Assessing Community Outcomes

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Purpose of the Session

- To provide a basic introduction to program evaluation and some of the key steps/processes involved in planning a program evaluation.
- To convince you that evaluation is do-able and *worth doing* (even when no one is forcing you!).
- To help you take some first steps.

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What is Evaluation?

- "Program evaluation is the **systematic collection** of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgements about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform **decisions about future programming**."

  Michael Quinn Patton, *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*

- "Evaluation is the systematic assessment of the **operation and/or the outcomes** of a program, compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards, as a means of contributing to the **improvement** of the program or policy."

  Carol H. Weiss, *Evaluation*

- "Project-level evaluation can be defined as the consistent, ongoing collection and analysis of information for use in **decision-making**."

  W.K. Kellogg Foundation, *Evaluation Handbook*

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"*Wouldn't it be nice if just once they'd give us money, skip all the falderal, and say 'go crazy.'"*

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Why Do Evaluation?

- **Accountability** - key stakeholders require it.
- **Proving program impact** - making the case that what you do makes a difference.
- **Program improvement** - to see what's working, using data for program management and improvement.
- **Marketing/Fundraising** - to generate support for your program.
- **Knowledge development** - to generate information that will improve the quality of practice in the field.

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A Vision for Evaluation

- Our vision for evaluation is rooted in the conviction that project evaluation and project management are inextricably linked.
- Effective evaluation is not an "event" that occurs at the end of a project, but is an ongoing process.
- Thinking of evaluation tools in this way allows you to collect and analyze important data for decision making throughout the life of a project.
- We also believe that evaluation should not be conducted to prove that a project worked, but also to improve the way it works.

From the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, *Evaluation Handbook*

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Types of Evaluation

- **Context Evaluation**
  Understanding the circumstances/context of the program

- **Implementation/Process Evaluation**
  Understanding how the program is being implemented, documenting program activities

- **Outcomes Evaluation**
  Assessing the results of the program

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Key Questions in *Planning* an Evaluation

- What stakeholders need to be involved?
- What do I want to know about the program? What questions do I want to ask?
- What kinds of information can I use to answer my questions? What data should I collect?
- How am I going to use the results?

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What Stakeholders Need to Be Involved?

- Funders
- Students, youth
- Staff
- Faculty and administrators
- Participants
- Community/ Higher Ed partners
- Collaborating agencies
- Others with an interest in program effectiveness

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What Do I Want to Know About the Program?

- The questions you ask will depend on:
  - the **purpose** and audience for the evaluation (who wants to know what and why)
  - the **goals** of the program
  - the **time and resources** you have for evaluation
- There is no single "right" question – you need to think about what you need to know.

Getting started…

- Please take a moment to answer these questions.

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What Kinds of Information Do I Need to Answer My Questions?

- **Use a logic model to identify priorities**
  What do we most want to measure? What do we need to know about now vs. later?
- **Match the data to the questions**
  What kinds of information "fits"?
- **Create a flexible and responsive design**
  The program should drive the evaluation, not the other way around!
- **Think about what you already collect**
- **Collect and analyze data from multiple perspectives**
  Don't rely on just one type of source!
- **Keep the available resources in mind**

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What is a logic model?

A picture of how your initiative works – what you will do, with whom, why, and what will result (your *theory of change*)

If we do X, then Y should happen, if the assumptions on which the initiative is based are true

- *If students and community members work together on a community problem, students will become more engaged in their own communities, and CBOs will be better able to serve their clients.*

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We hate logic models that…

- Are useless academic exercises
- Are created and never looked at again
- Are too generic
- Aren't shared with stakeholders
- Are never used

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The logic model process asks:

- What is the ***problem*** to be addressed or ***goal*** to be achieved?
- ***Who will be served*** through your initiative?
- What are your ***assumptions*** about how and why your initiative will work?
- What ***strategies/activities*** will you use?
- What ***outcomes*** do you expect?
- How will you ***measure success***?
- What are the long-term ***impacts*** you hope to achieve?

Parts of a logic model

Name of Initiative

Problem Statement: What are the problem(s) to be addressed? Goal to be achieved?

For Whom →	Assumptions →	Strategies/ Activities →	Outcomes →	Measures of Success →	Long-Term Impacts
Target group(s)	What you know, think and believe about what's needed and will work	Activities needed to achieve desired outcomes	Reasonably measurable changes in policies, practices or target group(s)	Information needed to show whether initiative is successful	Ultimate outcomes for initiative
Who	**Why**	**What you do**	**What changes (shorter-term)**	**How you know**	**What changes (very long-term)**

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Sample Logic Model

Ophelia's Players

Mission: *The Mission of Ophelia's Players is to provide a safe space and opportunities for girls to find their voice and their imaginative selves via the theatre.*

For Whom →	Assumptions (Theory of Change) →	Strategies/ Activities →	Outcomes →	Impact
Girls ages 9-14, from 4 urban neighbor-hoods in and around Middletown .	Girls need a structured, gender-specific program to counter the likelihood of retreating, experiencing malaise or becoming quiet. Girl-positive programming enhances social and emotional development Theatre-based programming helps girls reacquire their voice, formulate their identity, and leads to positive developmental outcomes. Quality girl-positive theatre-based programs require staff trained in girl development and theatre skills. Professional development is necessary to increase: •The awareness of the needs for girl-positive programming. •Community's capacity to provide quality girl programming.	Ophelia's Players engage in girl-positive theatre-based training including creative movement, voice exercises, theatre games, and journal writing. Players have an opportunity to try out different roles and model different types of interactions in a safe environment. Players engage in structured conversations designed to give girls an opportunity to explore their own female identity. Ophelia's Players staff is provided with professional development activities via training circles, quarterly workshops and a summer institute.	**Initial:** •Girls develop healthy relationships with peers and adult female role models •gain proficiency in communications skills •develop their imagination. **Intermediate:** •Girls will develop positive female identity •find their voice • think more creatively, using visioning, reflection and problem-solving skills **Long-term:** •Girls will have a positive self-identity •positive self-esteem •Girls will be empowered to positively affect their environment and the environment of those around them.	Girls will become resilient, vocal creative women.

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Benefits of the *process* of creating a logic model

- Clarifies thinking
- Uncovers different understandings
- Makes it easier to identify gaps
- May lead to consideration of new ideas
- Helps focus complex work
- Helps decide what outcomes are important to track
- Helps create shared ownership

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Benefits of having a logic model *product*

- Aids in planning
- Shows cause-and-effect relationships between strategies and outcomes
- Makes it easy to share a project description with others
- Supports accountability and evaluation
- Assists in replication
- Often is required!

Strategies vs. Outcomes vs. Measures of Success Examples

STRATEGIES →	OUTCOMES →	MEASURES OF SUCCESS
What you do	**What changes**	**How you know**
Offer youth leadership programs.	Youth get more involved in school and their community.	Youth report implementing new leadership strategies (survey/interviews) and teachers' assessments of youth engagement improve (interviews, school records).
Develop social opportunities and groups for underserved students.	Student participants have a greater sense of belonging and engagement.	Students who participate in new opportunities report groups helped them feel more engaged (survey).
Develop and use statistical methods to predict which students are at greatest risk for dropping out.	Advisors use better information to identify underserved students who might need additional support early in students' academic careers.	The number of underserved students identified as needing additional support increases.

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Measuring Impact of S-L/Community Engagement

	Skills	Attitudes/ Dispositions	Behaviors
Students	Persuasive writing	Believe it's important to get involved	Testifies at city council
Faculty/ Staff	Teaching	Believe S-L can improve ways students learn content	Uses SL in a class
Community	Use evaluation results	College can be a good partner	Joins a PAR project

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Summing up logic models

- Creates shared understanding
- Helps with program planning and implementation
- Helps answer what kinds of information can I use to answer my questions, what data should I collect?
- Links activities to results: fill gaps and avoid mismatches across categories

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What are Roles for Students/Youth? Any and All of Them!

- Planning and design team members
- Instrument design
- Data collection (surveys, interviews, site observation, etc.)
- Data analysis
- Reporting, presentation, discussion



"My question is: Are we making an impact?"

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Evaluation Design….

Type of evaluation design depends on the questions and audience…common approaches include:

- "Experimental Design" – Random Assignment
- Quasi-Experimental Design – Comparison Groups
- Qualitative/Observational

Think Critically About Your Choice of Evaluation Design….

- How it fits questions you are asking
- Audience
- Cost and Feasibility…

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Examples of Sources/Methods

Assessing Context	•Program Records/Reports •Public Records	•Interviews •Focus Groups
Documenting Activities	•Program Records •Enrollment Forms •Attendance Records	•Timesheets/Activity Logs •Participant Reports •Work Products
Understanding Process	•Interviews •Surveys	•Focus Groups •Observations
Assessing Outcomes/ Impacts	•Portfolios/Projects •Participant Self-Report (Essays, surveys, etc.) •Pre/Post Surveys •Program/School Record Information	•Supervisor/Teacher Interviews or Evaluations •Focus Groups •Observation/Checklists

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How Will I Use the Results?

- **Using the Findings**
  - Improving your program
  - Evaluating the effectiveness of your program
  - Generating new knowledge

- **Using the Evaluation Process**
  - Building shared meaning and understanding
  - Supporting and enhancing the program
  - Supporting human and organizational development

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Last Words-Key Points

- Design evaluation to meet your needs – there is no one "right" approach.
- Start with the questions, not the instrument
- Involve your stakeholders in the process.
- Make effective use of the resources (people and information) that you have on hand.
- Use logic models as tools for planning and reflection – its worth the time!
- Make evaluation a living, *useful* process – a "want to" instead of a "have to."

The Center for Youth and Communities, Brandeis University

- Research, policy, program assistance center located at The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University.
- Major focus on youth, education, and community development.
- Contact Information:

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