

EMPOWERMENT EVALUATION

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Society has seemingly intractable problems. The proportion of the population living in poverty is increasing. Too many are hungry and lack access to affordable homes. Too many experience mental illness or substance use disorders and lack access to quality treatment and recovery services. After having served a sentence imposed by the criminal justice system, too many reoffend and are reincarcerated. These issues, and many others, persist despite the best intentions of government, nonprofit human service organizations, and healthcare providers. The government contributes billions of dollars collected from taxpayers, while individual donors, philanthropists, and foundations give generously, yet the problems continue unabated.

Programs to alleviate societal problems frequently lack a substantive evaluation component, as do some other large-scale initiatives. Too few resources are available to support a thorough planning process to design programs or interventions based on the priority needs identified. Process and outcome data are often haphazardly gathered. Continuous quality improvement (CQI) cycles of reflection and action are not the routine. Even programs that have powerful anecdotal examples of success do not always have the benefit of evaluation data that provide sufficient evidence to verify program outcomes. The lack of rigorous evaluation data and desired outcomes that can be broadly understood and accepted by a wide range of audiences prevents effective programs from being replicated and scaled up. Even effective programs typically struggle to maintain funding, often fading away until being reinvented. Empowerment Evaluation (EE) offers an approach to change this scenario, by engaging evaluators as partners in developing and monitoring program interventions and documenting the results (Fetterman et al., 1996).

Learning Objectives

1. Gain a basic understanding of how empowerment evaluation and the Getting to Outcomes® 10 accountability questions can be used in program evaluation.
2. Learn how empowerment evaluators can be engaged as partners in designing, monitoring, and evaluating program outcomes.
3. Identify how empowerment evaluators' partnership approach can add value in creating systems change to sustain effective programming.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF EMPOWERMENT EVALUATION

Evaluators are frequently requested to utilize evaluation processes and methods to document the successes and outcomes of various programs, practices, and policies. A variety of evaluation methods and tools are available to answer specific evaluation questions to determine a program's value or worth. Many of these approaches and tools are implemented using traditional evaluation methods, which may be experimental or quasi-experimental in nature. Over the last 30 years, EE has become an increasingly well-known evaluation approach that has its roots in traditional evaluation as well as collaborative and participatory evaluation methods.

EE was initially described by David Fetterman in 1993 at the American Evaluation Association's (AEA) annual meeting (Miller & Campbell, 2006). The approach draws its origins from empowerment theory, community psychology, and action anthropology. An initial EE resource, *Empowerment Evaluation: Knowledge and Tools for Self Assessment and Accountability* (edited by David Fetterman, Shakeh Kaftarian, and Abraham Wandersman), was published in 1996 and offered examples of how evaluators used EE processes and methods in a variety of program and policy sectors. Since that time, the EE approach has blossomed to include additional volumes of books, resources, and tools for those interested in using EE as an evaluation approach. Innovative work and scholarship in recent years has contributed to EE being seen as a legitimate approach in professional evaluation circles and across settings (e.g., government, foundations). The AEA's Topical Interest Group (TIG) on Collaborative, Participatory, and Empowerment Evaluation has consistently increased its membership each year. Advocates of EE have also delineated it as theoretically different from similar evaluation approaches such as participatory evaluation and developmental evaluation (Wandersman et al., 2005).

In traditional evaluation processes, which are frequently conducted by an independent evaluator, collaboration may occur with key stakeholder groups to determine what is to be evaluated and suggest strategies for use. The extent of this collaboration varies widely on the following five dimensions: control of decision making, diversity among stakeholders who participate, power relationships among participating stakeholders, manageability of evaluation implementation, and depth of participation (Weaver & Cousins, 2004). EE places a strong emphasis on stakeholder control of the decision-making process and active engagement by stakeholders. There is also a focus on using data to facilitate CQI, that is, systematic cycles of collecting data and analyzing it in order to refine programming. Many organizations or groups that embrace EE over traditional evaluation processes appreciate the goal of building the capacities of program staff to conduct and use evaluation methods on their own. The use of EE in various types of organizations can facilitate longer-term systems-level change including building organizational learning through the use of data, informed decision making, and developing feedback loops for CQI (Lentz et al., 2005). Evaluators who utilize traditional evaluation methods do not typically view building an organization's evaluation capacity as a priority (Cox et al., 2009).

DEFINING AND OPERATIONALIZING EMPOWERMENT EVALUATION

Various definitions of EE have been offered including this initial definition provided by Fetterman et al. (1996): "the use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings

to foster improvement and self-determination.” More recently, EE has been defined as an approach that aims to increase the probability of achieving program success by (1) providing stakeholders with tools for assessing the planning, implementation, and self-evaluation of their programs and (2) mainstreaming evaluation as part of the planning and management of the program/organization (Wandersman et al., 2005). This most recent definition is not viewed as “new” but rather an expansion of the prior one with the goal of enhancing the overall clarity of EE (e.g., Fetterman & Wandersman, 2007). Both definitions have a strong emphasis on continuous learning and improvement and extend the traditional role of an evaluator to be one of a facilitator or coach. Moreover, the model explicitly states that the EE evaluator aims to aid the program (e.g., participants, staff) to achieve positive and/or successful outcomes as decided by the stakeholders (e.g., Wandersman et al., 2005). While detractors have used this core value to suggest that empowerment evaluators are more susceptible to bias in data collection and interpretation, the primary authors and champions of EE (e.g., Fetterman, Wandersman) have sought to refute these claims by underscoring EE as a credible and effective evaluation approach. These controversies are well documented and available in the literature (Fetterman et al., 2009), but are outside the scope of this chapter. It is noteworthy that the practice of EE is consistent with the AEA’s Joint Committee on Program Evaluation Standards.

Methods for implementing EE strategies have also emerged over time. Fetterman (1994) highlights his *three step model for EE* to include these components: establishing the mission, taking stock, and planning for the future. The empowerment evaluator serves as a coach or a *critical friend* (i.e., a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend; Costa & Kallick, 1993) to help the community develop its missions. When taking stock, the empowerment evaluator assesses what existing efforts have already occurred. This is likely to include documentation of the project’s baseline assessment. When planning for the future, the empowerment evaluator works with the community to set specific goals and uses evidence-based strategies or activities to accomplish the goals. Potential evaluation methods such as interviews or surveys may be used to test whether the strategies are working and allow for midcourse corrections. There are subsequent assessments of the activities comparing the findings to the baseline results to measure growth or change over time.

Wandersman and colleagues utilize a 10-step model for EE known as *Getting to Outcomes*[®] (Chinman et al., 1999; 2004). This model is built on a series of 10 accountability questions that integrates effective components of planning, implementation, and evaluation. The model and the manualized set of strategies were recognized as the Outstanding Publication by the AEA in 2008. The 10 accountability questions and related literatures for each of the 10 steps are presented in Table 8.1.

In 2009, Wandersman and his colleagues developed a document used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on how to hire an empowerment evaluator (Cox et al., 2009). The document includes information about the skill sets and competencies an empowerment evaluator should have as well as specific hiring tools such as job descriptions and potential interview questions.

Table 8.1 Getting to Outcomes® 10 Accountability Questions^a

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

Source: Adapted from Chinman et al. (1999; 2004).

^a Getting to Outcomes and GTO are trademarks registered by the University of South Carolina and RAND Corporation. It is noteworthy that, while GTO is trademarked, resources are available free of charge (visit <http://www.rand.org/health/projects/getting-to-outcomes.html> for access to manuals and other GTO tools and resources).

PRINCIPLES OF EMPOWERMENT EVALUATION

The *principles of EE* are outlined in the textbook *Empowerment Evaluation Principles in Practice*, edited by Fetterman and Wandersman (2005). To specifically illustrate the principles, each chapter provides a case study of the EE principles in practice. Table 8.2 outlines the *principles of EE* and a brief description of each. All principles are equal in importance and are not ordered by priority.

The *principles of EE* are defining characteristics, and those practicing EE are encouraged to utilize evaluation methods that include as many principles as possible. These principles, and the practice of EE, will certainly be more attractive to some organizations than to others. For example, a nonprofit organization whose mission may include social justice or community change may be interested in EE because of certain principles such as democratic participation, community knowledge, and community ownership. By working with empowerment evaluators, the capacities of organizations to adopt and integrate the principles can be improved over time.

Table 8.2 Principles of Empowerment Evaluation

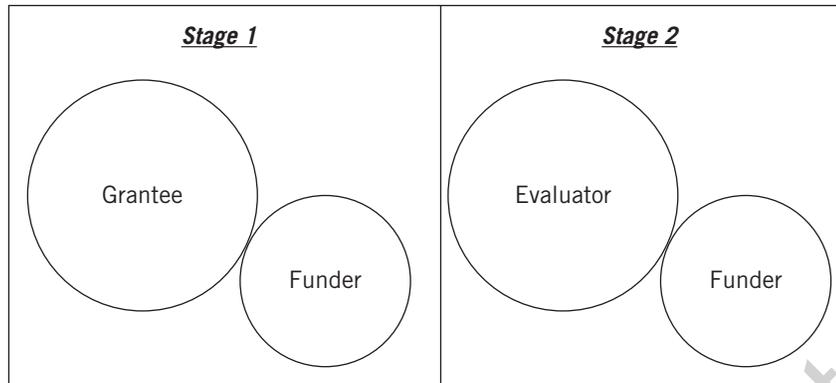
Principle	Brief Description
Community ownership	EE places the primary responsibility and ownership for building the organization's evaluation capacity and evaluating the organization's strategies within the organization
Inclusion	EE involves the representation and participation of key stakeholders
Democratic participation	EE is a highly collaborative process. Every stakeholder's voice is to be heard and equally valued
Community knowledge	EE values and promotes the knowledge present within an organization and community in which they work. Community stakeholders are considered to be in the best position to understand the community's problems and to generate solutions to those problems
Evidence-based strategies	EE promotes the use of evidence-based strategies so that organizations can use their resources to select, implement, and evaluate strategies that have a high likelihood of success
Accountability	EE focuses on data that can be used to inform continuous program improvement and to determine whether a strategy has achieved the desired outcomes
Improvement	EE helps organizations to improve their strategies so they are more likely to achieve their stated goals and outcomes
Organizational learning	EE fosters a culture of learning within organizations. Stakeholders come to view all data (positive and negative) as useful information to inform improvement in strategies
Social justice	EE increases an organization's evaluation capacity to implement strategies that work to reduce health disparities that affect groups marginalized (Brennan et al., 2008) by discrimination, persecution, prejudice, and intolerance
Capacity building	EE builds individual and organizational evaluation capacity so that stakeholders are better able to conduct their own evaluations, understand the results, and use them to continuously improve their strategies

Source: Adapted from Fetterman and Wandersman (2005).

EVALUATORS AS PARTNERS TO SUPPORT SYSTEMS CHANGE

Using the EE approach, the evaluator is intentionally engaged as an active and integrated partner frequently beginning with the planning phase of the program/initiative. This is significantly different than the traditional model of how evaluators and funders frequently interact (Figure 8.1). Specifically, the organization (such as a grantee) typically has minimal involvement with the funder or the evaluator in the initial stages of evaluation planning. This traditional model assumes the grantee has selected interventions that are best practice 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 baseline data. All too frequently the traditional evaluation model concludes that the project's outcomes

Figure 8.1 Traditional Grant Evaluation Model

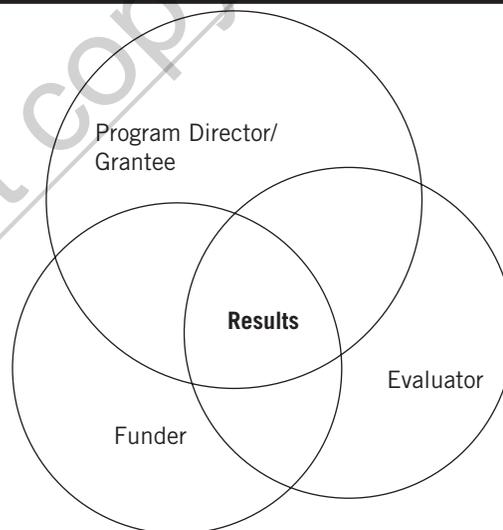


Source: This figure originally appeared in Fetterman et al. (2015). *Empowerment evaluation: Knowledge and tools for self-assessment, evaluation capacity building, and accountability*, 2nd Edition (p. 50). Sage.

cannot necessarily be attributed to the project's interventions. Such conclusions can 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 about the value of pursuing new strategies and interventions in the future.

The EE partnership model depicted in Figure 8.2 reflects an interactive and collaborative partnership, which includes the funder (Yost, 2015). The partnership involves the evaluator as a meaningful partner who contributes to the program's planning and

Figure 8.2 Empowerment Evaluation Partnership Model



Source: This figure originally appeared in Fetterman et al. (2015). *Empowerment evaluation: Knowledge and tools for self-assessment, evaluation capacity building, and accountability*, 2nd Edition (p. 50). Sage.

monitoring as well as the documentation of its results. This collaboration allows for evaluators to share their perspectives and skills, adding value throughout the duration of the program and thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving results that can be attributed to the interventions. This collaborative partnership, consistent with the partnership-oriented emphasis of EE, is distinctly different from the traditional model of evaluation in which the evaluator is typically engaged in a separate function to assess a program after it has been implemented.

The EE partnership model may be used even if the funder partner cannot be actively engaged. However, funders who participate in cycles of reflection are likely to be better prepared to understand and authorize real-time decisions regarding programmatic or budget changes. In addition, funders may be in a position to attract others to cofund the program and may also assist in bringing the program to the attention of the media and public officials.

In the context of the EE partnership, the evaluator's role often includes the following:

- informing the planning process by assessing the selection of evidence-based strategies or best practices;
- adapting those selected strategies to the community and supporting implementation of 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 *CQI* or cycles of reflection and action; and/or
- coaching the grantee on preparing credible progress and summary reports that can assist in securing future funding and institutionalizing the project.

In addition, the empowerment evaluator may embrace the role of teacher by intentionally working with the grantee to build the nonprofit organization's capacities to routinely practice high-quality evaluation beyond the specific grant project (Box 8.1).

BOX 8.1 SPECIFIC TASKS EMPOWERMENT EVALUATORS MAY PERFORM

- Help develop the theory of change or logic model.
- Help articulate clear goals and desired outcomes for the program, gather baseline data, and establish ways to measure the desired outcomes.
- Help identify promising or evidence-based practices that could be used to meet the goals and desired outcomes.
- Help strategize and plan evaluation implementation, including data collection

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BOX 8.1 SPECIFIC TASKS EMPOWERMENT EVALUATORS MAY PERFORM (CONTINUED)

- methods and required approvals (e.g., Institutional Review Board approval).
- Monitor progress on goals and activities throughout the program period and advise on making adjustments.
 - Assist in conducting periodic process evaluations.
 - Participate in routine grant management team meetings (involving the program director/grantee partner, funder partner, and evaluator partner) to review progress and lessons learned and to revise program and evaluation components, and spending plans, as needed.
 - Occasionally attend the program's steering committee and advisory group meetings and periodically gather their input and feedback on the program and the evaluation.
 - Assist in preparing annual program summary reports by providing the program director with information related to the outcomes of the program.
 - Assist in preparing materials or presentations regarding the program's outcomes that are suitable for communicating with varied audiences/stakeholders.
 - Prepare a final evaluation report.

CASE EXAMPLE: EVALUATOR AS PARTNER— CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM THROUGH “A WISER APPROACH TO REENTRY (WISR)”

The Problem

In 2011, the Massachusetts Department of Correction reported that 44% of all individuals released from prison were incarcerated again within 3 years (Papagiorgakis, 2015). With reentry services spread across multiple state agencies and the needs of newly released individuals spanning multiple systems, reentry barriers for this vulnerable group were formidable. At an average cost of \$53,000 per person per year, the cost to the state of this revolving door of incarceration was excessive. Beyond the

financial cost to the state, the toll in human suffering associated with incarceration and recidivism was substantial.

Creation of the WISR Model

Intent on reducing reincarceration, increasing public health, and improving public safety, a group of criminal justice, mental health, and community health professionals came together to form the Re-entry Roundtable and develop the Worcester Initiative for Supported Reentry (WISR). The WISR program involved collaboration among community-based

organizations including the Worcester Superior Court and District Court Probation Offices, Worcester County Sheriff's Office, Massachusetts Department of Correction, Massachusetts Parole Board, Dismas House, and the Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center. From the beginning of the planning process, the partners within the Re-entry Roundtable aimed to institutionalize an evidence-based model for successful reentry. The implementation of the model was first led by Dismas House and then by Advocates, Inc., with a total of \$1.9 million in funding from the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts for planning (in 2011), piloting (2012), and fully implementing the WISR program (2013, 2016). Approximately 10% of the foundation's total funding for WISR went to support the work of the evaluation partner.

The primary purpose of the foundation's funding for large-scale projects is to ensure that its investment in evidence-based programs results in positive outcomes that have high potential to be sustained in communities. The foundation, classified by the IRS as a 501(c) (4), that is, a nonprofit social welfare organization that can engage in lobbying, provided that their lobbying efforts align with the stated purpose of the organization, works closely with its partners to ensure meaningful advocacy and policy-level changes to eventually sustain proven initiatives either locally or through state or federal commitments.

The EE Partnership Model

From the outset, the Health Foundation required the grant applicant to use the EE partnership model and recruited a select pool of evaluators with EE experience and content knowledge. The grant applicant, Advocates, Inc., and EE evaluators from Brandeis University (from this pool) became partners to plan, implement, and evaluate the WISR program. The evaluator partner from Brandeis contributed to the development of the initial planning grant application and all subsequent applications and process and outcome reports to the Foundation.

Advocates, Inc. was funded to implement the WISR program using a problem-solving framework similar to the collective impact model (see Kania & Kramer, 2011 for more) consisting of a common agenda, a backbone organization, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a

shared measurement system. As such, the Foundation required them, as the lead organization, to facilitate a collaborative effort, involving a structured process of planning, piloting, and implementing a set of interventions, with the end goal of changing systems to sustain evidence-based solutions. The evaluator partner participated with the grantee and funder partners in all stages of the process, which promoted a culture of shared-problem solving, ongoing and real-time data feedback, CQI, and accountability among all partners. While each of the partners had its own particular perspective, the EE model created opportunities for high levels of collaboration through collaborative planning, ongoing problem solving, and specific strategies for program enhancement. This occurred in a variety of ways including quarterly grant management team meetings for collaborative planning, participation in steering committee or advisory group meetings, and joint preparation of summary reports and presentations.

The expertise of each partner was shared in an interactive and ongoing manner that strengthened the program and its evaluation. The grantee brought deep knowledge of the problem in the community and gathered together the other relevant organizations to design a comprehensive program. The funder brought expertise in advocacy, an essential ingredient in creating systems change. The evaluator brought skills in identifying the theory of change and desired measurable outcomes, designing and monitoring the evaluation component, and then documenting the results in a final written report, which included an executive summary suitable for sharing with the general public and state policymakers.

Implementation of the EE Partnership

Planning and Grant Writing

With input from the Re-entry Roundtable and the empowerment evaluators, the grantee prepared a planning grant that addressed the first four accountability questions of the *Getting to Outcomes*[®] *empowerment evaluation* approach. This included identifying the needs to be addressed, the goals and desired outcomes of the initiative, and potential interventions to meet the goals. The empowerment evaluators contributed toward this effort by sharing information from a literature review with the Re-entry Roundtable to inform their planning.

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In summary, the WISR program provided participants with intensive case management to support them with housing, employment, healthcare, and other key needs. Case managers met with participants 30–90 days before release, administered screenings and assessments to identify participants' strengths and service needs, and in partnership with the participants, developed individually tailored service plans to encourage smooth transitions to the community. Case managers coordinated services to ensure adequate supports were in place prior to release and as needed upon return to the community. Generally, participants accessed services for up to 1 year postrelease.

Throughout the planning process, the evaluators also facilitated discussions with the Re-entry Roundtable and the grantee to ensure that all of the collaborating agencies fully understood the needs of individuals reentering the community and the roles of each organization that worked with them such as the jail, the probation office, and community agencies. The empowerment evaluators also helped the team craft goals and program objectives that were measurable so they could track progress and outcomes. The partners used the planning grant to fully develop the WISR model for reentry and then tested and refined the model during a pilot grant year.

Developing Data Collection Systems

During the planning year, the empowerment evaluators worked with the grantee, particularly the case managers, to build on existing data collection systems (related to GTO questions #5–#7). The goal was to not only streamline data collection but also ensure that the data could be used for WISR program monitoring and outcome measurement. Together, the case managers and empowerment evaluators developed an Excel database to record data on program participants from intake to discharge. The database included information that the case managers needed for their own internal reporting, as well as for the WISR evaluation.

Using Data for Continuous Quality Improvement

All partners recognized that the grantee owned the data and that the grantee agency should understand how to use the data for their own monitoring and CQI. After completion of the dashboard to report progress, the lead agency submitted monthly data to

the funder agency using the dashboard. The EE evaluators reviewed the monthly findings and ensured that the grantee was reporting the data accurately. The grantee, funder, and EE evaluators held quarterly meetings and used the monthly reports to track progress and identify areas for improvement (related to GTO questions #8–#10). These data were also shared periodically with the Re-entry Roundtable. When challenges arose, the EE evaluators would provide more in-depth analyses to facilitate CQI. For example, after studying several months of data, the partners noticed that a high percentage of participants were struggling to find employment. As a result, the grantee worked to ensure that all participants had sufficient access to the program component that focused on strategies to obtain employment.

Using Data to Assess Program Implementation and Outcomes

The grantee and representatives from other program providers serving on the Re-entry Roundtable partnered with the EE evaluators to design the process and outcome evaluations. Program partners also contributed to the process evaluation by sharing information, completing interviews, and participating in key meetings. The grantee and evaluator also cowrote the process evaluation sections of the biannual reports submitted to the funder. For the outcome evaluation, the Re-entry Roundtable helped define the recidivism outcome and the timeframe for analysis. Additionally, the Superior Court collaborated with the evaluators to obtain the recidivism data for the WISR participants and a comparison group randomly selected from a group of comparable men who would have been eligible for WISR but were released to probation before WISR started. This partnership resulted in a stronger evaluation design than would have been possible if designed and implemented by the evaluators or grantee alone, given the tight budget and the restricted access to recidivism data. The evaluators added value, however, because they were able to conduct a more detailed multivariate analysis than what would have been possible by the collaborating program providers. These analyses used multivariate models to control for moderating variables such as age, facility type (prison or jail), and race. These analyses helped to assess the strength of the WISR intervention on the main outcome (e.g., recidivism), while accounting for other variables.

Using Data to Advocate for Sustainability

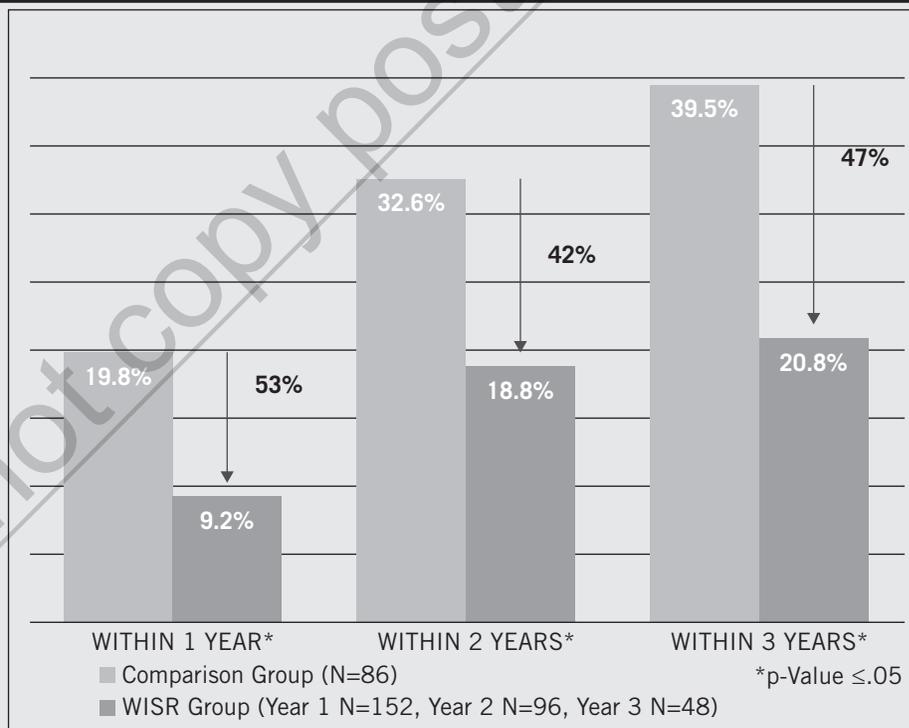
The EE evaluators partnered with the lead agency and funder to share outcomes with policymakers throughout the project. Over a 2-year period, the partners engaged with selected policymakers, provided updates on WISR's progress, and educated new policymakers as elections brought changes in legislators and committee assignments, as well as a party change in the executive office (from Democrat to Republican Party). Toward the end of the project, the grantee, funder, and EE evaluators participated in meetings with key groups of legislators and state agencies to establish a path for institutionalizing WISR. Although these meetings centered on the significant quantitative outcomes established through the rigorous evaluation, the partners also invited WISR participants to the meetings to share their personal experiences, which also had a strong impact on policymakers.

Additionally, the evaluators helped the grantee staff develop press releases and op-ed articles highlighting the program and its outcomes.

The Results

WISR resulted in a 47% reduction in recidivism 3 years postrelease, relative to a historical comparison group identified by the Massachusetts Superior Court Probation Office (Figure 8.3). This significant reduction contributed to increased safety of communities and reduced economic and social costs due to crime. Moreover, the reduction in recidivism yielded a 59% return on investment based on 1-year incarceration costs in Massachusetts (Figure 8.4; also see Chapter 12, which provides an in-depth overview of costs analysis in evaluation, including return on investment). Accounting for additional years of averted incarcerations would generate additional cost savings.

Figure 8.3 Reincarceration Rates by Years Post-Release



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Figure 8.4 Cost Analysis of the WISR Model

<u>WISR Costs</u>		<u>Incarceration Costs</u>	
Total (pilot + 3 years):	\$961,593	Average annual cost per person:	\$53,041
Average cost per person:	\$ 6,327		

<u>Cost Analysis per 100 Participants</u>	
Averted incarceration costs:	\$1,007,779
<u>WISR Costs</u>	<u>\$ 632,700</u>
Net Savings	\$ 375,079
Return on Investment (ROI):	59%

Examples of How the EE Partnership Contributed to WISR Outcomes

WISR’s outcomes can be attributed, partially, to effective use of the EE partnership model to engage partners throughout the planning of the program design, the ongoing monitoring and practice of CQI, and the documentation of program outcomes. These examples illustrate the particular value added by the evaluation partner:

- The EE evaluators worked with the staff of the grantee to conduct a search of existing literature for related best practices and evidence-based practices to inform the design of the program intervention. In the course of reviewing national and local programs, the lead agency staff also conferred with key service providers to identify interventions that would most ably address challenges in the local community. The providers identified local strengths and resources, and their ability to modify, when necessary, any operational policies or procedures to implement the evidence-based interventions with fidelity. Through ongoing one-on-one consultation and at grants management and steering committee

meetings, the evaluation team was an integral part of this decision making. Further, they provided their own knowledge and expertise gained from working on projects that used similar interventions.

- The EE evaluators worked with the Re-entry Roundtable to establish goals and outcomes that were generally accepted benchmarks for the criminal justice field. The 3-year, postrelease recidivism rate is the standard for measuring recidivism and was adopted as the primary outcome measure for the WISR.
- The research design was informed by practicality and affordability while also maintaining rigorous standards. For instance, although the evaluators would have preferred to randomly assign eligible individuals to the WISR program or a comparison group, conversations with the Re-entry Roundtable indicated that this was not feasible. However, representatives from Superior Court Probation agreed to pull a random historical comparison group based on the eligibility requirements for WISR participation, thus providing a rigorous comparison group. As mentioned earlier, the

involvement with Superior Court Probation also allowed access to recidivism data that would have been difficult for the evaluators to access on their own.

- The evaluation partner worked to build the capacities of the grantee’s staff to generate monthly dashboard reports to report “live data.” These reports were shared with the steering committee and grants management teams and the Re-entry Roundtable, who collectively identified trends in recidivism, employment, housing, and access to primary health, mental health, substance use, and other services. This allowed the grantee to tap into the collaborative’s resources to devise solutions to problems and enhance activities that showed positive trends. Timely access to these data helped the team to test different models and use data to develop and implement better systems.
- Specifically, ongoing data review of dashboard reports and interim process evaluation reports helped the WISR collaborating organizations identify problems and creatively address issues to strengthen program components. Early on, the process evaluation identified the immediate need for housing for some participants, and the budget was adjusted first to lease a few units and then later revised to provide “rent on demand” when appropriate. Similarly, the need for intensive employment support among many participants led to the creation of an employment specialist position. Continued gaps in employment then led to another redesign so that the responsibility for employment assistance was assumed by the case managers who had stronger relationships with the participants.
- Participation in CQI practices built the capacities of WISR leadership to generalize evaluation practices in other programming offered by the collaborating organizations. The evaluators’ and key partners’ involvement in the program design happened early on in the project’s lifecycle and built a foundation for a culture of collaborative problem solving and ownership by all key stakeholders for CQI throughout the

project. As a result, when the grantee requested increased support from probation or approval of the Re-entry Roundtable for programmatic changes based on data-informed decision making, the partners supported these changes.

- The structure of the foundation’s funding mechanism not only provided the project with the latitude to test new operational systems, but also required that it do so in order to fully vet and then implement the most efficacious set of services. The evaluation partner was instrumental in providing data to facilitate rapid cycles of reflection and action to ensure the program implemented the most effective services.

Effecting Systems Change

Throughout the WISR program years of 2011–2016, the grantee, funder, evaluation partner, and members of the Re-entry Roundtable worked to provide information to policymakers about WISR’s impact on recidivism. Communications targeted public officials, primarily state legislators and key members of the administration, and were shared with the public through periodic media coverage. In April 2014, the foundation hosted a key public awareness event to introduce WISR and share its positive preliminary findings. Approximately 250 policymakers, including state legislators and representatives from key state agencies, representatives from the collaborating WISR provider organizations, and select community leaders attended. The event featured key speakers including the Executive Secretary of Public Safety, the Commissioner of the Department of Correction for Massachusetts, the Worcester County Sheriff, and the evaluation partner, who shared the promising preliminary results (Brolin & Dunigan, 2017).

In early 2017, armed with WISR’s final results, the grantee, funder, and evaluation partner convened a series of meetings with leadership in the state legislature and the administration, including the lieutenant governor, to garner their support to sustain the WISR model through state funding. Additionally, court officers in the judiciary were identified as important individuals to educate and disseminate findings to colleagues in the legislature

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to ensure ongoing financial support for the model. The evaluation partner's attendance at several of these key meetings brought attention to WISR's positive results and provided an opportunity for the evaluation partner to respond to questions, which strengthened the credibility of the findings.

The response was a broad-based and whole-hearted acceptance of the WISR model. Despite the state's limited capacity for funding new programs, key members of the administrative leadership agreed to begin to replicate the WISR model within the Massachusetts Department of Probation in its Office of Community Corrections, with 14 locations across the state. Then in 2018, the state approved substantive criminal justice reform, which included the

provision of reentry services. By early 2019, the state had approved contracts totaling \$7 million to pilot the services, based on the WISR model, in Worcester and Middlesex Counties through 2021. With the anticipation of significant reduction in recidivism rates resulting from the pilot, the intention is to then expand the reentry services throughout the state. As WISR scales up and becomes institutionalized across the state, the impact of the reduced costs of incarceration and improved public health and safety will benefit the entire Commonwealth. The use of the EE partnership model and ongoing engagement of the evaluation partner was integral to this significant achievement.

Deciding to Work With an Empowerment Evaluator

Program staff, program participants, and the community benefited by including the EE evaluators as partners in this complex initiative. By incorporating the evaluator as a meaningful partner, the collaborative developed a deep understanding of the needs of the population of focus and of those who are responsible for ongoing data collection.

For programs to benefit from EE, a concerted effort to identify and engage EE evaluators who bring content expertise to the efforts is warranted. Contract deliverables should include regular and frequent meetings with the EE evaluator to share evaluation data, identify areas in need of improvement, modify program approaches, and track results of these modifications. The EE evaluator can be a valuable partner in communicating results and advocating for sustained funding when the results are positive. By seeking and providing funding for an *empowerment evaluation*, funders and program providers have the opportunity to disseminate and sustain proven innovative practices rather than funding a one-time implementation of a new program model.

Considerations for the Novice Evaluator

There are a variety of issues to consider as one begins a career as a professional evaluator. First, become familiar with a variety of different evaluation approaches, knowing that there will be times when EE is not feasible or warranted. Certainly, the program staff or funder may not be interested in an EE approach given the significant investment of time required from various stakeholder groups. There are likely to be certain types of programs or situations in which EE might be more valuable than others. Some specific questions to address when considering an EE approach might be: Will a range of partners contribute to defining outcomes? To what degree is program staff interested in using evaluation findings for *CQI*? How willing are the program partners to build their own capacities to evaluate their own program? Be knowledgeable of a variety of evaluation models to ensure that choosing EE fits best with the situation. Second, the 10 *principles of EE* help to operationalize the model and distinguish it from other evaluation approaches. The principles

were designed to communicate the underlying values of EE and guide the practice. While all of the principles are equally important, the work becomes more complex as each is integrated into an EE program design. What principles might be the most difficult or challenging to integrate into the practice of EE? What actions might be taken to help integrate these principles into the practice of EE? Do some appear to be more straightforward than others? Which might those be? Given the full set of EE principles, what strategies/processes might be useful in helping to build positive relationships including trust. Third, similar to all evaluation approaches, EE focuses on the ultimate results, which may require sophisticated measurement methodologies. Measuring changes in outcomes will require knowledge of quantitative data analyses, so novice evaluators will benefit from honing these skills. What qualitative data collection methods might be considered when using an EE approach? What qualitative data analysis procedures would best be used with these methods? Last, while EE continues to evolve and become refined in its approach, the concept of improvement has always been a central feature. EE has never been described as neutral. Given this commitment to improvement, what processes for feedback or *CQI* might be used? How might the program staff be involved to determine the best improvement strategies? What challenges might occur? The questions posed and issues raised in this section are meant to be thought provoking and provide constructive information for novice evaluators as they consider EE as an approach for their practice. The practitioners, researchers, and developers of EE have all grappled with these questions and continue to learn from each other. We look forward to you joining our community of learners.

FURTHER READING

General Information About Getting to Outcomes/Empowerment Evaluation

American Evaluation Association. (n.d.). <https://www.eval.org/>

BetterEvaluation: Sharing information to improve evaluation. (n.d.). <https://www.betterevaluation.org/en>

Fetterman, D. M., & Wandersman, A. H. (2007). Empowerment evaluation: Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 28, 179–198. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234603883_Empowerment_Evaluation_Yesterday_Today_and_Tomorrow

Getting to Outcomes®: Frameworks for success for evidence-based programs. (n.d.). <https://www.rand.org/multimedia/video/2017/06/12/frameworks-for-success.html>

Getting to Outcomes®: Improving community-based prevention. (n.d.). <https://www.rand.org/health/projects/getting-to-outcomes.html>

Fetterman, D. M. (n.d.). Empowerment evaluation blog. https://www.betterevaluation.org/resources/website/empowerment_evaluation_blog

This blog, by Dr. David Fetterman, provides a range of resources on empowerment evaluation theory and practice. The blog includes links to videos, guides, and relevant academic literature that provide a detailed analysis and discussion of using empowerment evaluation.

Articles/Toolkits on Getting to Outcomes

Fetterman, D. M., Rodriguez, L. C., Wandersman, A. H., & O'Sullivan, R. G. (2014). Collaborative, participatory, and empowerment evaluation: Building a stronger conceptual foundation for stakeholder involvement

approaches to evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 35(1), 144–148.

Getting To Outcomes™ 2004: Promoting accountability through methods and tools for planning, implementation, and evaluation. (n.d.). https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR101.html¹

Obteniendo Resultados 2004: Promoción de responsabilidad a través de métodos y herramientas de

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planeación, implementación y evaluación. (n.d.). https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR101z1.html

Promoting Success: A Getting To Outcomes® Guide to implementing continuous quality improvement for community service organizations. (n.d.). <https://www.rand.org/pubs/tools/TL179.html>

The Getting to Outcomes demonstration and evaluation: An illustration of the prevention support system. (n.d.). https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP20080602.html

KEY CONCEPTS

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI): Systematic cycles of collecting data and analyzing it in order to refine and improve programming.

Critical friend: A trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend.

Empowerment evaluation: An evaluation approach that engages evaluators as partners in developing and monitoring program interventions and documenting the results.

Empowerment evaluation partnership model: An interactive and collaborative partnership (that may include the funder) that utilizes the empowerment evaluation principles to plan, implement, and evaluate the program.

Getting to Outcomes®: One model to operationalize empowerment evaluation whereby the stakeholder groups (including the empowerment evaluator) address 10 accountability questions.

Principles of empowerment evaluation: The principles of empowerment evaluation that are inclusive of how the evaluator and stakeholder groups organize their work based on the local context and purpose of the evaluation.

Three-step model for empowerment evaluation: Fetterman’s initial model of empowerment evaluation that includes the three components: establishing the mission, taking stock, and planning for the future.

WISR: The Worcester Initiative for Supported Reentry (WISR) that used the empowerment evaluation model to achieve positive program and systems-level outcomes.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does empowerment evaluation differ from traditional program evaluation? What are some of the strengths and challenges of each?
2. In what context or situations would program evaluation likely benefit from empowerment evaluators as partners? How might this contribution enhance program implementation?
3. What characteristics of a critical friend might be important in evaluation work? Would you be a good critical friend in an evaluation context? Why and why not?
4. Does the case study seem relatable to addressing other societal issues? If so, please identify some examples.

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