

of integrated, multifaceted, evidence-based interventions for a significant duration in order to effect change. One key to achieving outcomes from an initiative is the intentional use of evaluation throughout the process. Yet few nonprofit organizations who step forward to lead collaborative efforts or develop comprehensive interventions have the internal capacity to provide the initiative with professional evaluation assistance. In addition, applicants and funders rarely negotiate for funding to include a robust evaluation component.

A proactive alternative is for funders to provide grantees with support for an evaluation component that will help to shape their work and enhance the likelihood of achieving outcomes. Thus, funders should prioritize evaluation as a significant grantmaking function. Grants should include sufficient resources to support a substantive evaluation component, and funders should commit significant internal staffing to support and participate in the evaluation process.

Empowerment Evaluation

Definition

Empowerment evaluation has demonstrated its efficacy in facilitating grantee results and funder impact. Empowerment evaluation is an evaluation approach that aims to increase the probability of achieving program success by (a) providing program stakeholders with tools for assessing the planning, implementation, and self-evaluation of their program, and (b) mainstreaming evaluation as part of the planning and management of the program/organization (Wandersman et al., 2005, p. 28). Because nonprofits typically lack the capacity to systematically plan for, monitor, and capture results in their programming, the empowerment evaluation framework offers funders an alternate approach that embraces a philosophy of partnership between the funder, the applicant/grantee, and the evaluator, promoting the mutual goal of achieving successful results. This interactive partnering approach is distinctly different from the traditional model of grantmaking in which evaluation may occur only after the grant has concluded but is typically unable to ascertain if the programming *per se* produced any outcomes.

The traditional grant evaluation model depicted in Figure 3.1 shows two disconnected stages. In stage 1, the grantee has little, if any, involvement with the funder or an evaluator. After the project has concluded, an evaluator may be hired by the funder to assess the project. This traditional model assumes the grantee has selected interventions that are best practices or evidence based and that the grantee has identified measurable objectives and valid measurement tools at the outset. The model also assumes that data are gathered methodically

throughout the duration of the project, including the initial benchmarks. Further, the use of comparison or control groups is rare. Thus, the traditional evaluation model frequently concludes that the project's outcomes cannot necessarily be attributed to the project's interventions. Such conclusions often leave the grantee frustrated with the practice of evaluation and unable to gain support for sustaining the project. Moreover, the grantee, and the nonprofit sector in general, may become disillusioned with the value of pursuing new strategies and interventions in the future.

The empowerment evaluation partnership model depicted in Figure 3.2 reflects an interactive and collaborative partnership throughout the project. The partnership model intends to integrate evaluation as a process within the project, acting as a normal part of planning and management, rather than as a separate function often occurring outside the project, as is the case with the traditional evaluation model. Thus, the partnership model ensures the assumptions made in the traditional evaluation model are realized. The partners are connected and are able to share their perspectives and skills, adding value throughout the duration of the project and thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving outcomes that can be attributed to the project's interventions.

Guiding Theories and Principles

The empowerment evaluation approach is guided by the "theory of process use," meaning that if project staff are involved in conducting the

Figure 3.1 Traditional grant evaluation model

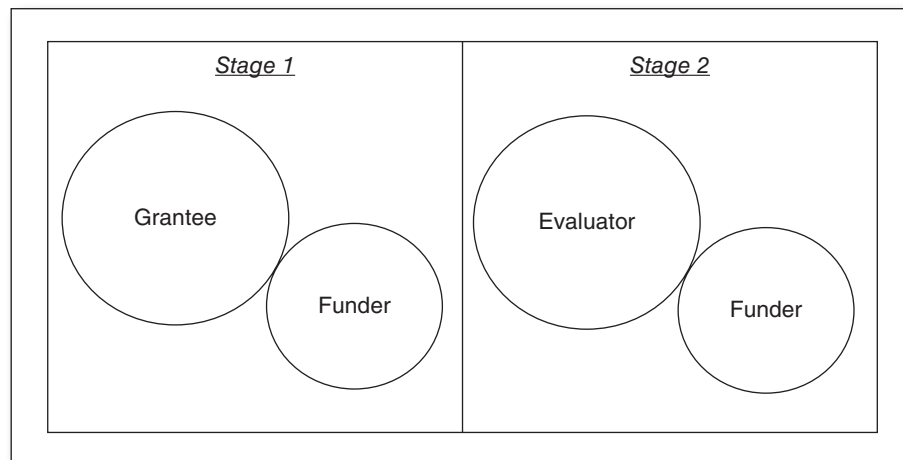
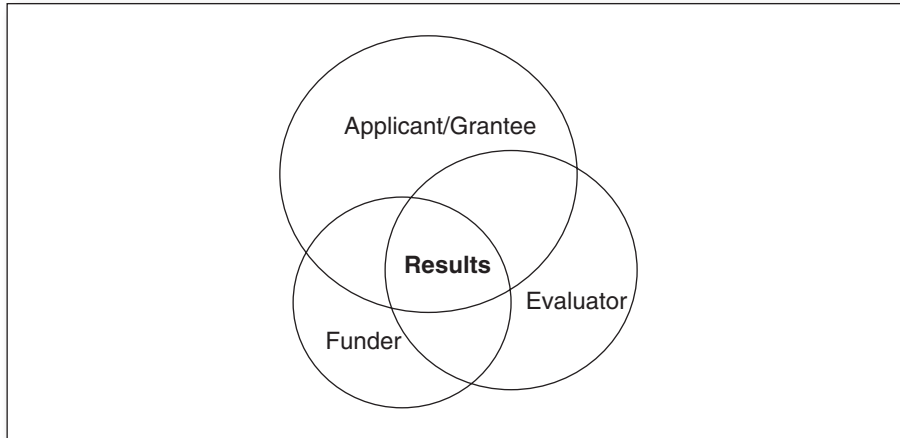


Figure 3.2 Empowerment evaluation partnership model



evaluation, the results are credible and more likely to be acted on. In addition, the empowerment evaluation approach facilitates the alignment of the “theory of action,” or the espoused rationale for the project, with the “theory of use,” or what the project actually does (Wandersman et al., 2005, 30–38). The empowerment evaluation partnership model helps to provide a process for those designing and implementing a project with clarity of purpose and action.

These theories work in conjunction with 10 specific principles of empowerment evaluation (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005). These principles, described in Table 3.1, provide the lens through which to focus the evaluation.

Role of the Grantee, Funder, and Evaluator as Partners

The empowerment evaluation partnership model brings together unique assets represented by the partners’ differing experiences and expertise as well as other resources, such as the funder’s capacity to convene others to support or participate in the project. With each partner sharing in the responsibility to foster a successful project, the interaction of their varied skills and resources compounds the value of their unique contributions. The partners’ interactive process, from planning the project through monitoring its implementation and capturing the outcomes, yields results beyond those typically emanating from a traditional evaluation model.

Table 3.1 Empowerment Evaluation Principles

Improvement	Empowerment evaluation is designed to help people improve program performance; it is designed to help people build on their successes and re-evaluate areas meriting attention.
Community Ownership	Empowerment evaluation values and facilitates community control; use and sustainability are dependent on a sense of ownership.
Inclusion	Empowerment evaluation invites involvement, participation, and diversity; contributions come from all levels and walks of life.
Democratic Participation	Participation and decision making should be open and fair.
Social Justice	Evaluation can and should be used to address social inequities in society.
Community Knowledge	Empowerment evaluation respects and values community knowledge.
Evidence-based Strategies	Empowerment evaluation respects and uses the knowledge base of scholars (in conjunction with community knowledge).
Capacity Building	Empowerment evaluation is designed to enhance stakeholders' ability to conduct evaluation and to improve program planning and implementation.
Organizational Learning	Data should be used to evaluate new practices, inform decision making, and implement program practices; empowerment evaluation is used to help organizations learn from their experience (building on successes, learning from mistakes, and making mid-course corrections).
Accountability	Empowerment evaluation is focused on outcomes and accountability; empowerment evaluation functions within the context of existing policies, standards, and measures of accountability; did the program or initiative accomplish its objectives?

SOURCE: Adapted from Fetterman and Wandersman (2005).

The partnership process generates a culture of evidence-based decision making and demystifies the evaluation function. Moreover, it builds the capacity for effective programming within nonprofit organizations by transferring the skills learned through this process to the administration of other programming.

Role of the Grantee

The grantee's role often includes taking the lead in designing and implementing the project; seeking advice from the evaluator on best practices or evidence-based strategies; choosing measurements and methods of data collection; participating in cycles of reflection and action to continuously improve the project by reviewing data, and when appropriate, proposing and implementing programmatic revisions to overcome barriers to implementation. In addition, the grantee's role includes seeking assistance from the funder, when appropriate, to broaden or strengthen program or funder partnerships; facilitating advocacy activities to build public awareness of a societal issue and support its alleviation using the project's interventions; and developing credible progress and outcome evaluation reports with assistance from the evaluator to augment advocacy efforts, including lobbying for changes in public policy.

Role of the Evaluator

The evaluator's role often includes informing the planning process by assessing the selection of evidence-based strategies or best practices; adapting those selected strategies to the community and implementing the strategies with fidelity; identifying valid measurement tools and assisting in the development of data gathering practices; fostering the monitoring of data collection to assist the process of continuous quality improvement or cycles of reflection and action; and coaching the grantee on preparing credible progress and summary reports that can assist in securing future funding and institutionalizing the project.

Role of the Funder

The funder's role often includes assisting in inviting key community leaders and representatives from other organizations to support the grant project; participating in cycles of reflection and action, and authorizing real-time decisions regarding programmatic or budget changes; assisting in seeking other funders for the project; and assisting in advocating for changes in public policy to remove barriers to the resolution of societal issues targeted by the project and/or to institutionalize the project's interventions.

Ten Accountability Questions

With the partnership model in place, an empowerment evaluation problem-solving framework—as fully described by Chinman, Imm, and Wandersman (2004) in *Getting To Outcomes 2004: Promoting Accountability Through Methods and Tools for Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation*—uses the 10 accountability questions presented in Table 3.2. These questions provide

Table 3.2 Ten Accountability Questions

<i>Accountability Questions</i>	<i>Relevant Literature</i>
1. What are the underlying needs and conditions in the community? (NEEDS/RESOURCES)	Needs/resources assessment
2. What are the goals, target populations, and objectives (i.e., desired outcomes)? (GOALS)	Goal setting
3. Which evidence-based models and best practice programs can be useful in reaching the goals? (BEST PRACTICE)	Consult literature on science-based and best practice programs
4. What actions need to be taken so the selected program “fits” the community context? (FIT)	Feedback on comprehensiveness and fit of program, including cultural competence
5. What organizational capacities are needed to implement the program? (CAPACITIES)	Assessment of organizational capacities
6. What is the plan for this program? (PLAN)	Planning
7. How will the quality of program and/or initiative implementation be assessed? (PROCESS)	Process evaluation
8. How well did the program work? (OUTCOMES)	Outcome and impact evaluation
9. How will continuous quality improvement strategies be incorporated? (CQI)	Total quality management; continuous quality improvement
10. If the program is successful, how will it be sustained? (SUSTAIN)	Sustainability and institutionalization

project evaluators and foundation staff. This provides an opportunity for the evaluators to learn from each other as the projects progress through the planning, pilot, and implementation phases, while also informing each other's projects. In addition, these conference calls provide an avenue for presenting new learning opportunities identified by the evaluators and supported by the foundation (e.g., a webinar on economic evaluation) that can enhance the evaluators' contributions to their respective projects.

Impact

The foundation has been recognized for its effective use of evaluation in several reports that assess foundation grantmaking and through presentations at American Evaluation Association, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, Grantmakers In Health, and the Independent Sector conferences. Released by FSG Social Impact Advisors, *From Insight to Action: New Directions in Foundation Evaluation* (Kramer, Graves, Hirschhorn, & Fiske, 2007) highlighted the foundation's use of empowerment evaluation as one of eight case studies of performance-centered evaluation approaches. The foundation was also featured in *Evaluation in Philanthropy: Perspectives From the Field*, a report co-released by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and the Council on Foundations (2009), as one of 19 foundations from across the country that uses evaluation to drive learning and improvement and capture results.

Prodding philanthropy's attention to impact investing, Kania and Kramer (2011) introduced the concept of collective impact and described its usefulness:

Large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination, yet the social sector remains focused on the isolated intervention of individual organizations. . . . Collective Impact Initiatives are long-term commitments by a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Their actions are supported by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities and continuous communication, and are staffed by an independent backbone support organization. (pp. 36, 39)

The Independent Sector's 2011 annual conference showcased Kania and Kramer's new thinking with a session titled "Working Collectively for Greater Impact," which included a presentation connecting the empowerment evaluation partnership model and the 10 accountability questions framework as responsible for the impact made by the foundation's grantmaking.

The foundation is in the midst of the third funding cycle of its Health Care and Health Promotion Synergy Initiative, having successfully completed two five-year cycles. Lentz, Imm, and Yost, et al. (2005) used the foundation's round one grant project titled Child Abuse Prevention and Protection Collaborative as a case study to describe the implementation of empowerment evaluation's principles and practices. Since that time, the foundation's grantees have achieved outcomes with varying levels of impact. Indeed, four projects (described in the next few paragraphs) have created a sea change in how certain health issues are addressed and have received ongoing governmental support to sustain effective interventions.

Oral Health Improvement

In its first funding cycle, the foundation focused nearly \$6 million to introduce and expand dental services for vulnerable populations in the Worcester area and North Central Massachusetts via two grant projects, the Central Mass Oral Health Initiative (CMOHI) and the Oral Health Initiative of North Central Mass (OHINCM). OHINCM helped to introduce a dental clinic at a community health center offering Medicaid and free dental services in that area for the first time. That dental clinic was then able to expand preventive dental services to 43 schools throughout the area. CMOHI helped double dental services provided by two other community health centers, who have sustained that enhanced capacity, in part due to the development by CMOHI of a graduate dental residency program at those centers. The two projects joined forces in advocating for a series of changes in public policy to remove barriers that prevented dentists in private practice from accepting Medicaid. At the outset of the projects, fewer than 10 dentists in Central Massachusetts were accepting Medicaid; by its conclusion, nearly 200 dentists accepted Medicaid, boosting participation rates to 50%.

Children's Mental Health Improvement

The foundation's first funding cycle also provided \$1.8 million for the Together For Kids project, which developed and documented the efficacy of a mental health consultation model to aid the social-emotional development of preschoolers in child care settings who presented with challenging behaviors. Following advocacy and lobbying efforts, the state began funding these services statewide in 2010 and has continued the services, providing more than \$8 million to date.

Ending Adult Chronic Homelessness

During the second funding cycle, the foundation provided \$2.2 million for the Home Again project to end adult chronic homelessness in Worcester. The project first documented the efficacy of using a “housing first” approach and was instrumental in persuading the state to transition its funding from sheltering to a housing first approach. In January 2011, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness recognized Worcester as the first community of its size in the country to essentially end adult chronic homelessness. Other advocacy efforts resulted in changing public policy to gain state (i.e., Medicaid) and federal government (i.e., Medicare) funding for the provision of case management services to this population statewide to ensure they remain housed.

Cautionary Acknowledgments in Using the Empowerment Evaluation Partnership Model

While the foundation’s experience with the empowerment evaluation partnership model and the 10 accountability questions has created impact and justifies its continuation, there are cautionary acknowledgments that accompany its endorsement. Perhaps the most obvious objection some funders may have is that funding a robust evaluation component throughout a multiyear project requires resources that could otherwise go to support additional grants. If funders with this objection are comfortable with the outcomes and impact of their grantmaking, then adopting the empowerment evaluation partnership model may not be advised.

For those funders considering adoption of the empowerment evaluation partnership model and 10 accountability questions, it is important to understand that a partnership process requires additional resources to support staffing at the foundation level, as well as within the grant budget. As with the development of any relationship, the empowerment evaluation partnership will require some extra attention to interpersonal communication and chemistry. Grantees may initially be hesitant to lead and somewhat intimidated by having the funder and the evaluator as partners in the process of planning and implementing the project. The funder may be perceived as too dominant in the partnership. Similarly, the evaluator may take a rather academic approach that may result in the evaluation essentially overwhelming the project, especially with regard to the project staff’s time and effort in data collection. Evaluators are advised to present a practical approach that can be translated to service in the field, while maintaining scientific standards.

To be effective partners with the grantee, funders and evaluators must quickly become well informed on the issue being addressed by the project, including its root cause and efficacious solution. In addition, given the occasional turnover of key players among the partnership during a multiyear project, the partnership will experience some interruption and attention must be given to orienting new players and rebuilding relationships.

EMPOWERMENT EVALUATION'S ADDED VALUE

The empowerment evaluation partnership offers a model for collaborative learning and problem solving. With the evaluator's involvement, the 10 accountability questions provide an effective framework for designing comprehensive programming to systematically plan for, monitor, and document results.

In addition, the interactive empowerment evaluation partnership process builds the capacity of nonprofits to generalize the experience to other aspects of their work. Funders benefit by having a clear understanding and rationale for making continuation grants to support the project. Most important, results are well documented and often lead to changes in how society best serves its most vulnerable. The call for accountability is answered.

Evidence of outcomes and impact should be the driving force in determining the use of philanthropic and governmental investment in programming to serve vulnerable populations and alleviate societal issues and concerns. All talent should be brought together to focus on that goal. Funders and nonprofits have long been engaged in this endeavor, and elevating their efforts to a higher level of effectiveness should remain an ongoing consideration. Evaluators bring a skill set to those efforts that can add value well beyond the cost of their involvement. Using science to address societal issues and then translating that science into practice is a worthy purpose indeed.

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