

No Better Time Conference

Notes from Learning Exchange Session: Making the Case for this Work: Improving the Way We Collect, Report, and Explain Outcomes

July 10, 2009 9:15-11:45 a.m.

Session Leaders: Tina Nabatchi (Syracuse University) and Kristen Cambell (National Conference on Citizenship)

- I. **Overview of Session:** Goals of session were to a) Identify where the field/participants are with regard to evaluation; b) Identify where the field/participants want to be with regard to evaluation; and c) Identify strategies to get the field/participants to that place (how are going to get there?)

- II. **Opportunities & Obstacles:** Participants used post-its to finish each of the following sentences, which they then stuck on flip-chart paper.
 - a. **Goals: “A specific outcome that we should measure for in our evaluations is...”**
 - Outputs: Civic education from deliberative processes; community/neighborhood process; youth development of civic identity; academic outcomes; community level outcomes (e.g., dropout rates, unemployment)
 - Institutional value for publicly engaged scholarship
 - Increase in civic capacity in a community (more able to use DD effectively going forward)
 - Effects of DD on programs/public policy
 - The value of online civic behaviors
 - Reciprocal duties among peers/people in a community
 - Variety of activities (Film screening, music, discussion)
 - Testimonials (#/quality)
 - Changes in perspectives of public officials or other institutional leaders
 - Rating online based on different criteria of logic and values
 - The effects of inter-group dialogue on college students, especially around attitudes/knowledge about race
 - Frequency, quantity and substance by category of citizen-based values, priorities, or policy recommendations in rules or bills.
 - Quantity of participation (#s)
 - Awareness of the complexity of an issue or topic
 - Acquisition of democratic skills or responsibilities
 - Changes in policy (organizational or governmental)
 - Policy impacts
 - Adding ‘democracy’ to the curricula of public administration, political science, and business administration

- Are new coalitions formed to address the issue(s) at hand
- Post-dialogue session behavior toward a previously feared or avoided “other”
- Culture change over 3-5 years
- Changes in civic attitudes
- Growth of experience and improvement in quality of group deliberation
- How relationships and networks are build among participants
- Impact on policy development
- The specific “will” of the community with respect to a given issue
- Impact on confidence in institutions (e.g., city, schools, etc.)
- How the process remains in use in a community after we leave. If the participant base grows ad time goes on.

b. Challenges: “But, the biggest thing standing in the way of that is...”

- Units of measurement
- Developing “a culture of evidence”
- Attributing success to our own interventions (tracking impact)
- Awareness of existing models of measurement
- Long-term investment and training
- Mapping activity
- Linking research needs/importance to actual deliberative efforts and ensuring an approximation of evaluation
- Organizations afraid the results will be bad or not what they wanted
- Risking over-defining “wealthy civic identity” cultural and contextual equivalence
- Money and time to observe behavior after a session and difficulty of separating out other potential causes of behavior change
- Creative expression improves capacity for communication
- Too many factors (# of people train and moderating); are issues being handled differently; are those in power changing how they do business?
- Ware a decentralized – we don’t work in the paced that we need to collect data from
- It’s hard to operationalize the changes we are looking for.
- Need for captured data and tools for analysis
- “Developmental evaluation” – finding ways for local organized to measure their progress as the work unfolds
- When to assess?
- Ideologies and anxieties of scholarship and scholarly products
- Community organizers in action
- Isolating creative contributions

- Indicators and metrics
- The institutionalized conception of democratic government now in vogue and in texts
- No "commonly accepted" measures of confidence
- Synthesizing language data
- Lack of time and staff; length of time needed to conduct a study
- Length of time needed to measure impact (years?)
- No metric associated (new problem; no precedent)
- Policy determinations are multi-determined.

SOME THEMES:

- Policy effects
- Behavior changes/attitudinal shifts (in relationships and individuals)
- Collaborative action (groups)
- System and Capacity
- "Culture of Evidence" for field
- How do we know results are product of the intervention
- Longitudinal studies take too long (especially when focus is on policy impacts)
- Standardization of measures, metrics, language (Terms and cultural sensitivities)
- Knowing the tools to use

III. Strategies and Solutions: Participants brainstormed and discussed ways to bridge the gap between where we are and where we want to be

- Need to identify benchmarks of progress (logic model and longitudinal evaluation methods would be helpful with this)
- We need rubrics, particularly for development change (Where people are, barriers to entry, etc)
- Need for improved qualitative methods
- Civic Impact Index/ Civic Health Index
- We need PR for this work
- We need to connect DD design to outcomes
- We need validated measures, software tools (both qualitative and quantitative)
- Identify and measure at various levels of change
- Need testable, understandable theory
- Identify tools, strategies, methods that work in various cultural settings
- Backward Mapping
- Coach participants through research designs and tools; explain the importance of research; empower the "subjects" by letting them express their experiences
- Co-creation of research experience

- Democratic evaluation
- There needs to be multiple “ownerships” of process and outcome.
- Have participants and stakeholders identify upfront possible outcomes
- Need tools for figuring out current/baseline conditions
- Needs assessments and asset mapping
- We need a theory of change (1, 3, 5 years, etc.) that have goals and intermediate outcomes – logic models
- Need to identify what different audiences want from evaluation
- What validated measures exist?
- We need to identify the specific changes we are looking for at the individual, group, organizational, community and other levels
- Develop a list of indicators and approaches to measurement

NEXT STEPS

1. Use NCDD as a resource for compiling validated measures
2. Send to Alan Tomkins (Nebraska) measures of institutional trust

SOME RESOURCES

- Martin Carcasson – paper on Public Agenda website discussion outcomes from DD
- NCDD (www.thataway.org)
- Steinar Kavale – qualitative research and collaborative approaches
- Bill Dougherty
- Michael Quinn Patton “The Evaluator’s Evaluator”
- Grantcraft.org – evaluation information
- Evaluation tools at racialequity.org
- “Flipping the Script: Doing Evaluation Differently” by Sally Leiderman
- Kansas Community Toolbox
- Nvivo and Atlas TI are useful qualitative data analysis programs
- CIRCLE