Building a Culture of Evaluation in the Nonprofit Sector

Historical Overview: How did we get here?

The Portland Business Journal published an article about program evaluation (September 30, 2011). An article was written in response “Evaluation is Key, Nonprofits Caught in a Conundrum” (October 21, 2011), pointing out the challenges in conducting evaluations such as funding it. This led to conversations about evaluation in the nonprofit sector. Several meetings occurred since fall 2011, including a mix of funders, nonprofit professionals and evaluators. Some of the topics discussed in these meetings included:

- Educating nonprofits and funders about evaluation
- Building capacity in this area
- Finding ways to have multiple stakeholders in the room to talk about evaluation

Some challenges: funder requirements, fear of competition (v. collaboration), lack of understanding evaluation.

Some opportunities: Communication, building bridges, establish a common language, making evaluation accessible.

In June 2012, an OPEN event opened explored this topic further: “Evaluation in the Nonprofit Sector”. In this session, we discussed challenges of conducting evaluation in the nonprofit sector. One of the top challenges discussed was the culture around evaluation within nonprofits.

Barriers we identified included: fear, a low priority for evaluation, a lack of knowledge about evaluation, misconceptions, and/or feeling of not needing external input.

Since then….Interest continued to grow in this area. So much so, the Linked In discussion group “Evaluation Workgroup NW” was started, and you’re invited to join.

Today….We continue to explore this topic, and to continue to build momentum. Ultimately, helping all of us to understand how we can build a culture of evaluation in the nonprofit sector.

Questions for exploration:

- What is the importance of having a culture of evaluation in the nonprofit sector?
- What’s right with the current culture of evaluation in the nonprofit sector?
- What are the gaps in our current culture of evaluation?
- What would an ideal culture of evaluation look like?
- What steps and resources are needed to build this culture?

The format for today will be to alternate between panel and table discussions. This will give everyone the opportunity to talk about their experiences, and help move the conversation forward.
Resource List: Building a Culture of Evaluation in the Nonprofit Sector
OPEN Conference March 15th

What does a culture of learning look like? [http://tinyurl.com/bdderwd](http://tinyurl.com/bdderwd)
A blog post on “defining a culture of learning” by evaluator Ann Emery

Creating a Culture of Evaluation: Change Management [http://tinyurl.com/asx7obb](http://tinyurl.com/asx7obb)
by Paul Mattessich from *Nonprofit Tools you Can Use* (a free e-newsletter)
- Involve staff
- Review, discuss, and act on findings
- Get top-down endorsement

Creating a Culture of Learning and Accountability [http://tinyurl.com/a7uhhbv](http://tinyurl.com/a7uhhbv) by Matthew Fort from *The Bridgespan Group*
“Culture matters far more than systems. If your organization doesn’t care about metrics, don’t bother to start building systems to measure performance.”
- Setting and communicating goals
- Creating incentives
- Developing effective processes

- What characterizes an evaluative culture?
- Building an Evaluative Culture
- What not to do
- Systems of Results Activities or a Culture of Results?
- A strategy for moving forward

The Evaluation Process: Evaluating Effectiveness [http://tinyurl.com/ampjn2m](http://tinyurl.com/ampjn2m)
by Patrick M. Rooney from *The Nonprofit Times*
- Evaluation Process
- Impact evaluation
- Building the capacity for evaluation
- Sharing the results

A Multidisciplinary Model of Evaluation Capacity Building [http://tinyurl.com/a7qemk](http://tinyurl.com/a7qemk) by Hallie Preskill and Shanelle Boyle, *Claremont Graduate University from American Journal of Evaluation*
“Drawing on the fields of evaluation, organizational learning and change, and adult and workplace learning, our hope is that this model provides some cohesion, organization, and perspective that are required to maximize the success of any ECB initiative.”