

Summary of Findings for Interactive Focus Group from “Measuring What Matters” Workshop
May 20, 2018
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Background:

The interactive focus group was performed on April 27, 2018 with participants who attended the “Measuring What Matters” Workshop. The focus group was interactive in nature, so activities involved a variety of expression methods such as drawing, speaking, sharing with a partner, and individual writing. Questions were created to evaluate the workshop using the following goals:

- 1) Participants feel positively (energized) about taking on evaluation and that evaluation is possible and meaningful;
- 2) Participants learn something about evaluation that applies to them;
- 3) Participants learn from each other and about each other in conversation (network);
- 4) Participants recognize grind thinking (survival mode) vs. mission thinking and are motivated into mission thinking; and
- 5) Participants learn different options for evaluation that are within reach – not always numbers and not always just to evaluate what the funders want. Participants learn that they can control evaluating what matters to them.

Findings:

- 1) **Activity 1 Goal 1: Participants feel positively (energized) about taking on evaluation and that evaluation is possible and meaningful.**

We evaluated this goal through a drawing activity, where participants drew how evaluation made them feel before the workshop, and how it made them feel afterwards. Common ideas that emerged in the drawings were that the workshop was eye-opening and skill-building. Themes emerged, showing that participants felt confused, anxious, unengaged, uncertain, and passive about evaluation before the workshop. After the workshop, participants felt clear/focused, relaxed, prepared/ready, competent/trained, and engaged about/with evaluation. Drawings often showed eyes open after the workshop, skills learned, ideas for new implementation and calmer facial expressions and hair.

Figure 1. One Participant Felt “Ready to Go” With Evaluation after the Workshop

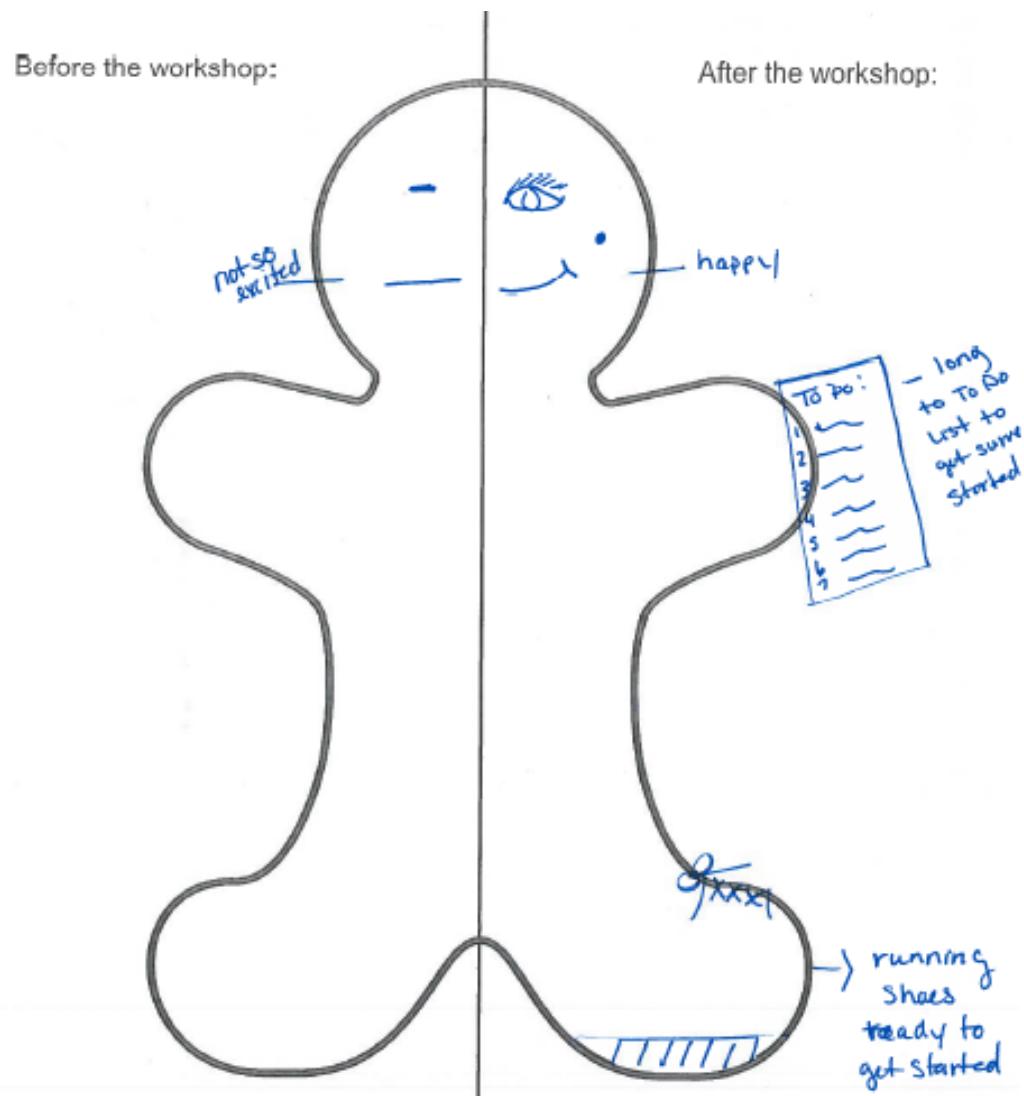
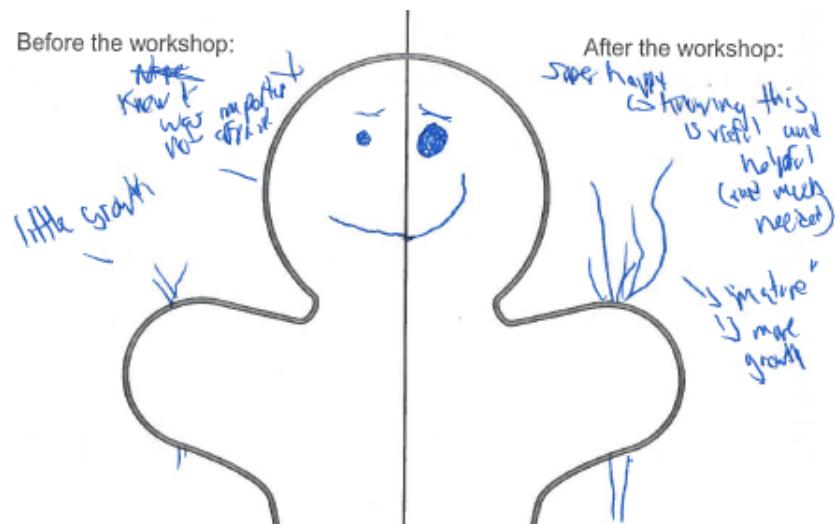


Figure 2. Another Participant Felt Evaluation was important and “Much Needed” After the Workshop



Students who participated were asked to draw how they felt about evaluation before participating in the Evaluation Lab Fellowship and after. Common ideas echoed those from the workshop, with greater emphasis on the skills and confidence built throughout the year. The themes included going from curious about the process to curious about the application, from hesitant and uncertain to confident (ready to go), from having no tools to having tools, skills, and knowledge, from quantitative to qualitative (numbers to feelings), and from hesitant to excited. Drawings often showed students with tools after the fellowship, and with a sense of excitement and confidence.

Figure 3. One Student Learned to Evaluate with Heart (Use Qualitative Data)

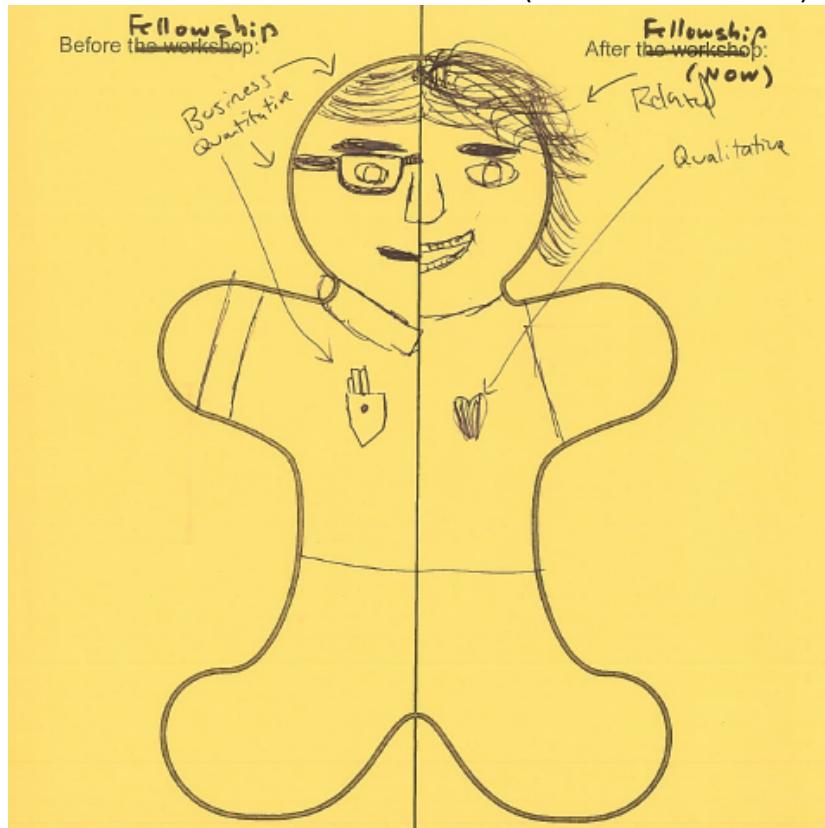


Figure 4. Another Student Felt Confident in their Evaluation Abilities



2) Activity 2 Goal 2: Participants learn something about evaluation that applies to them.

In activity 2, participants worked with a partner to discuss the new evaluation ideas or techniques they learned at the workshop. Participants responded that they learned how to evaluate with a collaborative approach, to engage staff more frequently, and to accept failure as a base to growing and progressing. Participants also mentioned learning about mission time and embedding evaluation in their everyday practices.

Rubrics were mentioned frequently, and participants cited learning to create them and use them to define both success and failure in terms of their own organizations. The rubric also seemed to highlight the possible range of success in organizations, where something might be acceptable but still improved upon and what ultimate success would look like.

Participants also learned that qualitative work is valuable. Overall, the participants noted learning new methods to collect data, whether through rubrics, surveys, interviews, or an incorporation of more than one of these.

3) Activity 4.1 Goal 3: Participants learn from each other and about each other in conversation (network).

To find out what participants were learning from and about each other, we asked the question, “Who did you connect with here today and what did you learn from them (if anything)?” We found that:

- All respondents were able to connect with at least one other person at the workshop and most were able to name the organization they came from.
- Many also noted what they learned from each new colleague, such as “I learned from another [participant] that Nurtured Heart Approach was developed first for young children,” or “I learned specific skills for statistical tests of pre - & post - surveys and how to code focus group answers.”
- Some participants also noted that they learned about specific organizations and their purposes.

4) Activity 3 Goals 2, 4, and 5: Participants learn something about evaluation that applies to them; Participants recognize grind thinking (survival mode) vs. mission thinking and are motivated into mission thinking; and Participants learn different options for evaluation that are within reach – not always numbers and not always just to evaluate what the funders want. Participants learn that they can control evaluating what matters to them.

In activity 3, we asked participants to form 3 groups and brainstorm about what practical steps for implementing ideas and techniques they learned during the workshop. Common ideas and techniques were:

- implementing rubrics,
- improving communications and staff engagement,
- encouraging participation across the organization,
- taking initiative and ownership, and
- updating logic models with visualizations.

One group also mentioned imposing mission time to help embed evaluation into the day to day processes.

5) Activity 4.2 Positives and Changes: Responses on what should stay the same and what should change in the workshop.

As part 2 of activity 4, we asked participants to tell us what they liked or didn't about the workshop. Overwhelmingly, people were excited to see the work of the students presented through the posters. People also enjoy connecting with others who are working in local organizations, the hospitality and comfortable environment, listening to others, and hearing Henry Real speak. Some of the suggested changes were to build the student poster presentations to include information about the previous years of evaluation lab experience, present about or somehow publicize who was present and who they represented, to include more interactive activities, and to include more networking opportunities with other participants to learn what others are doing. Some participants felt the poster session was a bit long, suggesting that it instead be done in a big group, or in separate rooms, or somehow done in less time.

Positives	Changes
Seeing the students' posters and presentations	Build student presentations on previous years
Connecting with others who are working in local organizations	Publicize bios or information about the other workshop participants
Hospitable and comfortable environment	Include more interactive activities
Listening to others ideas about embedding evaluation	Include more networking opportunities

Hearing Henry Real (keynote) speak	Shorten the student poster presentations
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6) Overall Themes

After reviewing all activities individually, it became evident that some themes emerged regarding the overall workshop:

- One transcending theme was wanting to know more about working with the Evaluation Lab and the Evaluation Lab process.
- Another was improving communication and engagement within organizations – including people up and down and across the organization.
- Participants also learned that incorporating evaluation as a core practice can help make evaluation less onerous and more doable.
- It became evident that participants enjoyed the opportunity to network and would like more networking opportunities at future workshops. In the future, participants would also like to know more about other participants and their organizations.
- The value of qualitative data continued to emerge through each activity and student presentations were a strong highlight.

Other Findings:

It's important to note that during this workshop, a different dynamic between presenters and participants was observed. In years past, the workshop participants were overwhelmingly positive in their remarks and comments about the students' work. The overall crowd dynamic this year seemed more critical than in years past. To preempt this in the future, we will spend more time preparing for critical feedback as well as introducing the workshop in a new way (highlight what it is and what it is not). For example, including some explanation of the difference between academic research and evaluation or the difference between evidence-based and practice-based programs. The hope here is that setting the expectation of what the workshop should be about will help set the tone for the day and preparing the students for critical feedback will better prepare them to adequately answer questions.

There has been some discussion about whether the workshop should be open to just the 5-7 organizations that participate in the Evaluation Lab throughout the year, or if the student presentations should only be open to the 5-7 organizations that participate throughout the year, or if it should be kept as is. It seems evident from the findings in the focus group that participants benefitted from their participation in the workshop even if they were not part of the Evaluation Lab throughout the year. That said, we'll need to brainstorm in greater depth to determine how we can best set the tone for participants to have an open-mind and see how organizations can learn and create valuable institutional knowledge using evaluation, and how they can then use what is learned to make informed decisions moving forward.

Concluding Remarks:

In closing, the findings from the interactive focus group suggest that the workshop **met all five of the goals** and while there are a few suggestions for changes, participants benefited from their involvement. Participants left the workshop feeling more positively (energized) about taking on evaluation and that evaluation is possible and meaningful; they learned something about evaluation that applies to them; they learned from each other and about each other in conversation (network); they recognized grind thinking (survival mode) vs. mission thinking and were motivated into mission thinking; and they learned different options for evaluation that are within reach. Participants discussed wanting more time for networking, and more information about how each year of participation in the Lab built off the previous. Overall, participants left feeling positively and with the skills and motivation needed to take on evaluation in their own organizations to measure what matters to them.