

COMMUNITY CONNECT

SUMMER 2001

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EVALUATION: Measuring up in the nonprofit sector

In the world of nonprofits, evaluation evokes both a lot of lip service and a lot of anxiety. Everyone seems to be in a quandary over what to evaluate, when to evaluate and how to go about it.

In talking to a wide variety of experts and other funders, we learned this: Evaluation can be a powerful – and empowering – tool for nonprofits. If ingrained in everything that nonprofits do, the process of evaluation ensures a high likelihood of success. That's because you're constantly thinking about what constitutes success and how to get there.

Opinions about the importance and reasons for evaluations vary. Some say you should hire a professional to do the task. Others say it should be part of your everyday work. Others have explicit methodologies they say should be followed.

Still others say that what you evaluate is just as important as the evaluation itself.

For example, at Teen Lifeline, Inc., a Phoenix-based peer-to-peer telephone hotline, success isn't just measured by how many suicides are prevented in a year. It is also measured by how well the teen-age volunteers grow through mentoring and training exercises. And, by evaluating the success of its volunteer corps, Teen Lifeline has become even more adept at helping teens in crises from all over the Valley.

**"DON'T DO IT TO SATISFY US;
DO IT TO FULFILL YOUR MISSION."**

Ed Portnoy
Director of Grants Programs
Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust

"In nonprofits, there is a sense that you know you're doing something well, and for the good of the community. But today, that's not enough," says Michelle Moorhead, Teen Lifeline's Executive Director. "You have to demonstrate how effective you are, both to yourself and to the community you serve."

Teen Lifeline's story is examined more closely in this issue.

Whatever the reasons given for evaluation, this issue of Community Connect underscores this: nonprofits should be evaluating their work first to measure and celebrate successes, and to learn how to do their work better. To do so for funding or for any other reason is secondary.



SLHI
A Catalyst for Community Health

St. Luke's Health Initiatives

Evaluation: The pause that pays

How does a nonprofit know if it's on track? How does it measure its effectiveness, learn from its experiences, know what its clients really need and demonstrate its merits to funders and stakeholders?

More and more, nonprofits and funders alike are turning to evaluations for the answers. Nonprofit leaders and grant-makers have both divergent views and some common threads.

It's challenging to find the time and resources to develop and implement evaluations. Still, many nonprofit executives have discovered that the time they take to incorporate an evaluation component into the mix is time well invested. The representative sampling of experiences shared here demonstrates not only each organization's unique approach to evaluation, but also the variety of information – both good and bad – that a careful evaluation may reveal.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE, MEASURING RESULTS



Teen Lifeline volunteers Pam and Matt work the telephones helping Valley teenagers who call in for counseling and crisis help.

Teen Lifeline, Inc., has its work cut out for it in a state that ranks second in the nation in the number of suicides by youth and the dubious honor of ranking first in gun-related teen suicides. Still, through its free, confidential, peer-supported hotline and life skills development program, the nonprofit seeks to impact the rate of teen suicide by empowering Arizona's youth to reach their full potential.

Executive Director Michelle Moorhead employs a variety of quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools to measure the effectiveness of Teen Lifeline's work. During calls, volunteers ask questions designed to evaluate the quality and scope of problem resolution. Callers whose issues appear more serious are identified for further contact.

Moorhead also has set up an evaluation program to measure the effectiveness of Teen Lifeline's training program and its impact on the teen volunteers, measuring their increases in knowledge, skills and self-efficacy.

"The time has passed when it's OK to simply feel good after doing whatever you're doing," Moorhead says. "Now there's a push to be more accountable and prove your effectiveness through fact-based evaluation supported with hard evidence. It's hard for nonprofits to move from the mindset of 'I know that what I'm doing makes a difference' to proving it."



Michelle Moorhead, executive director of Phoenix-based Teen Lifeline, Inc.

She believes that funders can help. "It's an educational process that funders need to support. If they want us to be accountable, they have to be willing to fund the evaluations themselves. As clinicians, we say, 'I know this program is making a difference, I can see it every day.' Yet proving that is tough."

"A" FOR EFFORTS

What if the efforts are measurable but the outcome is out of your hands?

That was the question Mental Health Association of Arizona Executive Director Cheryl Collier faced when the goal of one of the organization's funded efforts was to gain mental health insurance parity for the state. The efforts – educating the public and policy makers – were within her organization's control, but the outcomes were up to members of the state legislature.

Collier says that their evaluations and measurements vary by project. In this case, they evaluated their efforts by measuring elements within their

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MYTHS **VS.** REALITY

MYTH: Evaluation is a complex science. I don't have time to learn it.

REALITY: It's a practical activity. If you can run an organization, you can surely implement an evaluation process.

MYTH: It's an event to get over with and then move on.

REALITY: Outcomes evaluation is an ongoing process. It takes months to develop, test and polish – however, many of the activities required to carry out outcomes evaluation are activities that you're either already doing or should be doing.

MYTH: Evaluation is a completely new set of activities – we don't have the resources.

REALITY: Most activities in the outcomes evaluation process are normal management activities that need to be carried out anyway in order to evolve your organization to the next level.

MYTH: There's a "right" way to do outcomes evaluation. What if I don't get it right?

REALITY: Each outcomes evaluation process is somewhat different, depending on the needs and nature of the nonprofit organization and its programs. Consequently, each nonprofit is the "expert" at their outcomes plan. Therefore, start simple, but start and learn as you go along in your outcomes planning and implementation.

MYTH: Funders will accept or reject my outcomes plan.

REALITY: Enlightened funders will work with you to polish your outcomes, indicators and outcomes targets. Especially if yours is a new nonprofit and/or new program, then you very likely will need some help – and time – to develop and polish your outcomes plan.

Adapted from "Basic Guide to Program Evaluation" by Carter McNamara, MBA, Ph.D

Evaluation...

- ‡ Must be budgeted and built into programs up front
- ‡ Is not a report card
- ‡ Need not be complicated to be effective
- ‡ Provides valuable data to guide nonprofits in their decision-making
- ‡ Comes in many forms
- ‡ Offers just as many lessons in revealing what didn't work as well as what did
- ‡ Builds opportunities for enhanced communication between nonprofit and grant-maker

"Learning what does not work is as important as learning what works well."

Judy Walruff, Senior Program Officer, Director of Grants Management, The Flinn Foundation

KEY THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE DOING AN EVALUATION

PURPOSE

● What do we want to be able to achieve because of the evaluation?

- ◀ Demonstrate results/effectiveness to funders/investors
- ◀ Understand, verify or increase impact on clients
- ◀ Improve delivery mechanisms to be more efficient and less costly
- ◀ Verify that we're doing what we think we're doing
- ◀ Clarify program goals, processes and outcomes for management planning

AUDIENCE

● Who are the audiences for the information gleaned from the evaluation?

- ◀ Funders/Investors
- ◀ Board members
- ◀ Management
- ◀ Staff/Employees
- ◀ Clients
- ◀ Community
- ◀ Other

● What do we need to evaluate?

- ◀ The process of the product or service delivery (its inputs, activities and outputs)
- ◀ Feedback from customers/clients who experience the product or service
- ◀ Strengths and weaknesses of the product or service
- ◀ Benefits to customers/clients
- ◀ Client needs
- ◀ Results of the program/outcomes
- ◀ Other type(s) of information

● How can the information be collected in a reasonable and realistic fashion?

- ◀ Questionnaires
- ◀ Interviews
- ◀ Documentation
- ◀ Observing clients/customers
- ◀ Observing staff/employees
- ◀ Focus groups
- ◀ Other(s)

● Where can we get help in setting up and conducting an evaluation?

- ◀ Funders/Investors
- ◀ Staff Members
- ◀ Board Members/Volunteers
- ◀ Consultants
- ◀ Database Managers
- ◀ University students/Researchers
- ◀ Other

● When is the information needed?

● What resources are available to collect the information?

Why do it?

Q&A with evaluation expert B.J. Tatro

Q What is an evaluation?

A It's using tools and techniques to determine whether your agency is carrying out programs as planned and achieving the desired results. Both are important because you need to know if you're doing what you said you would do before you try to determine if you're achieving the desired results.

Q What's all the fuss about evaluations?

A Today there's so much competition for limited resources among all sorts of worthy causes. In an environment where the need continues to grow and resources aren't keeping up, it's not good enough to say, "I think this might work." You need to make decisions based on sound information. Evaluations provide information to guide decisions for the allocation of limited resources.

Q Is that it?

A Far from it: Increasingly, funders expect accountability for the utilization of their resources – even individual donors want to see results. That doesn't mean you necessarily have to achieve results exactly as first envisioned, but you do need to be accountable for documenting what, if anything, changed.

Q What steps are involved in an evaluation?

- A** While it depends on the type of evaluation, a few basic steps include:
- Incorporate evaluation into your preliminary program design to clarify your thinking and help ensure that you'll have the data you need both for the evaluation and program management. Make it part of your program operation.
 - Identify your goals and be realistic. Describe what success will look like given the length of time and resources available, then identify the specific program activities that will lead to those results.
 - Involve multiple stakeholders in the evaluation design and implementation – particularly individuals who are affected by the program – to get a much broader perspective.
 - Ask yourself questions that will help you know what to document or track. How will I know if I'm carrying out the planned activities? How will I know if I achieve the desired results? What will I measure?
 - Determine how to collect data. Who's going to collect it, how will it be analyzed and who's going to do it?
 - If you're funded at a lower level than proposed, remember to go back and modify your goals and objectives to match the new resource level.

Q What should an evaluation reveal?

A Did you do what you said you'd do? If not, why? And, what did you do instead?

Remember: Evaluations give you the data you need to guide your decision-making and improve your program, not just to prove that it's working.

Q What if the evaluation reveals an unexpected outcome or problem area?

A Communication with your funder is key. Don't wait until it's over; instead, allow for mid-course corrections and negotiate them with your funder. My experience is that they're generally quite understanding: They don't want you spending their money in ways that aren't prudent.

Q What are common pitfalls we should avoid?

- A** A few of the most common mistakes that I see include:
- Not incorporating the evaluation into the program design
 - Not field testing. You need to field test the data.
 - Not factoring in the time and money (resources) to do the evaluation.
 - Not using the information gained in the evaluation. After putting all that effort into it, you should use it to make improvements rather than sticking it on a shelf. Use it to guide your decision-making and program improvement!

B.J. Tatro teaches a course on evaluation at the Arizona State University's Nonprofit Management Institute and owns a consulting business that helps nonprofits improve their evaluation skills.

Evaluation: The pause that pays (Continued from page 2)

control such as numbers of media hits, media exposure and coalitions reached.

She believes that evaluations go beyond serving the immediate need of providing documented evidence essential to funding. "It's also a very therapeutic process for staff members who are moving so fast they don't realize how much they've achieved. Evaluations force you to do that."

"WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS"

Carol Lockhart, Executive Director of PhoenixCare, a palliative care disease-management program that provides active total care to adults who have been diagnosed with a serious chronic illness, compares setting up an evaluation process to "wandering in the wilderness."

"We sat and debated how to measure the impact of our program for three months," says Lockhart, who looked at everything from how to measure the process and assess the delivery of care to determine outcomes achieved.

Lockhart believes it's essential to build evaluation into the program upfront. Doing so gave her organization answers to questions that arose as the project progressed and allowed for midcourse corrections when collected data revealed that participation levels were below projections. Through the system they had established to track

referral sources, Lockhart's team found that physician referrals were lagging.

Knowing the source of the challenge does not always lead to the answer or reverse a trend, however. PhoenixCare leadership stepped up their efforts to reach physicians, but ultimately accepted that it was an uphill battle to change physician behavior over the short term. Realizing that, they redirected the bulk of their efforts toward hospitals and managed care companies responsible for most referrals in the first place.

Lockhart promotes the concept of "keeping it simple." Her organization consulted with a programmer who customized a Microsoft Access database to the organization's needs.

"By tracking the right data, you can determine whether or not your perceptions are valid," she says. "Think of it as a constructive process. Develop models that show what doesn't work, too, and share what you learn so others don't go out and do the same thing."

FINE TUNING THROUGH FIELD TESTING

When the program itself is a needs assessment, it follows much the same course as an evaluation: preliminary communication with multiple stakeholders, careful planning, pre-testing, adjustments and development of population-appropriate surveying tools.

In a two-year program that concluded at year's end, leaders of the Arizona State University Community Health Services clinic conducted an in-depth health needs assessment of area domestic violence shelter residents requiring one-on-one and small group interviews.

"As an autonomous nursing clinic, our nurse practitioners had reason to believe that residents of domestic violence shelters had acute health care needs that were not being met," says Liz Holman, Clinic Director. "Before we could develop a proposal to provide care, however, a formalized assessment was required."

She and Chris Lyons, Outreach Services Nurse for the Clinic, enlisted support from a wide spectrum of experts to develop the assessment, from statistical experts on the ASU faculty to the governor's office and leaders in the domestic violence shelter arena. Once the survey was developed, Lyons field-tested it with select residents and adjusted the questions based on their reactions.

"We learned to be extremely careful about how the questions were phrased so we wouldn't seem judgmental," she says. "Field testing allowed us to fine-tune the survey tool and create an accurate, meaningful assessment."

RECENTLY AWARDED GRANTS

March 2001

Following is a listing and brief description of grants totaling \$751,301 that were approved by SLHI's Board of Trustees in March 2001:

PHOENIX BODY POSITIVE

\$75,000 for one year
Hepatitis C and B public education and awareness

EASTER SEALS OF ARIZONA

\$50,000 for one year
Development of a therapeutic play environment

SCOTTSDALE FOUNDATION FOR THE HANDICAPPED

\$15,445 for one year
Software development project

ALICE'S WONDERLAND

\$124,000 for one year
Development of alternative sources of support

COMMUNITY FORUM

\$15,000 for one year
Support of a forum for nonprofit CEOs

RECORDING FOR THE BLIND AND DYSLEXIC

\$95,480 for two years
Implementation of fund development plan

TEEN LIFELINE, INC.

\$39,000 for one year
Implementation of fund development plan

AID TO ADOPTION OF SPECIAL KIDS

\$121,791 for one year
Creation of business plan for resource center

COMMUNITY C.A.R.E. CONNECTIONS

\$50,000 for one year
Volunteer recruitment and training

PHOENIX REVITALIZATION CORPORATION

\$100,000 for 2 years
Implementation of action strategy


PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA


\$14,000 for one year
"Train the Trainer" program


EVALUATION: THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE


by Roger Hughes
Executive Director, SLHI


In the rush to get on the evaluation bandwagon? You might want to consider the following:

 Evaluation – like social science generally – often confirms what common sense already tells us. We usually know what’s working, and what isn’t. We run the risk of disappearing into a thicket of formal assessment and accountability, when the best use of our time and resources may be to simply make an all-things considered-judgment about a project and move on.

 Do you need professional help to undertake a formal evaluation? Perhaps, if you’re looking at a long-term project with multiple components and actors. More likely you can do a perfectly acceptable evaluation by taking the time to reflect on your work – and to be honest with both yourself and your partners on what you can realistically hope to accomplish.

 There’s an old administrative maxim, “He who is held accountable is he who is the most vulnerable.” Evaluation ought to be tied to accountability, but often it is not: people and projects are evaluated based on outcomes over which they have limited impact and control. You need to be clear on what you are willing to be held accountable for first and then evaluate your work accordingly.

 Evaluators love to talk about collecting the “data.” One huge problem is that we’re awash in data and its interpretation, to the point where more time can be spent tracking and packaging data than in providing programs and services. Once upon a time we talked about the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge. Now all we seem to talk about is the pursuit of information and data. And this is progress?

 One common mistake is to confuse monitoring with evaluation. We monitor activities to make sure we’re doing what we said we were going to do. But that doesn’t mean what we’re doing is effective. Some funders may require elaborate monitoring of projects that speak more to their own needs for internal accountability and control, and less to giving grant recipients the freedom to shift gears when things aren’t turning out as planned. Some frank talk about evaluation and monitoring between the funder and grant recipient at the outset would be helpful.

“We’re not using evaluation to determine a pass or fail grade to determine if the program will continue. We’re using it to discover the strengths and weaknesses of the agency and its programs so we can help them improve.”

Wayne Parker
Director of Research and Evaluation
Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust

The following grants were made from SLHI’s Bridge Grants Program:

THE ARIZONA ADOLESCENT HEALTH COALITION

\$3,685 for one year
Support of conference on adolescent health issues

THE ARIZONA ASTHMA COALITION

\$10,000 for one year
Implementation of short-term fund raising plan

ARIZONA COUNCIL OF HUMAN SERVICE PROVIDERS

\$2,900 for one year
Support of Healthy Families Conference

ARIZONA GRANTMAKERS FORUM

\$10,000 for one year
Seed support for organizational development

ARIZONA HOSPITAL AND HEALTHCARE ASSOCIATION

\$10,000 for one year
Public Opinion Poll 2001

OASSIS

\$10,000 for one year
Support for conference on suicide awareness on college campuses

SCOTTSDALE PREVENTION INSTITUTE

\$5,000 for one year
Supports for Hispanics-in-health conference

The following grants were made from SLHI’s Trustee Fund:

ARIZONA FRIENDS OF FOSTER CARE FOUNDATION

\$5,000 for one year

PHOENIX CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL

\$5,000 for one year

NATIONAL MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY

\$5,000 for one year

THE NEIGHBORHOOD CLINIC

\$5,000 for one year

RAISING SPECIAL KIDS

\$5,000 for one year

SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

\$5,000 for one year

SURVIVORS ON OUR OWN

\$5,000 for one year

TEACH FOR AMERICA

\$5,000 for one year

ONLINE RESOURCES

Nonprofits wishing to hone their evaluation skills will find a wealth of information available online.

- † A good place to start is the Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits' site and its "Basic Guide to Outcomes-Based Evaluation for Nonprofit Organizations with Very Limited Resources," by Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD:
www.mapnp.org/library/evaluatn/outcomes.htm
- † InnoNet – Offers a variety of assistance to public and nonprofit organizations to better plan, execute and evaluate their services and agencies, including a "workstation" to help agencies develop evaluation plans: www.innonet.org/index.html
- † United Way Outcome Measurement Resource Network – Includes excerpts from "Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach," plus papers and articles on the topics of evaluations and outcomes measurement:
www.national.unitedway.org/outcomes/pgmomres.htm
- † Outcome Measurement and Program Evaluation links:
www.ucp-utica.org/uwlinks/outcomes.html

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