Rethinking Evaluation
Developing a Strategy for the Sector, By the Sector
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#RethinkEval

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Overview

✓ How can the Sector Driven Evaluation Strategy help you?
✓ What have we heard from you?
✓ How are we responding with practical ideas?
✓ How can you help shape the strategy?
Sector Driven Evaluation Strategy

• Evaluation is a big systems issue
  • lots of actors, lots of information flow, lots of influencing factors

• Can be a huge asset when we get it right

• Changing the conversation: focus on why not just technical how to

• Some changes are beyond org-level — we need to work together
What we are NOT doing

• We are NOT putting together a toolkit (although we will produce some resources)

• We are NOT offering training in how to do evaluation

• We are NOT developing a new methodology or endorsing an existing methodology

• We are NOT designing this strategy alone
Some of what we’ve heard on evaluation...

Top-down
Non-negotiable
Misunderstood
Reports written, but not read
When do we stop proving the obvious?
Last-minute
Lack of capacity
Uncoordinated

Headache
Dismissed
Accountability
Inconsistency
Spun to sound effective
Focused on numbers
Inaccurate
Underfunded

Untapped potential
In other words, the system for evaluation is....
The Functions of Evaluation

Evaluation is:

• a tool for holding nonprofits accountable
• a tool for project management and decision-making
• a tool for developing collective action in response to complex issues
• a tool for learning and engagement with community members
• a type of intervention: a way of mobilizing people to take action
Framing the Issues: What Leads to a Useful Evaluation?

- A clear, shared purpose
- Specific people committed to meaningful use of the evaluation
- A plan for ongoing communication that ensures buy-in and transparency
- A match between expectations, skills / capacity, and funding
- A process to ensure that there is a safe space for critical reflection and learning
- Follow-through
Community engagement and guiding principles

“Communities drive the (evaluation) agenda. Self-determination is exemplified in everything that we do. Homeless people need to be involved in homeless evaluation. Same in indigenous communities. Even the creation of the process has to be from the community. (Before this interview), we would have had the community help design the questions.”
The importance of negotiation

“In our project, we had three national partners. Within each community there were different sectors involved: business, people living in poverty, etc. There were a lot of meetings and it took a lot of time, a lot of angst. We had to challenge ourselves a lot. We need to create resources that give enough guidance to engage in this kind of process.”
Safe space for reflection

“We try to be very honest with funders, but sometimes it feels like you are not sure how honest to be. We are a very new organization. There is often a big learning curve. It is hard to tell a funder ‘holy crap, we are doing way too much!’ There were these really big things we learned, that we deviated from a plan, maybe we ‘failed.’ Always that fear factor that you will never get funded again because you suck at everything! We know this is widespread and we are in great company. We are not the only ones!”
Useful Evaluation: What We Learned from these Stories

- leadership that is strongly supportive
- involvement of an intermediary with little or no connection to accountability
- evaluation that lasts long enough to evolve and grow
- true shared ownership
- trust and strong relationships built through time
- a willingness to name and discuss differences
Why do we do evaluation?

- Learn about what works, under what conditions, and why
- Build a stronger, more responsive nonprofit sector
- Better address the social issues that matter in Ontario
How have government and funders tried to improve evaluation in the sector?

- Develop standardized measures
- Train nonprofits in evaluation techniques
- Create outcomes-based granting and reporting systems

More evaluation work taking place

More data generated

Learn about what works, under what conditions, and why

Build a stronger, more responsive nonprofit sector

Better address the social issues that matter in Ontario
What More Needs to Be Done?

- Building a vision for evaluation
- Building capacity to negotiate evaluation plans
- Building capacity to share what is learned
- Work on culture of evaluation
- Work on mechanics of measurement

- Strong Shared Understanding of Why Eval’ns Matters and How to make it Useful
- Eval’ns answers important questions
- Increased commitment to use of findings
- Evaluation is more fun, less onerous
- More eval’ns taking place

- Increased trust and ownership
- More action generated
- More dialogue generated
- More data generated

- Learn about what works, under what conditions, and why
- Build a stronger, more responsive nonprofit sector
- Better address the social issues that matter in Ontario

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Strategies & Products

- A vision for evaluation in the nonprofit sector that expresses our values and is something we could use to advocate on behalf of the sector
- A guide for negotiation and planning of evaluation: a conversation starter
- Developing a culture of evaluation that can be fun and less onerous
- A network approach to better share what is learned and promote collaboration
Vision & Principles

Some examples:

● Designed and altered collaboratively
● Regular communication between stakeholders
● Versatile and adaptable
● Openly sharing and talking about findings

and the sector did rise up and agreed that evaluation shall be useful
Negotiation guide

Examples of some important questions to ask:
• How did you think that last evaluation went?
• Who is going to use these results?
• Who is going to decide?
• How much work will this take?
Developing an evaluation culture

Some examples:
• Less paper
• Arts-based approaches
• Rapid response evaluation
• Safe space for failure
A network approach to promote sharing and collaboration

- Sharing findings
- Ways we can act as an evaluation intermediary or address systems level questions
- Ways we can work collaboratively to create common metrics
Next Steps

- Continue to refine ideas and collect feedback
- Identify and test strategies with nonprofits
- Meet with funders
- Future webinars
- Future events
Looking for a sleeping aid?

- Read our evaluation blog post
- Read our evaluation executive summary
- Read our evaluation literature review
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