

Communicating the value of evaluation

ECHO Learning Institute

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Value of Evaluation

- Our most likely go-to place when thinking of the value of evaluation is decision making based on outcomes.
- A second go-to place might be process evaluation: how to make what we do more efficient and/or effective?
- Both of them are valid places to go to.

I'd add:

- Evaluation, embedded as a day-to-day process strengthens the shared understanding of mission
- Aligns actions with values
- Focuses resources – not just financial!

Communicating the need for evaluation

- Easier if you have compliance requirements that call for evaluation
- Or if the “not knowing” is visibly affecting operations and results
- Or when, as leaders and partners, you know you have blind spots and might have a sense of the areas of difficulty, but can't put your finger on it.
- The challenges:
 - you don't know what you don't know
 - It is unclear what you can get out of using resources

Reluctance to engage in evaluation

- Partners are stretched thin, so the task of evaluation (particularly the broad concept of it) becomes overwhelming and hard to visualize as possible.
- Association with compliance. This happens particularly to partners whose funding is closely tied to government or non-profit funding agencies with specific evaluation requirements that do not match the organization's mission

Then there's the dread

Evaluation apprehension: the fear of being assessed. But why?

- Fear of losing control of our own environment (Reitzig and Maciejovsky, 2014)
 - Top-down decision making
- Perception that evaluation results will be ignored (Paulus et al., 2018)
- Fear to being criticized – might adversely affect our standing in the organization
- Reactance – when changes come from an external party we'll resist it because we feel restricted (Taut and Brauns, 2003)

Reframing evaluation

Evaluation is a space for reflection, inquiry that is most successful when all voices are heard.

Recognition for what is working feeds desire to make the work even better

Refocusing evaluation

How to transform evaluation from a dreaded chore to something you feel like singing about

1-Link it to your mission

2-Involve everyone

- Helps you focus on what you care about
- Feeds sense of agency
 - Working with others to find ways to align actions with goals
 - Problem-solving
- Provides a break from the day-to-day frenzy and allows you to go back into the fray with renewed purpose

Evaluation is central to achieving your mission

- To keep moving towards your mission, you need to know what you are and aren't achieving, and how you can do better. That is the work of evaluation

Involve everyone

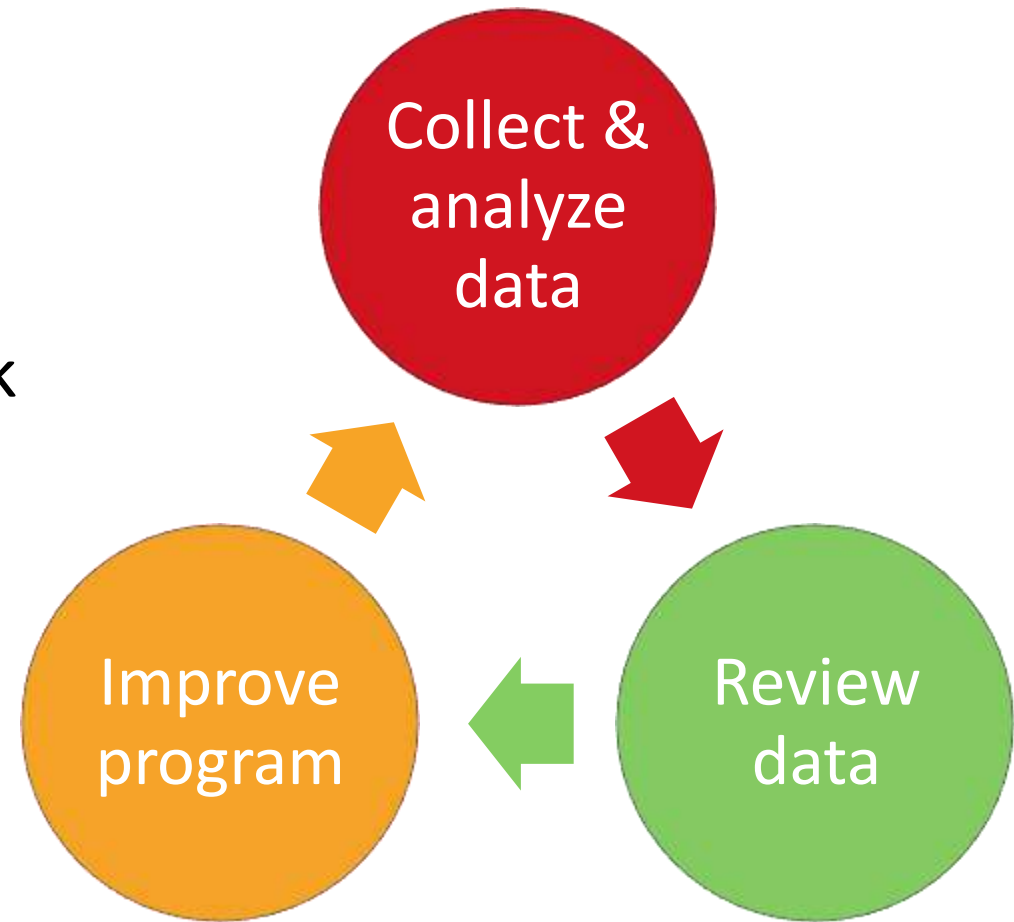
- Staff
- Participants
- Board
- Partners
- Funders

Value of asking people what they think: NMPCA's experience, academic programs, student experiences, patients, and managers

Value of sharing the data that your staff has so laboriously collected

Designing the Feedback Loop

- Mission time provides the time and place for incorporating data into decision making
- Collect, share and invite feedback on data at all levels of the organization



Evaluation Lab's Mission Time & Team

Mission time: one-hour meeting once per week, January-May

- Review/revise logic model,
- write rubrics,
- plan annual evaluation,
- plan Annual EXPO

At the table: Director, Associate Director, Team Leads (voluntary), Students (voluntary)

WHAT WOULD WORK FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Evaluation Lab Feedback loop

- Eval^2 compiles and reviews data, makes recommendations
- Instructor revises curriculum
- Advisory Council (leadership of partnering organizations) reviews data
- Evaluation Reports shared on website

WHAT WOULD WORK FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Bringing it back to your organization

What you need

- Mission Time
- Evaluation Team(s)
- Feedback Loop

Communicating internally means more than just conveying information!

Communicating the value of unwelcome results

- As an evaluator, I've been there. It is very unpleasant.
- It requires a true partnership with your evaluator and with your staff
- Allow all stages of grief!
- Come back to your mission and vision, with a focus on what you are evaluating:
 - If my wait times are too long, where is the bottleneck? Are there potential bottlenecks after this one is resolved? What supports or changes could help improve this?
 - Your evaluation feedback loop should be your operations and improvement feedback loop as well!!

Communicating the value of a different type of evaluation...

- This is a tricky one, particularly when the board or director wants a type evaluation.
- Involving people on the ground can reframe priorities
- Finding ways to communicate priorities of staff and leadership in the context of mission-centered evaluation can help not just set up an evaluation plan, but an evaluation agenda.

Communicating with Leadership:

- Administrative leadership focuses on outcomes and processes and tend to be well-informed
- Board of directors might be as well informed, but not always: they might ask for eval results that are not feasible to produce with the data available
- Communicating the role of evaluation is key, as is pointing out the challenges of doing so.
 - What technical systems should be in place to provide mission driven results?
 - What human components are required?
 - What institutional barriers? (e.g., Medicaid billing data)

Communicating with Funders

- Funding agencies want to know that their money is doing what it was supposed to do.

Lab's perspective:

- Involving funding agencies by showing results of mission driven evaluation –expo, results of exit interviews and conversations with community partners.
- Identify organization's outcomes and how evaluation is linked to them, even if not directly
 - Process
 - Systems
 - Staff capacity

Thank you!