Workshop Mini Guide for Evaluation Strategy Design

Simplifying the Process

The following mini-guide will help you to create your evaluation strategy. Your strategy includes a Theory of Action (the story of how your organization expects to make change,) an evaluation framework (a map of your key outcomes and how you will measure progress), and an evaluation plan. This plan contains the logistics of how you are going to implement your evaluation design.

In considering evaluation, a participatory approach is critical for a number of reasons. First, stakeholders (program staff, beneficiaries, clients, collaborators, etc.) have various *perspectives* and insights about the work your organization performs. The more these contributions can inform the strategy, the stronger it will be. Second, the *process* of discussing your strategy, and especially your evaluation framework, provides a structured opportunity for critical thinking about the work, which can strengthen strategies and practice. We know too that participation helps to encourage ownership and buy-in of social change work.

STEP ONE: Your Theory of Action - Mapping Your Outcomes

How can the Theory of Action mapping process help my organization tell the story about our impacts?

Mapping out your organization's **Theory of Action** is an essential part of identifying what a social change organization is hoping to achieve and how. **The Theory of Action** simply lays out, in a logical order, earlier outcomes, or things that need to happen, in order to reach the longer-term impacts in communities and more broadly.

Don't forget to discuss your ASSUMPTIONS:

As you are working through your Theory of Action, think about, and discuss, the assumptions underlying the outcomes you map. What is your rationale for believing that outcome A will lead to outcome B? Notice if there are questions raised that need further research or discussion.

Review your answers regarding expected outcomes in the pre-workshop questionnaire. These are the long-term and shorter-term outcomes identified by you and your organization. This work is best done on the wall with sticky notes and pens. We will walk you through how to begin mapping your change strategy.

STEP TWO: Your Evaluation Framework—Linking Outcomes to Indicators

How can a Theory of Action map be used to assist my organization with indicator development?

Once your organization's outcomes are established and mapped out, your change strategy should become a little clearer. Standing back, look at your map; from this point of view, it is much easier to identify (1) what needs to be measured and (2) which indicators need to be established. In other words, the Theory of Action mapping process helps to focus on what to measure and to tell the story of how your organization makes a difference in the communities you are working in

Refer to **Worksheet A - An Evaluation Framework: Outcomes, Guiding Questions, and Indicators.**

1. **WRITE DOWN YOUR OUTCOMES.** First fill in the **OUTCOMES** columns with the short-term outcomes you have just mapped out. Force yourselves to prioritize and narrow down what you intend to measure. It may help to put numbers from 1 to 3 on sticky notes.

2. **DEVELOP YOUR GUIDING QUESTIONS.** Next, think about your evaluation's **GUIDING QUESTIONS**. These questions are designed to help guide your selection of indicators. Answering these questions will help your organization focus on what changes are most important to measure to know if you are making progress. In developing your guiding questions, remember to ask yourself the following, "What do we need to know, to understand if we are making progress towards our goals and expected outcomes?"

For Example:

Expected outcome: Local government is responsive to community needs.
Guiding question: Are there stronger relationships between communities and local government?

3. **IDENTIFY YOUR INDICATORS.** Finally, you want to identify your **INDICATORS**.

Indicators are measurable evidence of meeting your social change goals. Indicators can be counted (quantitative) or it can be something more descriptive (qualitative). Remember to ask yourself the following, "What is the value in answering this guiding question? Can the information be easily collected? And, is the indicator well defined?"

What is the difference between quantitative and qualitative indicators? Is one better than the other?

Often, quantitative indicators are seen as measurements of hard facts and concrete numbers. They are often seen as objective and verifiable, and their truth as unshakable. They often deal with outputs and are easy to define. Qualitative indicators are often seen as subjective, unreliable, and difficult to verify. They are more difficult to define and have to do with the changes in people's behaviors, perceptions, relationships, and understanding — which are difficult to count. Qualitative indicators are very important for complex social change work, where there are many factors and actors that can, and need to, contribute to outcomes. The indicators you identify will help to answer the how and why of your organization's effectiveness, as well as impacts that cannot be measured solely through counting.

STEP THREE: Thinking About Your Data Collection Strategy

Figuring out How to Measure Impacts

When developing your data collection strategy, it is important to consider:

- ➯ What method is best suited to measure what you want to find out.
- ➯ Who are you targeting, who do you need to learn from, who has knowledge to share;
- ➯ Why you are targeting these people/groups (think of what specific information/knowledge you are seeking); and
- ➯ How you will use this information.

Refer to **Worksheet B - Thinking About Data Collection Strategies.**

Addressing the WHAT, WHO, WHY, and HOW will help make your evaluation more purposeful by framing what you need to know in terms of how this information will be used to advance your social change mission.

1. **WHAT.** Establish **WHAT METHOD** of data collection is best suited to measuring what you need to know.
2. **WHO.** Identity **WHO** has the information you need to know; who you have to reach-out to. Think critically about why your organization needs to include these people/groups and/or information sources in your evaluation strategy.
3. **WHY.** Focus on what you need to learn, what knowledge you hope to draw from these people/group. Answering this question is important and will give your evaluation approach rigor or credibility outside your organization.
4. **HOW.** It is important to think about how all this work you are doing and all the data you are collecting will be used. Will it be used to inform planning and program development, to make a case to your constituency or to a funder? Your findings are meant to be put into practice! Therefore, focus on how these questions will help shape your evaluation design (the questions you are asking and how you are collecting information) as well as how you use the findings.

STEP FOUR: Your Evaluation Plan

Making it Happen

Refer to **Worksheet C - An Evaluation Plan: Making it Happen!**

1. **WHO** will manage the evaluation and collect the data? Will it be handled internally or is external help needed?
2. **WHAT stakeholders need to be involved?**
3. **HOW** will you analyze the data and report out on the findings?
4. **WHEN do certain key steps need to happen?**

NOTE: The "HOW" question is particularly important. In fact, after thinking through this question, you may decide to reduce or shift the type and amount of data you are collecting.

Key Words and Important Definitions

Guiding Questions – Guiding questions are designed to help guide your organization's indicator selection. Answering these questions can help you focus on what changes are most important to collect information on and measure.

Indicators – Indicators are quantitative or qualitative factors or variables that provide a simple and reliable basis for assessing achievement, change or performance. Over time, indicators can help show changes in a specific condition. Outcomes can have multiple indicators.

Outcomes – Outcomes are changes in conditions, capacities, institutions, and relationships that effect, or have the potential to effect, people's lives. It is a state or condition – what you want to see happen – as a result of the work you do.

Outputs – Goods or services produced by a program, organization, or community.

Method – the means you will use to collect data. For example: survey, observations, and interviews. There are **Quantitative Methods,** which are research and evaluation techniques that are used to collected information dealing with numbers (or quantities). And there are **Qualitative Methods,** which produce data that are descriptive, contextual, and interpretive through such means as focus groups, interviews, and open-ended responses.