Building Evaluation Capacity in Community-Based Organizations: Reflections of an Empowerment Evaluation Team

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ABSTRACT. This article presents the challenges and successes of a university-based empowerment evaluation team as they promoted community-based organizational (CBO) self-evaluation skills through a large community capacity building effort funded by a community foundation. Using a reflective inquiry approach, the team's approach to empowerment evaluation is discussed, and the how's, the why's, and the outcomes of the team's efforts are presented. Lessons learned emphasize the significance of training, role clarity, management of power relations, participant readiness, adequate resources, technology, coaching skill, and mutual support through a coaching network and interagency networks. Perhaps most significantly, clear and consistent communication

between grantee and grantmaker, mediated by evaluation coaches, promoted evaluations that address internal and external stakeholder needs. The ideology of empowerment guided this project, and participatory research did prevail, but grantee self-direction was harder to enable. Likewise, consumer participation was woefully limited. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com>* © *2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS. Empowerment evaluation, organizational self-assessment, participatory evaluation, community-based organizations

Many recent grantmaking efforts by foundations and government funding sources have focused on building community capacity (Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001). A key aspect of such capacity building increases the ability of community-based organizations (CBOs), through their board members, agency administrators, program staff, and program participants, to evaluate their results. This article presents challenges and successes of our journey as a university-based team of evaluators working to "give evaluation away" to CBOs (to borrow terms from Stevenson, Mitchell, & Florin, 1996). Our work involves cumulative experience with over three hundred CBOs and twenty funding sources. Here, we present our reflections and lessons learned recently through a particular evaluation project sponsored by a multi-county community foundation in a large southern metropolitan area.

In this project, the foundation funded CBO grantees (up to three years of renewable funding) based on competitive proposals in four strategic areas: strengthening families with pre-school children, promoting ethnic and racial harmony, enhancing potential among economically challenged populations, and developing youth. Twenty-three CBOs, listed in Table 1, received funding. The foundation encouraged innovative, preventive, and collaborative approaches to serving hard to reach and under served populations. Grant amounts to individual CBOs ranged from $16,000 to $100,000 per year. The grants were staggered, so the project lasted four and one-half years, and thirty organizations received evaluation coaching. Grantees included small, grass roots organizations with part time staff as well as large, well-established United Way funded organizations.

TABLE 1. Type Organizations in the Initiative

Strengthening families with pre-school children

- 4 neighborhood-based child care centers
- 1 program for teen unmarried mothers
- 1 early childhood therapeutic preschool
- 1 Hispanic early literacy program
- 1 bi-lingual preschool
- 1 alliance of part-day preschools

Promoting ethnic and racial harmony

- 1 program to promote minority youth participation in the arts
- 3 immigrant support programs
- 1 race relations training program
- 1 program to promote minority participation in wilderness

Enhancing potential among economically challenged populations,

- 1 program to training homeless people for food industry careers
- 1 cars for work program
- 4 preparation for job skills training programs
- 1 program to support grandparents raising their grandchildren

Developing youth

- 1 after-school programs
- 1 youth leadership program
- 1 school-based mental health service

EVALUATION APPROACH

The foundation selected our team because our approach is grounded in principles of empowerment evaluation and building learning organizations (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2004; Garvin, 1993; Linney, & Wandersman, 1991; Whitmore, 1990, Zimmerman, 1995). The foundation, which had experience with traditional external evaluators, decided that the strategic nature of this new initiative would benefit from building organizational capacity for evaluation. Our approach aims to leave the grantees and their programs in a position to sustain effective practice and share lessons learned with other community entities that may want to replicate the programs or lessons learned about managing change. To promote this aim, the coaches consulted individually with grantee organizations while facilitating periodic group sessions involving representatives of multiple grantees. In addition, the grantmaker had a secondary goal of developing its own capacity to support self-evaluation efforts of their grantees. The grantmaker thus sent staff to most individual and all group sessions.

Collective *empowerment* through organizations and communities involves active, inclusive participation in group decision-making, social responsibility, mutual support among participants, and group capacity building (Andrews, Guadalupe, & Bolden, 2002; Israel, Checkoway, Schulz, & Zimmerman, 1994). Empowered groups and communities plan, enact, and evaluate interventions that affect their collective groups.

Empowerment evaluation uses evaluation techniques and findings to "foster improvement and self-determination" (Fetterman, 2001, p.89). Its unambiguous value orientation is reflected in the core principles that guide empowerment evaluation practice (Fetterman, 1994; 1996):

- Emphasis on collaboration and participation;
- Support for continuous improvement (formative);
- Tools for managing and communicating;
- External and internal accountability;
- Facilitative evaluator's role (known as coaching);
- Evaluators also advocate for the project;
- Collaboration between evaluators and project participants to inform decision making; and
- Quantitative and qualitative methods.

The principles derive from the long established practice of participatory action research (PAR) (Suarez-Balcazar & Harper, 2003; Wadsworth, 1997; Whyte, 1991), which integrates research into social change processes in ways that help people learn from their own experiences and share them with others. Key issues in effective PAR center about who participates, to what extent, and in what ways. In human services, empowerment evaluation essentially places the people who provide and receive services as the participants who make critical decisions about the standards of success, program/organizational practices, lessons learned, and what to share with others.

The empowerment evaluation process intends to be essentially democratic, collaborative, and developmental (i.e., goals fit with the developmental stage of the program). Self-determination, a core value inherent in the process, becomes manifest as participants focus on their mission, take stock of what they are doing, and plan for the future (Fetterman, 2001). As practiced by our team, the facets or developmental stages of empowerment evaluation involve the evaluation coaches training participants in evaluation, facilitating organizational self-evaluation, advocating on behalf of programs, promoting illumination by

the participants, and finally, liberation-the shifting of perspectives regarding self, resources, opportunities, and one's environment. In sum, the emphasis of empowerment evaluation is organizational and personal capacity-building and self-determination.

Organizations that embrace empowerment evaluation acknowledge that the participants in the organization are the primary stakeholders in wanting to know the results of their efforts. Most often, organizations receive external financial support, and thus are coached to also report performance data and outcomes to external stakeholders. The primary focus, though, is on promoting *use* of evaluative processes and results throughout the organization. Thus our team promotes reflective inquiry, a process that encourages participants to examine findings as they emerge, cooperatively reflect on the meaning of the findings, and take action to adapt organizational process based on their interpretations (Schon, 1995).

THE EVOLVING EVALUATION PROCESS

Empowerment evaluation, as practiced by our team, follows a basic stepwise problem solving process, i.e. organizing for action, building capacity for action, taking action, refining action, and institutionalizing action (Dugan, 1996; see also Fawcett, et al., 1996; Fetterman, 1996; Linney & Wandersman, 1991; Schones, et al., 2000). As in most community change efforts, the steps are not always linear and tend to co-occur or be re-visited, depending on emerging influences. We provide training in the development of measurable outcomes, logic models (that show how inputs, outputs, and activities lead to results), measurement instruments, systems for recording and analyzing evaluation data, processes that use data for program improvement, and skills in report writing. As an evaluation team, we facilitate capacity building through a collaborative learning process that includes grantmakers (i.e., foundation board and program officers), grantees (i.e., program staff, board members, program participants), and ourselves as learners. The learning and doing process builds individual, organizational, and community capacity to evaluate a specific grant-funded program as well as subsequent ones. More importantly, the process builds the agency or partnership's capacity to use evaluation results for continuous program improvement.

Preparing/Organizing. Perhaps the most critical aspect of successful empowerment evaluation approach occurs in the organizing stage. In

this project, our coaching team included an overall project director, four team facilitators (one for each strategic area), and a "floating" consultant for information systems design. Team members have backgrounds in social work, psychology, public health, and education, with experiences in managing nonprofit organizations, community development, and evaluating community programs, using traditional and participatory evaluation approaches. The team met monthly to coordinate the overall evaluation approach.

Engaging the Grantees. Who is at the table for orientation and training will critically influence the degree to which the organizational capacity for evaluation is built. At the grantee level, the participants in the coaching involved teams comprised by the grantee, and variously included board members, administrators, managers, and direct services providers. The goal of including program participants (i.e., clients) was encouraged but not realized by any grantees, primarily because they were engaged in start-up programs and had not developed strong and trusting relationships with participants and no resources were allotted to compensate participants for the contributions to evaluation planning. Participants were key informants in assessments of the programs, if not in design.

In addition to training the grantee teams, the coaches trained the grantmakers (program officers and board members) to encourage capacity building for evaluation within the funded programs (grantees) and within the grantmaking organization. Program officers participated in evaluation orientations sessions with the grantees.

The coaching began with an extended orientation to evaluation (half day to full day) for each interagency group by strategic area. Our initial coaching efforts focused on demystifying the evaluation process, teaching evaluation basics, and developing an overall plan to support program development, program implementation, and program evaluation, with the importance of both process and outcome data emphasized. We clearly explained the evaluation process and encouraged those involved to view evaluation as a process that can support the development of quality programs. Printed workbooks for doing evaluation were distributed and introduced in detail. The workbooks evolved as the process evolved, and were grounded in interaction with the grantees. After orientation, each grantee received individual site visits from evaluation coaches and foundation staff about every 4-6 weeks for three years, depending on need.

The four initiative-focused interagency teams (evaluation coaches, foundation staff, and grantee teams within each of the four strategic ini-

tiatives) met quarterly primarily to share lessons learned. The meetings tended to be intense work, with grantee teams and coaches probing deeply into the purposes of the grant project, the meaning of the intended outcomes, and the feasibility of measuring results through inexpensive and nonintrusive qualitative and quantitative methods. Between meetings, the grantees completed evaluation worksheets, implemented evaluation activities, and corresponded with evaluation coaches by telephone, fax, and email. Much of the work centered on decision-making prompted by such tools as planning forms, logic models, measurement plan grids, and design of tools for information gathering and reporting of process and outcome data. In addition, the evaluation consultants met quarterly with foundation staff to review the process.

Evaluations of our training sessions suggested that we were successful in meeting our training and technical assistance goals. Participants reported increased knowledge in evaluation skills and were able to link program planning with evaluation planning. The grantmaker and the grantees reported appreciating evaluation, the importance of a participatory approach to evaluation, and the usefulness of such an approach to reaching outcomes that can support program development and program improvement.

Clarifying Roles and Expectations. As designed, the participants in this evaluation process had multiples roles. Role ambiguity can lead to conflict, which early clarification can forestall. The grantees had roles that involved commitment to their target populations, internal accountability within their organizations, external accountability to the grantmaker, and mutual support for partner organizations in the loose interagency network based in each of the four initiatives. The coaches explained that they were not traditional evaluators but did have accountability to the grantmaker and were coaches to help build grantee organizational capacity. The grantmaker was an investment partner in the projects proposed by the grantees and had accountability as stewards of the resources for the specific projects while also promoting long-term organizational capacity of the grantees. This approach was new to all parties and involved clarification in practice as the work evolved.

Participant Readiness. Grantee readiness to learn evaluation skills and conduct their own evaluations is essential to empowerment evaluation. With regard to general community change, Edwards and her colleagues (2000) found that early assessment of readiness for change will yield information about how to intervene to promote the change. In a study of twenty-one communities, Feinberg, Greenberg, and Osgood (2004) found that participants' readiness for change at the beginning

and perceptions of effectiveness later in the process were mediated by internal functioning of the organization. This suggests that assessing readiness and promoting productive collaborative functioning enhances success.

In our case, grantees ranged from complete naiveté about evaluation to solid training, although only three of thirty organizations had personnel who were experienced in evaluation and prepared to develop organizational systems to produce evaluative information. Those who were naïve included persons who were eager to learn and those who were quite resistant, based typically on the assumption that attention to evaluation would detract from client caregiving. Assessing grantee readiness by focusing on areas such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes allowed coaches to tailor the coaching to the needs of the particular organization.

Likewise, grantmakers must be ready for change. Empowerment evaluation has a decided bias towards "empowerment" and self-determination. To support such an approach requires a degree of flexibility that may conflict with existing grantmaking approaches, responsibilities, and timeframes. Grantmakers may find it difficult to strike a balance between allowing grantee organizational capacity building at a reasonable pace and getting to focused program results at a more rapid pace. Empowerment evaluation should be the approach of choice only when it fits the needs of the situation and all parties are ready for it. Alternative approaches to evaluation may be more appropriate.

Power Issues. Balancing the power between the grantee, the grantmaker, and the evaluator requires attention during the organizing stage and throughout the consultative process. In the case of this project, the grantmaker chose the evaluation coaching team and the grantees and controlled the financial resources for the evaluation and program process. Thus an unequal distribution of power occurred among the grantmaker, grantee, and evaluation coaches. Grantees were hesitant to trust the empowerment process and felt compelled to please the grantmaker. Instead of focusing on what they wanted on behalf of their organizations, they had a tendency to focus on speculating about what the grantmaker might want, for fear of getting it wrong and losing funding. The grantmaker tried to encourage autonomy of the grantee and initially was flexible about timeframes, implementation schedule, and the definition of program success. But the grantmaker has multiple accountabilities: to the grantees, to the broader community, and to its board. The grantmaker's desire to allow time for the grantee to develop sustained evaluation capacity was at odds with the need to see quick evidence that programs are

achieving positive outcomes. For example, a group of programs funded to reach chronically unemployed people, i.e., those who had dropped out of work, family, school, community, had to devote extraordinary staff time to finding and enrolling program participants. When participation rates were low and dropout rates high, funders and program staff saw success differently.

While measurable outcomes are certainly a product of empowerment evaluation, considerable grantee time and attention are required to learn evaluation, develop a feasibly measurable evaluation plan, and implement it. By concentrating on early outcomes, funders devalue the process evaluation and give the grantees a strong message that "success" is defined only by easily quantifiable data rather than through a process that includes developing and implementing a strong, well-organized program.

At the same time, the grantees needed to understand that grantmakers are stewards of scarce resources and need assurance that they have invested them wisely, particularly given that for every grant awarded, many would-be, deserving grantees are turned away. The coaches thus spend time working independently with grantmaker and grantee, helping them to understand one another's organizational cultures and needs.

Changing Our Approach. The use of an empowerment evaluation process fit well with the goals of the foundation, but the iterative process of getting to outcomes across multiple levels and multiple programs presented a challenge to the foundation's self imposed timeframes, i.e., they aimed to see results in three years. We discussed these issues in our regular meetings with foundation staff. Our coaching staff was particularly concerned that trust issues were rampant because we were violating certain core principles of empowerment evaluation, most notably: organizational self-direction and independent decision making. Given the nature of the grantmaker-grantee relationships and their independent as well as mutual interests, we facilitated frank discussions about relevance of empowerment evaluation and all parties agreed that this approach was essentially too much, too fast. We agreed that to re-focus our evaluation approach to participative evaluation, which involves the grantee in organizational evaluation capacity while attending to given external accountability expectations. We subsequently assumed more of an expert role and offered more specific opinions to both the grantees and the grantmaker in the areas of program development, evaluation procedures and measures, and quality improvements. For example, we reduced the amount of time grantees devoted to exploring alternative measures and chose measures for them, with grantee and grantmakers' concurrence.

According to Fetterman (1996), for empowerment evaluation to be effective and credible, participants must have the latitude to experiment, to take risks and responsibility for their actions, and to operate in an environment that is conducive to sharing both successes and failures. Empowerment evaluation also requires an atmosphere characterized by support, trust, honesty, and the ability to be self-critical. In this experience, the grantmaker supported the empowering process in theory, but was not able to facilitate the necessary environment to support fully the empowerment evaluation process in practice.

Evaluation Resources. In addition to readiness, programs must have the needed resources (e.g., human, physical, and fiscal) to conduct evaluation. To create learning conditions for grantees, adequate funding for grantee staff and evaluation coaches is needed to address issues of time, energy, and inherent conflicts of getting the program implemented and the evaluation conducted simultaneously by the same staff. In this project, grantees learned only after grant awards that they were to participate in an empowerment evaluation process. Even later, they understood the time and resources necessary to engage in such an evaluation effort. Not surprisingly, during the first year of work with grantees, in which the learning curve is very steep, grantees offered numerous complaints. They perceived, perhaps correctly, that time spent on evaluation was time away from programming and client contact.

Coaches' skills are a critical resource. The process of giving evaluation away requires coaches to advise regarding program planning, program implementation, and evaluation design and data analysis. Also, substantive knowledge or access to specialists in the program areas is essential to the process (e.g., as grantee ponder how to improve quality or process for early child care programs, expert advice may be required). Evaluation coaches also need group facilitation, team building, and organizational and community development skills. In many instances, the evaluation coach provides significant support in addressing issues of staff turnover, interpersonal conflict, and poor agency performance. The skills and resources of the evaluation coach are needed to address multiple organizational issues in order to facilitate the evaluation process.

Technological resources and capacity directly influence the evaluation process. For example, in this project many smaller organizations struggled with inadequate donated computers; the larger groups with more resources struggled to use new software that was purchased to meet wide ranging needs of the entire organization but did not have fit well with the program's evaluation needs. Grassroots organizations often have unreliable email and fax support. Such issues affect data col-

lection, management, and communication with coaches–all essential components of the evaluation process.

Coaches need to be clear about resource needs to conduct an empowerment evaluation, including anticipated time, skills, technology, materials, funds, and other resources needed from the grantees, grantmakers, and coaches. Grantmakers can help by making resources for evaluation available to grantees and identifying these resources as distinct from the program funding they award.

Grantees are more likely to dig deeply into their own resources if they have chosen for themselves to do empowerment evaluation, believe their investment will build organizational capacity, and select the coaches who will facilitate the process.

INFUSING EVALUATION INTO ROUTINE BUSINESS

As the evaluation process evolves, the coaches disengage and the grantee staff and volunteers begin to "own" the evaluation. Their core work involves information processing: gathering, recording, compiling, reporting, interpreting, reflecting, making decisions, and changing programs. The interactions between coach and grantees are more limited yet more diverse. The coach's role may be multifaceted, including that of "expert", teacher, mediator, mentor, and source of emotional support. For example, the staff may seek expert guidance regarding how to tabulate responses on a survey form, ask for mediation about how to satisfy the grantmaker when data has been lost, or need a listening ear when the board has misinterpreted data. Several issues arose in this initiative as grantees began to build evaluation into their routines, including matters of measurement and information systems, consumer participation, and the inquiry and action process as evaluative data was used.

The Search for Measures and Tools and Matters of the Heart. CBO program evaluation is challenged by the paucity of valid, reliable, and free measures that are easy to administer, score, and interpret and relevant to low-income minority populations and the specific interventions of the program. The coaches' role included searching for standardized instruments and working with grantees to develop instruments as necessary. All grantees used quantitative and qualitative measures (such as journals and stories) and were adamant that the evaluations reflect the warmth and intensity of the human relationships in their programs. People who work in nonprofit organizations have often committed themselves to a way of life, not just a job, and feel a personal investment that

outweighs the financial investment made by the foundation. They trust their own and their colleagues' informal perceptions of what works and how to make improvements and are frustrated by requests for external accountability that imply a mistrust of their ways of knowing. For example, a Latino staff member working in a program to improve relations between Latino immigrants and the police reported that he knew that the program had made a difference because community members (police and citizens) had informally told him. He viewed a survey, suggested by the grantmaker, to "capture" this change as redundant and potentially interfering with the relationships he had built.

The Challenge of Information Systems. A vignette best illustrates this issue. The evaluation coach arrived at the small church that houses multiple social programs for the neighborhood and was delighted to see large boxes with the brand name of a state-of-the-art computer system. The staff member observed, "Don't get too excited. Someone else got new computers and gave us their old 286's." Most of the grantees in this project did minimal computer-based record keeping, except for financial records. The paper information systems were typically also minimal, used primarily for case management. Rarely was data compiled across cases, except for basic demographic information. A substantial share of coaching effort was devoted to helping grantees develop paper and, when feasible, computer-assisted information systems. This included data collection, processing procedures, quality assurance about data, compilation, interpretation, and reporting.

Consumer Participation. The voice of the consumer was an integral part of each grantee's evaluation. Typically this involved obtaining consumer input on instrument design or selection and, always, input regarding their perceptions of the program. Consumer leadership in program governance and management seems to be a rare feature of the organizational culture of the grantees. This issue was raised with all grantees, who generally were interested in finding ways to involve consumers more substantially.

Infusing Evaluation USE Throughout the Organization. Using systematic evaluative information to review the program and decide changes for improvement was a new experience for most grantees. They were coached about how to interpret and reflect on data to discover lessons learned. When they reached this point, the value of evaluation became more apparent. The grantees had multiple stakeholders, each of whom tended to appreciate different kinds of information: statistics, stories, pictures, maps, graphs, and tables. Grantees tended to want to share their challenges and celebrations in extensive detail when reporting in writing and orally to the foundation. The foundation board

preferred crisp information that highlighted the main points. The evaluation coaches worked hard to bridge the different voices and achieve media that benefited both. In general, the grantees produced 10-20 page semi-annual reports with a two-page synopsis for the foundation board.

Facilitating an Informed Collaborative Process. Grantees participated enthusiastically in quarterly collaborative meetings with other grantees, where they shared lessons learned about evaluation. This process of encouraged the reflective inquiry process and supported several empowering principles:

- *Peer support and consultation*. Grantees shared their program and evaluation experiences, affirmed each other's struggles, and offered ideas to improve both.
- *Resource sharing and generation of new resources*. For example, grantees in one initiative collaborated to solve the common obstacle of childcare for participants in grantee programs.
- *Problem solving*. For example, grantees across initiatives collaborated to find answers to the common problem of recruiting clients.
- *Celebration*. Grantees celebrated each other's program successes and program members' recognition in the community. They felt the loss of individual members when they retired or changed jobs.
- *Advocacy*. As collaboratives, the groups often felt empowered to advocate for their programs even with the sponsoring grantmaker. For example, after three years, the grantmaker decided to discontinue the initiative that supported employment readiness skills. The grantmaker's rationale was that this initiative was inconsistent with its focus on primary prevention. As a group, the grantees met with the foundation board essentially to help the board better understand the nature of the programs and people they were serving. Although unsuccessful in getting the program continued, they were successful in assuring the grantmaker that investments in similar programs through other foundation strategic programs were worthwhile.

Through the interagency collaboratives, the grantees and grantmaker's staff practiced the tenet that knowing evaluative information is not enough; sharing it promotes broader change.

OUTCOMES OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

This project yielded outcomes for the grantees, grantmaker, and evaluation coaches. The emphasis here is not on programmatic outcomes

for the twenty-three programs, but on outcomes related to the evaluation process.

Grantee Outcomes. Each initiative, with its respective focus on young families, interethnic harmony, economic potential, and youth, produced summative three-year reports for each grantee and the overall initiative. Several grantees used a "Start at the End" process that involved drafting templates for their final reports early in the program implementation process (Andrews, 2004). The participants had a clear idea of what data they would need to complete the report and thus were motivated to collect data thoroughly.

The global results included a range of findings, such as clear indicators of positive client change through many programs, difficulties in outreach, transportation, and attrition with the most challenged populations, delays in community-building projects (as compared with direct services), and barriers to consumer leadership. The grantees had two-page cumulative reports with succinct but thorough program description and outcome indicators. Many used these for marketing and fundraising.

The grantees were surveyed to assess the evaluation process. Ninety percent reported being able to define their goals, objectives, inputs, outputs, and outcomes as a result of the evaluation process. Over 75% responding affirmatively to a series of questions asking if they found the process helpful, would use the evaluation skills for other programs, and had used the evaluation to improve programs. Eighty percent said the evaluation process was worth the effort, even though 55% percent indicated the process was too time-consuming. Most grantees commented that they would have liked more detailed feedback from the grantmaker during the evaluation process.

Unfortunately, resource constraints did not allow monitoring organizational capacity for evaluation over time, although the coaches have anecdotal information. Several grantee staff members called evaluation coaches after the end of the project to ask advice as they were using their new skills to design evaluation plans for new programs in their CBOs. They tended to be in CBOs that had fully participated in the evaluation process, i.e., staff teams and board members designed and used the evaluation. They also tended to come from CBOs that were relatively larger, older, and better endowed with information technology. Staff at other agencies moved on to jobs elsewhere, taking their skills with them. The coaches tried to assure that the evaluation was infused into the organization, but several organizations failed to fully embrace this approach. In these organizations, attendance by staff teams or board members at

meetings about evaluation would be poor. The effect of the intervention thus varied among organizations.

Grantmaker Outcomes. As a result of this evaluation process, the foundation implemented a number of procedural changes in its grantmaking process for future initiatives. The changes applied to evaluation, strategic planning, and the role of the foundation in grantee evaluation.

The foundation staff and board gave positive feedback regarding the quarterly reports by grantees and annual reports by coaches and thus established plans to continue using participatory evaluation and the report format for future grants awarded. They hired an in-house evaluation coordinator and designated program officers to oversee grantee evaluations.

The process revealed that the foundation often gave unclear messages regarding its expectations of grantees. An example is that the foundation never clarified what it expected as indicators of the impact of the initiative to address chronic unemployment. Yet foundation board members expressed frustration when grantees reported numbers of people retained in training, without indicating number employed for over six months. The grantees were working on getting excluded people reconnected, whereas the foundation seemed to want more rapid results. So the foundation staff decided to devote more time to helping the board develop and articulate strategic objectives for future initiatives.

The foundation decided to simplify the evaluation process, which grantees had found time-consuming and resource draining. They decided to support investment in information management and organizational infrastructure to ease evaluation and provide report templates using the "start at the end" approach.

The foundation staff agreed to continue facilitating interagency network meetings for reflective inquiry and sharing among grantees.

These changes indicate that the capacity of the foundation to use evaluation and promote use of evaluation among its grantees was enhanced.

Coaches' Outcomes. As an evaluation team, we learned many valuable lessons. Ideologically, we wanted empowerment to emerge, but realistically, we adapted to the needs of grantees and grantmaker in this particular project. As grantees started producing evaluative information and practicing quality improvements, we found our work as coaches became more individualized and less collaborative; we met less often.

We also struggled with a number of issues related to discrepancies in empowerment principles and directions taken by many of the groups with whom we consult. A basic and as yet unanswered question for us

as a team is this, "If a community group chooses to invest its resources into an effort that previous knowledge (e.g. research studies or practice wisdom) suggests is ineffective, even after the coach advises otherwise, what is the next role of the coach?" Should we insist? Walk the walk with them as they "reinvent the wheel?" Should we bow out?

For example, we could not convince a school-linked group to use home visiting to support the needs of struggling parents even when the no-show rate for parents at the school was high. Similarly, a school-based mental health program clung to traditional hour-long office-based counseling sessions for elementary students, even though research suggests teacher-coaching or other interventions are more effective. A welfare-to-work program that offered all-day, fourteen-week life skills training sessions found that participants tended to drop out after about six weeks. When asked why the program was so intense and fourteen weeks long, no one could explain why (i.e. there was no "program theory of change"), and when suggestions were made to consider alternative formats, such as increments of four weeks with rewards, the ideas were discussed repeatedly but the staff clung to the fourteen week model, with its high drop out rates. So our role in promoting quality improvements was at times frustrating, but we deferred to the grantees, and in some cases they had to take the consequences, which was loss of funding due to poor outcomes from the foundation perspective.

As a result of this project, in our routine evaluation practice we have increased our emphasis on the *use* of evaluation, the value of "starting at the end," the significance of involving agency managers and governing bodies in the process, and the facilitation of group reflective inquiry through teams within organizations and meetings across organizations. We also learned that although CBO grantees have access to many evaluation planning tools and are fairly sophisticated at writing grant proposals with measurable objectives, they are much less experienced at committing staff time and information system resources to conducting evaluations or decision-making effort to using evaluation. In other words, evaluation in small nonprofits tends to be heavy on planning for evaluation and light on follow through. Evaluators thus need to be prepared to focus on issues of organizational governance and management in order for evaluation to be effectively used. Thus evaluators working with philanthropic organizations and community-based organizations should be familiar with their organizational cultures and the programs that are to be evaluated in order to provide the most pertinent and useful coaching. We encourage grantmakers are encouraged to retain evaluation consultants who can demonstrate such familiarity.

CONCLUSIONS: GIVING EVALUATION AWAY

When the process works well, organizational capacity is built. We call this "giving evaluation away." The need for coaching subsides as staff and board develop the capacity to evaluate their own work. Self-sufficiency, self-determination, and empowerment occur among those individual staff members and organizations that were ready for evaluation and willing to fully participate in the process with the coaches. Our experiences affirm those of Schones and colleagues (2000), who were retained by a grantmaker to coach community initiatives through empowerment evaluation. Resistance initially occurred because the grantees did not choose the empowerment evaluation process or the evaluation team. The grantees perceived unreasonable demands on time and energy as they concurrently developed programs while planning to evaluate them. And they focused on short-term outcome indicators (believing that immediate outcomes would increase chances for future funding) rather than focusing on long-term organizational capacity building. Our intervention aimed to help the grantees focus more on the latter.

In this project, we enacted a continuous learning model while teaching it. We found that even when community practitioners know about evaluation (i.e., completed training), they rarely do evaluation. The CBO organizational culture has to support evaluation, and the coaching process helps staff, board, and others affiliated with grantees to actually put their knowledge into practice in ways that are feasible and useful. We found that training, role clarity, management of power relations, participant readiness, adequate resources, technology, and coaching skill made a significant difference in adoption of evaluation practices. Mutual support through a coaching network and interagency networks also helped refine the process. Perhaps most significantly, clear and consistent communication between grantee and grantmaker, mediated by evaluation coaches, promoted evaluations that address internal and external stakeholder needs. The ideology of empowerment guided this project, and participatory research did prevail, but grantee self-direction was harder to enable. Likewise, consumer participation was woefully limited. Special studies are needed to determine effective ways to promote more active consumer leadership with regard to organizational accountability in the traditional CBO cultures.

As coaches, we were careful to model the consistent, systematic reflective inquiry process. During on-site coaching, we valued the process of learning while doing, i.e. "reflection-in-action" (Schon, 1995). Our

experiences with this sponsored project have strengthened our understanding of the conceptual frameworks that can support our practice of empowerment evaluation and other participative research efforts. We believe our modeling of this reflective process has also supported the ongoing capacity-building efforts of grantees and the grantmaker. Since this project, we have begun to add principles of appreciative inquiry, which focus on assets, as a means to engage participants more enthusiastically into the process (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003).

"Show me your results," the theme of the decade, is more difficult than it sounds in the nonprofit world. In this project, a community foundation encouraged grantees to build their organizational capacity for evaluation and provided consultants to teach them how. The aim was to benefit the grantees by helping them become more sustainable in a competitive funding market and to benefit the foundation by increasing their confidence that they have acted as responsible stewards. The effort involved transforming organizational cultures from those that essentially emphasize reactive program management based on informal and personal communication into proactive system where planning and evaluating using more formal methods of communication are routine. The balance of internal and external accountability created tension that had to be managed. The fruits of the labor begin to blossom when the grantee began to use evaluative information and shared lessons learned with their foundation investment partners.

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