The Present and Future Role of Evaluation in the Health and Human Services Sector

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Kidney stones
Mouse = Human?
Activity

• Turn to person next to you and talk about an assumption you’re making that is embedded in how you lead your organization and/or how you do your work
Presentation goals

Create...a new or refreshed meaningful vision for evaluation

Describe...three trends in evaluation that have relevance and importance for the health and human services sectors

Inspire...you to support more evaluation work
EVALUATION

Close your eyes - what image comes to mind when you hear the word evaluation?
Evaluation is…

the **systematic collection of relevant, credible and useful information** for making **decisions** and taking programmatic and strategic actions.

Evaluation helps…

Make sense, check reality, **test assumptions**, and **answer questions** – increasing our ability to take risks and learn from both failures as well as successes.

“Evaluation as a field has become methodologically manic-obsessive…Too many of us, and those who commission us, think that it’s all about methods. It’s not. It’s all about reasoning.”

Michael Q. Patton, 2013
Evaluation and evidence-based practice have much in common

Evaluation

Systematic collection of relevant, credible and useful information + Conscientious, explicit, judicious use of current best evidence for Making decisions and taking action

Evidence-Based Practice
Evaluation is about asking questions that matter

• In what ways…
• To what extent…
• How…
• What…
• Why…

“If you don't know where you are going, you might end up someplace else.” -- Yogi Berra
What we see depends mainly on what we look for.

Sir John Lubbock
Evaluation helps us do three things…

1. Test our assumptions, check reality

2. Give us confidence in making strategic and programmatic decisions

3. And most importantly, to LEARN
99% reported tracking metrics

89% are related to financial and internal operations

<50% report tracking program data

75% don’t have the expertise, technology, nor time to engage
Evaluation Trends in the Health and Human Services Sectors

3 APPROACHES TO COLLECTING RELEVANT, CREDIBLE, AND USEFUL INFORMATION
Trend #1: Increased recognition that evaluation and learning need to be aligned with strategy

*Strategy establishes the boundaries for evaluation; Evaluation guides the development and refinement of strategy*
Key components of an evaluation system

1. Evaluation Vision
   - Evaluation’s Role
     - Strategies and Tactics
     - Systems Map and Theory of Change
     - Strategic Evaluation Questions

2. Strategy and Focus
   - Strategies and Tactics
   - Systems Map and Theory of Change
   - Strategic Evaluation Questions

3. Monitoring & Evaluation Activities
   - Outcomes Maps and Indicators
   - Grantee Reporting and Evaluation Capacity
   - Program, Initiative, and Organization Evaluation
   - Communicating and Using Evaluation Findings

4. Supportive Environment
   - Leadership
   - Human Resources
   - Financial Resources
   - IT and Knowledge Management Systems

Learning Culture and Practices
SLE systems provide organizations with a coordinated approach to evaluation

SLE systems help organizations describe...

- Why
- How
- When
- By and with whom
- To what extent

...various programs, initiatives, processes, or policies in the organization **will be evaluated** and with what **resources**
Benefits of Strategic Learning & Evaluation Systems

A Strategic Learning and Evaluation System:

• Ensures asking the right questions at the right time

• Improves alignment between evaluation and program and organization strategies

• Ensures evaluations are sized rightly and that they provide meaningful and actionable information

• Communicates commitment to ongoing learning

• Provides a coordinated and intentional approach; increases effective and efficient use of evaluation resources
Local United Way community impact theory of change

Tri-county residents succeed academically, obtain financial stability, and live healthy lifestyles to build a stronger community

**Bold Goals**
- 88% of students will graduate high school
- 30% of residents living in poverty become financially stable
- 25% more residents adopt a healthy lifestyle

**Education**
- Early reading proficiency
- Early childhood program enrollment
- Attendance and suspension

**Financial Stability**
- Food security
- Earnings of low-skilled workers
- Employment among the low-skilled

**Health**
- Persons with medical insurance
- Persons with a usual primary care provider
- Obesity among adults

**Connecting the Community**
- Partners who utilize 2-1-1 and Connecting the Community
- Volunteerism

**Measurement & Evaluation**

**Collective Impact**
- Strengthen Partnerships
- Improve Systems
- Build Capacity

**Leading Indicators**

**Impact Area**
- Health
- Financial Stability
- Education
- Connecting the Community

**Resources**
- Financial
- Tools & Technology (e.g., Advocacy & Public Policy)
- Staff, Consultants & Volunteers
- Leadership
- Communication
- Collective Impact Learning Community

**Cross Cutting Strategies**
- Continuous communication engages, informs, and inspires
- Access to quality programs and services
- Effective use of service delivery systems
- Use of evidence based or evidence informed practices
- Actionable information is used decision making
- Use of shared measurement and metrics
- Fill gaps and reduced duplication of services
- Use of joint planning and decision making
- Effective use of volunteers
- Access to quality data in a timely manner
- Development and use of a collective plan of action
- Commitment to a shared vision and goal
- Knowledge of assets, needs and gaps
- Shared investment
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- Shared investment
- Shared investment

**Linking Pathways to Results**

**Leadership**
- Commitment to a shared vision and goal
- Use of evidence based or evidence informed practices
- Actionable information is used decision making

**Tools & Technology**
- Advocacy & Public Policy
- Volunteerism

**Staff, Consultants & Volunteers**
- Development and use of a collective plan of action
- Commitment to a shared vision and goal
- Knowledge of assets, needs and gaps
- Shared investment
## SLEQs helps us make choices about which monitoring and evaluation activities to implement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLEQs</th>
<th>M&amp;E Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What needs exist in the community that TUW should address?</td>
<td>• To what extent is TUW living into its ideal to be a learning organization (e.g., using data effectively in the organization)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What evidence-based health, education, and financial stability programs are being implemented in our community? Where are there gaps?</td>
<td>Monitoring (e.g., staff and volunteer surveys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To what extent and in what ways are we making an impact on the community?</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– On financial stability?</td>
<td>Partner Reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– On education?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– On health?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– On connecting the community?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To what extent and in what ways are we moving toward a collective impact strategy?</td>
<td>Monitoring (e.g., staff and partner surveys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How and in what ways are we equipping our community partners to meet the outcome goals we’re striving for?</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How are we best leveraging our resources to achieve the greatest impact?</td>
<td>Partner Reporting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SLES data and processes create a feedback loop that will be useful for continuous improvement

**TUW communicates** Investment Strategy changes to partners

**Who to fund?**
- Collective Impact
- Programs
- Public Policy & Advocacy

**How to deploy resources?**
- TD
- Convening
- Communications
- Tools
- Training
- Shared measurement

Based on the findings and convening discussions, TUW **refines** its investment strategy and SLES components

**Execute Investment Strategy**

**TUW gathers** information

- Surveys (Partner, Staff, Volunteer)
  - Collect progress on process and outcomes
  - Provide feedback

- On-site Visit
  - Observe programs
  - Discuss challenges and successes

- Partner Reporting
  - Gather impact narratives
  - Provide feedback
  - Collect progress on programmatic indicators

**Perform M&E Activities**

**TUW...**

- synthesizes information gathered
- Performs a quality check

**Review Findings**

Partners and Volunteers **engage** to review findings and make strategic decisions

**Refine SLES Components and Investment Strategy**

**TUW shares** impact and progress made to community
Reflections on Trend #1: Strategy for Evaluation

- Does your organization currently support research and evaluation?
- Do you have certain elements of the learning and evaluation framework in place? Which ones? What’s missing?
- What needs to happen in your organization to make learning and evaluation more strategic?
Trend #2: Growing interest in Shared Metrics

1. **Shared Measurement Systems**
   - A common online platform for data capture and analysis, including field-specific performance or outcome indicators.

2. **Comparative Performance Systems**
   - A common online platform for data capture and analysis in which all participants within a field use the same measures, uniformly defined and collected.

3. **Adaptive Learning Systems**
   - An ongoing participatory process that enables all participants to collectively measure, learn, coordinate and improve performance.
Arizona Community Foundation Proposal

Leveraged the Work of Partners

Awarded a $220,000 Matching Grant for a total investment of $440,000
The purpose of **Project SAM** is to create a **shared performance measurement system** to be utilized by **small- and mid-size nonprofit organizations** that provide financial education and empowerment services…

*To enhance financial education and empowerment services in Arizona communities.*
## Project SAM – Cohort Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COHORT</th>
<th>BENEFITS</th>
<th>EXPECTATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Proven track record offering Financial Empowerment Services</td>
<td>• 2-Year Grant Funding</td>
<td>• Participate in all training and technical assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Budgets &lt;$500,000</td>
<td>• &gt;$4,000 per year</td>
<td>• Participate in all design sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meet ACF’s standard application criteria</td>
<td>• Receive Training and Technical Assistance</td>
<td>• Participate in all Learning Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 15 Organizations Selected</td>
<td>• Participate in a Shared Learning Community</td>
<td>• Commitment to using Shared Measurement System</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Project SAM Comparative Measurement System

**Time Frame**

- **Short Term** (Immediate - 3 yrs)
- **Short & Mid-Term** (Immediate - 5 yrs)
- **Short, Mid, & Long-Term** (Immediate - >5 yrs)

**Cohort Shared Indicators**

- Youth & Educational Achievement Cluster Indicators
- Financial Counseling Cluster Indicators
- Financial Literacy Cluster Indicators
- VITA Cluster Indicators
- Affordable Housing Options Cluster Indicators

**Custom Indicators per Organization**
Reflections on Trend #2: Shared Metrics

- Have you considered bringing organizations together to develop a set of shared metrics?
- What would be some reasons you’d consider doing this?
- What challenges do you think you might encounter?
- What would it take to do this?
Calm waters of rough seas?
Am I dealing with complexity?

Consider an initiative or program you are supporting and ask:

- Are there many components or parts?
- Is the issue we’re working on related to other issues or problems?
- Is the context continuously changing (e.g., culture, economy, politics, demographics)?
- Are relationships important to success?
- Do things change just as we’ve thought we’ve gotten a handle on them?
- Is there a straight path from implementation to outcomes – are the outcomes predictable?
- Is it taking place in multiple locations?
- Are many individuals and organizations involved? Across different sectors? Are there different definitions of success?
- Are all the outcomes known or knowable?
Trend #3: Acknowledgement that social problems are complex

Simple
- Baking a Cake

Complicated
- Sending a Rocket to the Moon

Complex
- Raising a Child

The social sector often treats problems as simple or complicated
Complex situations are…

Characterized by high uncertainty and high social conflict…the outcomes of interventions aimed at solving problems under conditions of complexity are unpredictable. So many factors and variables are interacting, many of them not only unknown but unknowable, that there can be no recipe for success.

Lutheran Services of Indiana - Education Creates Hope and Opportunity (ECHO)

• To advocate for teens, graduate from high school (or GED), advance parenting skills, prenatal care, attend college or live with little to no assistance, prevent subsequent pregnancies

• Case management model – best practices, accreditation standards, evidence-based approaches (e.g., curriculum, nutrition)

• One-on-one support (involves parents, family members, school personnel, community partners)

• 2012-2013, ECHO seniors achieved 100% graduation rate (compared to 40% nationally)

**Goal – To break the cycle of teen pregnancy**
A teen’s journey…

What systems and policies influence system players?
We need to act differently to address complex problems

Complex systems are:

• Nonlinear, always changing
• Unpredictable, never static
• Uncontrollable
• Highly connected and interdependent
• Emergent

Addressing complex problems requires:

• Pattern recognition
• Working with paradoxes
• Acting & learning at the same time
• Unique, evolving solutions
• Connections and relationships
Evaluations of complex initiatives, or within complex environments should:

1. Be adaptive, flexible, and iterative
2. Describe the whole system, including components and connections
3. Strengthen feedback loops and improve access to information
4. Pay attention to context and changes as they occur
5. Look for effective principles of practice in action
6. Identify points of energy and influence, momentum, and power
7. Focus on the nature of relationships and interdependencies
8. Explain the non-linear and multi-directional relationships
9. Watch for patterns, both one-off and repeating
Bringing a complexity lens to an evaluation of ECHO

2. **Describe the whole system**, including components and connections

3. **Strengthen feedback loops** and improve access to information

7. Focus on the nature of **relationships** and interdependencies
Describe the whole system, including components and connections

Map the system of key organizations and institutions that interacted with parenting teens

Map where power and influence live in the system (e.g., who or what influences a parenting teen’s education outcomes)
Strengthen feedback loops and improve access to information

Engage program staff in learning and reflection (e.g., case workers)

Build in feedback loops with the teens and their family
Focus on the nature of relationships and interdependencies

Collect data from multiple influencers (e.g., parents, case workers, peers)

Qualitative data is often needed to ascertain the nuances of relationship influences
An evaluation of ECHO might also include…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions for Evaluating Complexity</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Helpful Tools/Methods</th>
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</table>
| Seek to understand and describe the system in its entirety, including components and connections |  • How and why different components interact  
  • The initiative is “dynamic” and ongoing activity, not one-off |  • Systems Mapping  
  • Social network analysis  
  • Interviews |
| Focus on the nature of relationships and interdependencies within the system |  • Evaluation should capture and describe the relationships and interdependencies between various parts of the system  
  • It’s important to understand relationships’ nature, strength, and longevity |  • Systems Mapping  
  • Social Network Analyses  
  • Surveys  
  • Interviews  
  • Digital Story-telling  
  • Web Analytics |
| Support the capacity of the system to learn by strengthening feedback loops and improving access to information |  • Learn through the collection, analysis and co-interpretation of data  
  • Learning conversations with stakeholders, and insights into how and where the system is responding to the initiative’s activities |  • Rapid feedback debriefs  
  • Memos/Learning Memos  
  • Critical Incident Reviews  
  • After Action Reviews |
Reflections

Complexity is a source of innovation and adaptability supported by diversity and distributed problem solving

We need to be more skilled at expecting, seeing, and responding to surprise …

Brenda Zimmerman, June 2014
In summary...

Create...a new or refreshed meaningful vision for evaluation
• Link to strategy
• Ongoing
• Learning oriented

Describe...three trends in evaluation that have relevance and importance for the health sector
• Strategic learning and evaluation systems/framework
• Shared metrics
• Evaluating with a complexity lens

Inspire...you to support more evaluation work
• Now what?
Final Reflections – Which of the 3 trends intrigues you the most?

✓ Strategic Learning and Evaluation Systems
✓ Shared Metrics
✓ Evaluating Complexity

Small group discussion:
• Jot down a few thoughts about which of these approaches resonated with you and why.
• What is one question you have about this particular trend/approach?
• Share your thoughts with others around the table.