students receive university credit, often turning their investigations into graduate research. Because students are doing research and writing papers, and the faculty are supervising and evaluating their work, both groups are doing what they would be doing as part of their regular workloads. The difference is

that project results are not simply filed away and forgotten. Instead, they help people address important social, environmental, and public health problems that are of concern to their community.

As a result of their work at science shops, some professors have conducted follow-up research projects, published scholarly articles on new topics, developed innovative research methods, forged new interdisciplinary collaborations, and modified courses they teach. Because they are networked with one another, the various Dutch science shops are able to share information and make cross-referrals. Today they respond to about 2,000 annual research requests, and have inspired the creation of additional science shops in Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Germany, Malaysia, Northern Ireland, and Romania.

Community-Based Research in the United States

The Dutch model inspired the Loka Institute—a nonprofit research, education, and advocacy organization located in Amherst, Massachusetts—to bring this concept to the United States and create the Community Research Network (CRN). Modeled partly on the Dutch network, the CRN supports participatory, community-based research efforts worldwide.

In July 1998, Loka conducted a study on the state of community-based research in the United States, and found over 50 community research centers around the country, dealing with a variety of issues—from environmental health to campaign finance. Since the study’s release, the number of known research centers in the country has grown to over 100. These research centers are bringing individual citizens from all walks of life into the research process.

For example, in New York City, seven of nine bus depots are located in disadvantaged and underserved communities of

northern Manhattan. Harlem residents raised concern when a new depot was constructed across from a junior high school. Community-based West Harlem Environmental Action (WEACT) formed a research partnership with researchers at Columbia University and health care providers at Harlem Hospital Center and Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center. As part of this effort, Harlem high school students collected and helped analyze data on diesel exhaust exposure and lung function among a sample of Harlem students. Their study suggests that most adolescents in Harlem are exposed to detectable levels of diesel exhaust, a known accelerator of chronic lung disorders such as asthma. Further studies have now been funded. The participating Harlem high school students coauthored an article published in the peer-reviewed *American Journal of Public Health* (July 1999).

With members of the Community Research Network, the Loka Institute is working to promote such collaboration between university researchers, graduate students, and community members. Our web-based, searchable CRN database (<http://www.loka.org/crn/crndb.htm>) has information about community-based research centers and researchers around the country. Each year we hold a national conference which provides the opportunity for face-to-face networking, collaboration, and problem-solving between both researchers and community activists. And our collaborative work with various organizations to develop guidelines for community-based research is providing a framework for training scientists and community members in how to effectively use this methodology.

Community-based research provides

students and professional researchers with a tremendous opportunity to use their skills to solve real-world problems that communities are facing, and to learn—from community members—how their expertise can be used to effect change. Moreover, community-based research is a skill-building and empowerment tool for individual citizens, thus creating a nationwide community research system that makes empowerment through mutual learning universally accessible. ♦

Jill Chopyak
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For more information about the CRN or the Loka Institute, contact the Institute at P.O. Box 355, Amherst, MA 01004; tel. (413) 559-5860, fax (413) 559-5811, e-mail loka@loka.org, web site <http://www.loka.org>.

Theory and Practice, *continued from page 3*

formation. Objective 2 was also concerned with determining whether that information reached specific target audiences and which information and mechanisms were most effective in reaching the audiences as well as assessing their information needs.

The evaluation objectives made it easier to complete key evaluation planning steps. Once we developed the objectives, we were able to proceed easily through standard evaluation planning procedures. Because the objectives were broad, they could be split out into a series of separate evaluation questions. Those evaluation questions then drove decisions on which methods were needed to answer the questions and therefore address the evaluation objectives.

This approach made it possible in some cases to use methodological approaches with some of the evaluation objectives that would allow us to examine causal links between parts of the Initiative. Because evaluation objectives looked at the links between parts of the model, evaluation questions on causality surfaced. While it was

not possible to set up experimental or quasi-experimental designs to assess questions of causality and impacts with the initiative *as a whole*, it was possible to set up such designs to address more specific issues of causality.

In addition to being the organizing structure for the evaluation design, the model and evaluation objectives served later as an effective starting point for further articulating the Initiative's theory of change. Similar to the process of developing the

evaluation questions, it was possible to connect short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes directly to the evaluation objectives. Because the objectives were the overarching structure for the theory, as the DI evolved, outcomes could be added or modified with-

out affecting the evaluation design's basic structure.

Finally, the objectives became the essential managing structure for the evaluation. Small teams of evaluation staff were set up for each objective. Organizing and managing by objective, as opposed to by methods or outcomes, kept the team focused on what we were learning about the DI's theory rather than what we were learn-

ing about its specific outcomes in isolation. Because the methods used crossed team boundaries, this structure also facilitated essential cross-team coordination on data collection and interpretation. ♦

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For more information

About the Devolution Initiative

See the WKKF web site's Devolution page at <http://www.wkkf.org/ProgrammingInterests/Devolution/>

About evaluating complex initiatives

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**The objectives
became the essential
managing structure
for the evaluation.**

The Evaluation Exchange

Readers' Survey

HFRP has sought to make *The Evaluation Exchange* an interactive newsletter from its inception. Recently, in order to be able to evolve in response to reader feedback, we invited readers to complete a satisfaction survey. Readers were asked to rate the newsletter based upon four qualities: informative, readable, useful, and thought-provoking. We also asked them to identify which sections of the newsletter they found most and least useful. Finally, we gave readers an opportunity to offer specific comments on *The Evaluation Exchange* and to suggest changes in the format or the types of issues addressed. While we were pleased to discover that the majority of respondents were satisfied with the newsletter—praising it as “relevant,” “useful,” and “readable”—we also appreciated the constructive criticism that we received. Of particular interest to us were issues and methods readers identified as worthy of more attention. These are briefly discussed below, along with the immediate steps HFRP is taking to better tailor *The Evaluation Exchange* to the needs of our readership.

From the Director's Desk, *continued from page 1*

work of her organization, the Loka Institute. Finally, in our Spotlight section, Danielle Hollar of HFRP writes about the possibility of using an approach that provides a more comprehensive picture of the quality of people's lives to examine the impact of welfare reform on individuals. As always, our New and Noteworthy section and our Electronic Mailbox provide information on useful evaluation resources.

We hope you will continue to provide us with feedback about how *The Evaluation Exchange* can be most useful to you. You may use the online survey form which is still posted on the *Evaluation Exchange* page of HFRP's web site, or e-mail comments to us at any time. (For our web site and e-mail addresses, see HFRP contact information in the copyright box on page 1.) Thank you. ♦

Response to the survey also helped to reveal the diversity of our readership, which represents a variety of national, state, and local agencies and institutions, both public and private. Answers showed that readers turn to *The Evaluation Exchange* for help in addressing a broad range of needs and concerns. Still, reader comments tended to correspond to three major areas of interest: (1) interest in evaluation methodology, including specific evaluative practices; (2) interest in particular demographic populations or policy issues; and (3) interest in broader organizational or professional resource development issues. Many comments and concerns also involved intersections of the three areas.

Area 1: Interest in evaluation methodology, including specific evaluative practices. Five subcategories of interest were isolated in this area: (1) how to start evaluations from scratch or with limited resources; (2) how to conduct multi-agency/cross-site evaluation; (3) how to demonstrate community impact; (4) how to use targeted populations in evaluation practice; and (5) how to employ specific evaluative methods. In response to these concerns, HFRP will be featuring several items of interest in future issues of *The Evaluation Exchange*. First, in the current issue on methodology, we respond to several methods concerns including the use of logic models, cost-benefit analysis, and evaluating collaborative endeavors. We will continue to include topics on specific evaluation methods in future issues. Second, in our next issue, we will be unveiling an “Ask the Expert” section in which a featured evaluator will respond to your “on the ground” evaluation questions. Third, in our most recent issue on youth development and in upcoming issues focused on areas such as out-of-school time, we discuss topics like how to incorporate youth voices in evaluation.

Area 2: Interest in specific demographic populations or policy issues. Evaluation of programs directed at children and youth was most commonly cited as an area of interest by readers. In response to your needs,

our most recent edition focused on youth development. Our next edition will focus on children and youth in the out-of-school hours. Other populations and issues of concern, including family support services and welfare reform, will also be targeted in upcoming editions of *The Evaluation Exchange*. Many readers were also concerned more generally about the connections between evaluation and policymaking. This is a subject of particular interest to HFRP. In this issue of the newsletter, our discussion with Michael Scriven touches on this subject; future editions will further explore these connections in conversations with and articles by both evaluators and policymakers.

Area 3: Interest in broader organizational or professional resource development. *Evaluation Exchange* readers identified several subcategories of interest under this area: (1) professional resource development; (2) small agency development; (3) learning how to educate others about the importance of evaluation; and (4) funding practices for evaluation. *The Evaluation Exchange* will continue to strive to keep its readers updated about the latest literature and developments in the evaluation field. In addition, future issues, including the forthcoming edition on out-of-school time, will address capacity-building in small agencies and funding strategies for evaluation. We will also be producing a future edition devoted to strategic communication issues that will help to address the links between evaluation and communication. Finally, look for upcoming work on adult learning theory and how it can inform evaluation and communication strategy.

HFRP looks forward to better meeting your needs as readers, and to continuing to receive your responses to our efforts. We would like to thank all of our readers who took the time to complete surveys and remind you that we are always interested in hearing from you. ♦

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Quality of Life: A Framework for Examining the Impact of Welfare Reform

“What we don’t know is precisely what is happening to all of these former welfare recipients.”¹

This sentiment of concern, expressed by Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala, echoes throughout public policy research and practitioner circles, federal and state legislatures, state and local welfare reform institutions, internet listserves, community-based service organizations, and in general, throughout the polity at large. And while research on “welfare leavers” is emerging,² much of this research tends to focus on traditional measures, on numbers geared toward answering questions such as how many people are leaving the rolls, how

many people have or do not have jobs, what wages people leaving welfare are earning, and so forth. Thus, we are beginning to collect counts, but we do not have the *story*. We do not know many details about former welfare recipients, what they are doing, how they are faring. Are they working? Are they moving into jobs and self-sufficiency? And more importantly, what are their lives really like after leaving public assistance? Of particular interest is a holistic conception of their “quality of life after welfare reform.”

From a public interest perspective, evaluators of social programs, public administrators, and policymakers are charged with understanding the magnitude and direction of the impact of welfare reform on beneficiaries of our public assistance institutions. But how do we go about as-

sessing the impact of policy in ways that really describe what is happening to people as new policies are implemented? Assessing the human impact of policy changes requires more than the evaluation of economic outcomes. Judging the true issues of well-being requires that we know about the resources of beneficiaries and their conditions of life from various perspectives. Characteristics of people’s lives that create the whole person— aspects such as health, knowledge and skills, social relations, conditions of work, and so forth⁴— need to be examined in relationship with each other in order to determine true policy impact.

One possible framework from which to craft evaluation activities that address these issues is quality of life. A *quality of life* framework takes into consideration all of the aspects of life that collectively affect well-being, including components such as those found in Box 3.

Evaluators may use these components of a quality of life framework to guide the selection of methodologies generally, and/or more specifically, in the construction of indicators and measures for assessing impact. In selecting methodologies for collecting and analyzing data, evaluators should seek methods that allow the collection and analysis of data in each of the component areas of quality of life, as

BOX 3 Domains and Examples of Measures of Quality of Life³

<i>Components</i>	<i>Measures</i>
Health and Access to Health Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact with health professionals • Symptoms of illness • Availability/use of health insurance
Employment and Working Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to leave during work hours • Type of occupation
Economic Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income/earnings • Expenses (child care, transportation, health)
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of education reached • School attendance/performance
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of persons per room • Type of housing/amenities
Security of Life and Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to violence and theft • Safe/functional housing
Diet and Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantity of food available • Resources for food acquisition

1 Vobejda, B. (Feb. 7, 1998). Spending per recipient has risen since enactment of welfare reform. *Washington Post*, p. A2.

2 For a comprehensive list of research focusing on those leaving welfare, see the Welfare Information Network web site (<http://www.welfareinfo.org>) and the Research Forum web site (<http://www.researchforum.org/>).

3 This framework is based primarily on the work of economists and philosophers found in Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (eds.), *The quality of life*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc. 4 Erikson, R. (1993). Descriptions of inequality: The Swedish approach to welfare research. In Nussbaum and Sen (eds.), cited above.

ELECTRONIC MAILBOX

**American Statistical Association,
Survey Research Methods Section**
<http://www.stat.ncsu.edu/info/srms/srms.html>

The mission of the ASA's Section on Survey Research Methods is to promote the improvement of survey practice and the understanding of survey methods by encouraging both theoretical and applied research on survey-related topics and by disseminating information on survey methods. The web site offers information and hints about surveys, focus groups, mail surveys, and other aspects of survey research.

**Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention Evaluation Working Group**
<http://www.cdc.gov/eval/index.htm>

This web site highlights the work of the CDC Evaluation Working Group and its efforts to promote program evaluation in public health. The site also provides in-

formation about resources to support evaluation, including CDC's framework for program evaluation.

**ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and
Evaluation and University of Maryland,
Department of Measurement, Statistics,
and Evaluation: Practical Assessment,
Research, and Evaluation (PARE)**
<http://www.ericae.net/pare>

An online journal which provides access to refereed articles that can have a positive impact on assessment, research, evaluation, and teaching practice, especially at the local education agency level. Currently online are six volumes of the journal, containing about 70 articles designed to help members of the community keep up-to-date with effective methods, trends, and research developments. ♦

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well as across these domains. Most often, doing so requires the use of multiple methods, but by choosing data collection and analysis methods based on this framework, all aspects of well-being will be considered. A quality of life framework also assists in the development of data gathering plans and instruments specifically. Following this framework ensures that questions are asked that address holistic conceptions of life, or that preexisting administrative data are identified and used that address the components of the framework, and thus the critical aspects of the lives of those affected by policy change. However, evaluators need to be cognizant of the fact that most administrative datasets do not include information on all aspects of quality of life mentioned above, and thus other means of data collection will have to be used to fully understand the stories of those leaving welfare.

In conclusion, I hope that this brief discussion of a quality of life framework for guiding evaluation activities has ignited your interest in pursuing holistic perspectives for the evaluation of social policies and programs. Crafting evaluation activities around indicators and measures of quality of life will provide greater, qualitative insight for guiding the creation and modification of public policies, especially those that affect low-income populations, by revealing the nuances of the lives of those affected by social policy change. From such a framework, evaluators, public administrators, and policymakers working on social policy issues can examine impact and determine how best to direct, or redirect, policy processes that serve low-income populations. ♦

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For information on
submitting articles to
The Evaluation Exchange,
please call (617) 495-9108
or visit our web site:
<http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/eval>

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Would you would like to receive e-mail notification when new issues of *The Evaluation Exchange* are posted on the Harvard Family Research Project web site? If so, just drop HFRP an e-mail at hfrp_gse@harvard.edu, and ask to be added to our announcement distribution list. (Note that the newsletter is posted in portable document format, and you will need to have the free software program Adobe® Acrobat® Reader installed on your computer to view it.)

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Thank you!

We regret that we cannot provide copies of the materials listed below. Please contact the publisher or authoring organization directly.

The Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), United States Department of Health and Human Services. (Nd). *The program manager's guide to evaluation.* This guide explains the program evaluation process and provides background information on how to use it successfully. Chapters answer questions such as the following: Why evaluate? What is program evaluation? Who should conduct your evaluation? How do you hire and manage an outside evaluator? How do you prepare for an evaluation? What should you include in an evaluation? How do you get the information you need? How do you make sense of evaluation information? How can you report what you have learned? Companion handbooks address evaluation issues specific to the different ACYF program areas.

<http://www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/CORE/dox/progman.html>

Bernard, H. Russell et al. (eds.) (1999). *Field methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: AltaMira Press (a division of Sage Publications). Formerly CAM, the *Cultural Anthropology Methods* journal, this is a new peer-reviewed journal whose editors include an international, interdisciplinary editorial board of scholars. The journal is published quarterly. Articles focus on the methods used by field workers in the social and behavioral sciences and humanities for the collection, management, and analysis of data about human thought and/or human behavior in the natural world. The emphasis is on innovations and issues related to methods used, rather than the reporting of research or theoretical-epistemological questions about research. For information about submitting an article reviewing a book or piece of software, contact the editor at ufruss@nersp.nerdc.ufl.edu. To ob-

tain subscription information, e-mail the publisher at order@altamira.sagepub.com.

Bond, Sally L., Sally E. Boyd, and Kathleen A. Rapp. (1997) *Taking stock: A practical guide to evaluating your own programs.* Chapel Hill, NC: Horizon Research, Inc. Produced at the request of the American Association for the Advancement of Science for its Science Linkages in the Community Initiative, this manual is a useful guide to program evaluation for community-based organizations. Focusing on internal evaluation, the manual describes the evaluation process from beginning to end. Chapters address issues such as why evaluation is necessary, identifying goals and objectives, qualitative and quantitative data, data collection strategies, and interpreting and using data. This guide includes examples using fictional CBOs; appendices include sample reports using evaluation data.

Frechtling, Joy and Laure Sharp Westat (eds.). (August 1997). *User-friendly handbook for mixed method evaluations.* Washington, DC: Directorate for Education and Human Resources, Division of Research, Evaluation and Communication, National Science Foundation. Chapters in this publication provide an introduction to mixed method evaluations, an overview of qualitative methods and analytic techniques, and approaches for designing and reporting mixed method evaluations. Also included are supplementary materials and exhibits that highlight the concepts discussed in the handbook. <http://www.ehr.nsf.gov/EHR/REC/pubs/NSF97-153/start.htm>

Patton, Michael Quinn. (1997). *Utilization-focused evaluation: The new century text.* Third Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. The latest edition of this important work, which won both the Alva and Gunner Myrdal Award from the Evaluation Research Society and the Paul F. Lazarsfeld Award from the American Evaluation Association, includes numerous new thought-provoking topics for consideration. Added topics include using

participatory evaluation processes to change a program's culture and build a learning organization; alternative evaluator roles connected to varying situations and diverse evaluation purposes; getting started: generating commitment to use; how evaluators can nurture results-oriented, reality-testing leadership in programs and organizations; and specific techniques for managing the power dynamics of working with primary intended users as well as evaluation stakeholders. New pedagogical features include more than 50 new exhibits for teaching and training use, and menus developed as special tools for working with stakeholders in selecting evaluation decision options. \$42.00 paperback. Sage Publications, Inc., 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320. Tel: (805) 499-0721. Fax: (805) 499-0871.

<http://www.sagepub.com>

Rossi, Peter H., Howard E. Freeman, and Mark W. Lipsey. (1999). *Evaluation: A systematic approach. Sixth Edition.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. Long considered a benchmark publication in evaluation, this book has been completely revised to include the latest techniques and approaches to evaluation as well as guidelines for how evaluations should be tailored to fit programs and social contexts. The new edition includes content on assessing program theory—illustrating procedures that evaluators use to tease out theory when it is implicit in a program, and information on approaches to assessing the quality of program design and conceptualization. Another new chapter offers practical approaches to fashioning effective evaluation questions, guidelines for selecting an evaluation type, and tips for deciding what focus an evaluation should have. \$59.95 hardcover. Sage Publications, Inc., 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320. Tel: (805) 499-0721. Fax: (805) 499-0871.

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