A Framework for Evaluation

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Strategic Issue Session 1:2, July 25, 2002: Evaluating and Learning from Rural Community and Economic Development Program and Grantmaking Efforts

1. What program are you evaluating?

2. What are the outcomes you are seeking? And how will you determine them?

3. How will you and/or your grantees/partners track and measure these outcomes?

4. What will be your approach to learning or your learning practice?

5. How will you share this learning?

Your Program

- What was the catalyst for starting this rural CED program/grantmaking effort?
- What rural region or set of places did you target with your program/grantmaking effort?
- What rural people or population did you target with your program/grantmaking effort?
- What rural development approach did you support with your program/grantmaking effort?
- What type of grantees did you target?
- What other partners did you work with to help with technical assistance, learning or project management?
- What other resource partners (funders) did you work with?
- For what period of time did you sustain the program?
- What resources did you commit to this program - staffing, board, operational and grant resources?

What are the outcomes you are seeking? And how do you determine them?

- **What are one or two realistic community-level outcomes you want your grantees/partners to achieve for rural communities or families?**
  - Who determines these and how?

- **What are one or two realistic community foundation-level outcomes you want to achieve that would enable your grantees/partners to produce the community-level outcomes for rural communities or families?**
  - Who determines these and how?

How will you and/or your grantees/partners track and measure these outcomes?

- **What are one or two indicators for each outcome?**
  - Who determines those indicators and how?
- **What measures are identified for each indicator?**
  - Who determines those measures and how?
- **What kind of data collection tools will you and or your grantees/partners use to track the measures?**
  - How often will data be collected?
  - Who will be responsible for this?
  - How will the findings be reported?

What will be your approach to learning or your learning practice?

- What methods will the community foundation use to reflect on what happened in this initiative?

- How will you look at the design of the program and its relationship to progress toward the various outcomes?

Learning, Page 2

- Who will be responsible for seeing that this happened?

- How will grantees/partners be included in the learning and reflection process?

- How will this learning improve the community foundation's performance or next steps?

- How will this learning improve the grantees/partners' performance or next steps?

How will you share this learning?

- With your community foundation staff and board?

- With your grantees?

- With your wider community?

Measurement Vocabulary

- Outcome: An outcome is the goal you are working toward. This outcome suggests a major change in the way you want the world to look and feel when you have completed your work.

- Indicator: An indicator is one component that must be changed or condition that must be achieved in order to claim that progress has been made towards the outcome.

  1. A good indicator shows progress toward an outcome.
  2. It is relevant and understandable to stakeholders.
  3. It is useable for collecting information and reporting on results.
  4. It is observable, measurable and specific.
  5. In some cases, an indicator is a proxy for something that is hard to measure.

Measurement Vocabulary, Page 2

- Measure: A measure provides a way to actually count or value the status of an indicator. To track a measure over time you must have a unit, which defines the increments of the measure and a baseline, which defines the measure at a starting point.

  1. Measures should focus on where you want to be.
  2. They should speak to people about the outcome you are working toward.
  3. They should relate back to the outcome.

Maine Community Foundation - Example

- **Community Outcomes**
  - Develop and implement better client feedback mechanisms to improve the economic security of low income residents
  - Develop an assets-focused mindset that would have long-term, sustainable impact on the way the agencies do business
- **Community Foundation Outcomes**
  - Increase MCF's capacity to address rural issues through the development of county based endowment funds and grantmaking partnerships with county fund advisors
  - Develop an assets-focused mindset that would have long-term, sustainable impact on the way the MCF does business

MCF - External Evaluation Methodology

- With the agencies
  - Interviews with staff
  - Reviews of self-sufficiency program records
  - Customer surveys conducted by agencies

- With MCF
  - Interviews with staff
  - Interviews with county fund advisors
  - County fund endowment records

MCF - Learning

- **With Agencies**
    - Had to change throughout organization with commitment of organizations leaders
    - Needed customer focus
    - 100 families out of poverty
    - Partnerships critical
- **With MCF**
    - Grassroots funding builds capacity of community and brings people together
    - Community foundation needs to build cross-functional teams
    - Family development accounts
    - $1.5-2.6 million in county fund endowments
    - Assumption about difficulty and importance of change is confirmed

MCF - Next Steps

- Agencies are developing new data system for tracking services and impact
- Agencies developed new programs based on interviews with clients
- Agencies shared learnings in a national meeting of community action agencies
- Agencies included results in their annual reports, proposals and newsletters

New Mexico Community Foundation - Example

- Community Outcomes
    - Increase the amount of philanthropic funds available for community-based economic development in rural New Mexico
    - Enhance the capacity of community-based economic development in rural New Mexico
- Community Foundation Outcomes
    - Develop NMCF's rural grantmaking capacity
    - Lay the ground to sustain NMCF's support for rural economic development

NMCF - External Evaluation Methodology

- Conduct the evaluation in a way that increases grantee and community foundation capacity for evaluation
- Key areas
  1. What has been the program's impact in terms of its stated goals?
  2. What did the grantees set out to do and did they do it?
  3. How effective was NMCF in providing services to its grantees?
  4. What has been the impact of the program on internal capacity building for NMCF and its grantees?
  5. What has been learned throughout the partnership system and how will a culture of learning be fostered at NMCF and with grantees?
- Attended and provided training at Learning Circles
- Interviewed grantees, staff and partners
- Reviewed grantee files in NMCF program office

NMCF - Learning

- We captured the results by looking at assets being developed
  - Community-based organizations
  - Relationships
  - Learning
  - NMCF

NMCF - Next Steps

- Began to implement recommendations
- Evaluation report shared with staff and board
- Results included in proposals
- Provided training to grantees on how to link short and long-term goals

External vs. Internal Evaluation

- Evaluation Purpose
  - Rendering judgements
  - Facilitating improvements
  - Generating knowledge
- External - no long-term, ongoing position within the program in organization
  - More independent, objective, credible
  - Less knowledgeable about nuances of local situation
  - Less able to follow through to facilitate implementation of recommendations

Themes from Internal Evaluation

1. Actively involving stakeholders within the organization can be difficult
2. Internal evaluators are often asked by superiors for public relations information rather than evaluation
3. Internal evaluators get asked to do lots of little data-gathering and report-writing tasks
4. Internal evaluators are often excluded from major decisions
5. Getting evaluation used takes a lot of follow-through

(Utilization-Focused Evaluation, ed. 3, Michael Quinn Patton, 1997)

- Internal evaluators can be
  - Change agents
  - Participants in policy formulation
  - Developers and implementers of organizational improvements