

Cultural Connections

Program Notes

Title: Program Evaluation- What, Why, and How

Location: Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose

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Presenters: Jenni Martin, Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose,
Director of

Education, www.cdm.org

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www.artspan.org

Terri Lind, Community Foundation Silicon Valley, Director of
Programs and Evaluation, www.cfsv.org

Fay Twersky, BTW Consultants – Informing Change, Founding
Principal, www.informingchange.com

Nicole Cheslock, Program Evaluation Consultant and Staff
Trainer

Program Overview

Nicole Cheslock (NC) introduced the goal: Learn how evaluation can be used in your institution, both with internal resources and with outside consultants. She then asked each presenter to share a tidbit about evaluation.

Jenni Martin (JM): Did graduate work at Stanford University, and as a grad student evaluated CDM's biosite program, which eventually led to her job as Education Director at CDM. Always hopes that evaluation works as a mirror to reflect back what's going on in a program from others' perspective – focus more on summative - asking what works? Are we meeting goals? Do goals need to change? Using different approaches is important.

Therese Martin (TM) Artspan has a staff of 3 to serve 850+ artists, both for Open Studios and drop-in programs. Use both traditional (asking if a program was adequate or not adequate) and non-traditional (throw a ping pong ball into a container marked "I liked it," "I didn't like it," etc.) methods of evaluation.

Terri Lind (TL) Previously worked in public benefits sector, interesting shift to work at a foundation. A foundation has a mission, is held

accountable by donors, funds come from (90%) living donors who want to participate. Partnerships are important, and they need to meet the goals. Important to ask questions – did we? Did we not meet goals? Answer and report back to donors. CFSV does this for five focus areas throughout the year.

Fay Twersky (FT) Has been consulting in the evaluation world since 1989. Ask: What value are you going to add? If you're going to detract value, then stay out of my way → learning how to work together with client. Think about: how can we add value? BTW tries to bring evaluation and planning → evaluation alone doesn't lead anywhere, you have to use the data.

NC: How do we add value? What's the first step to take?

FT: 1st ask, What am I trying to accomplish? What info do I need that, if I had it, would make a big difference? Not every program is information driven – not all information is equally usable.

TL: Funder's perspective. Be very clear: Why are we doing this? And work backwards. Hierarchy: Goal – milestones – activities – steps. Be reasonable with time, technology, staff time, what resources do you have to use? Don't start with evaluation and go the other way.

TM: Decode first who will do evaluation – instructors? Students? Teachers? A 10% return is doing really well, and that's with forms that are easy to use, SASE, coupons from merchants as incentives.

JM: Make sure to outline goals. Everyone should be on board with goals. Often evaluation is the first thing to go – involve graduate students to do evaluation work. Requires coaching time, but it's effective. Benefits: take small steps, use it as a way to get an outside perspective. Think about things you're already doing that someone could draw info from – such as journals done as part of a program.

NC: Talk about the biggest challenges (and possible solutions).

JM: Look for a match in philosophy w/ who you're working with. Lots of different methodologies out there, get one that works for you.

TM: Huge amounts of data entry – they work with L.E.M. (a business school in San Francisco). They write software to crunch Artspan's Numbers.

TL: Get a proposal in that fits the scale of time and funds – don't assume that you can end hunger or enlighten the spirit through art in one year! Know that your program will go on – see and understand the life cycle. Be realistic – what should you expect from pilot time? Are you looking to expand audience? Have evaluation to meet expectations, etc.

FT: 1. Multiple audiences – program manager, funder, users, Board, exec. Team, other public. May have promised different things to different funders.

2. Competing resources – where do you start?

3. Social service vs. social science (ART). Different skill sets in your institution staff.

4. Lack of adequate resources, rush to evaluate in funding world without an equal rush in funding.

5. Ceremonial evaluation – it's a ritual. We say, "Information isn't useful but it's part of the game." Solutions? There are lots of them, the common thread is integration. Integrate -- competing audiences. Work data entry into daily routine. Don't go beyond what you can do. Include a line item for evaluation in proposals.

NC: What are the benefits of evaluation beyond the fact that funders require it?

TM: Art for inner-city youth. After 1st year, reevaluated based on student feedback. *Focus Groups* Identified areas students are coming from – boys/girls clubs, etc. found students not interested in these services because they could go elsewhere for the same thing. Talked to similar organizations and schools, found a need to get art into classrooms. Led to advisory committee, continued to evaluate each project in program and analyze in a timely way to study success. Questions to ask are key: How to find out if Preschool -high school participants have enjoyed experience? Did students keep artwork? Did they use vocabulary from the project? Did they remember the name of the artist who worked with them? Lots of free evaluation info is on the web.

JM: Evaluation of BioSite Project (2 years). Earlier worked with a grad student (Used focus groups – groups make kids feel more comfortable--interviewed teachers, wrote report). Project started in 1993 w/ 2 elementary schools. 4 classes came to CDM 17 times for 1 1/2 – 2 hours. 1:5 ratio with teachers. Did water quality test, hands-on activities. Program expanded, adding 3 more elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools in 1997. Trained HS students to be facilitators for elementary schools. At the beginning, had set goal of half the students wanting to be teachers. Ambitious, but the research seemed to support it! For the second phase, they brought in stakeholders – what do they think we should be looking for? Also brought in a Ph.D. student in her final year at Stanford. She interviewed teachers, did journal assessments, observed programs, participated in staff meetings, which gave her insight into institutional visions. Really valuable to have her full-time because she really “got” the program. They were clear about their expectation: A final report and an executive summary (good for varied audiences), plus a mid-year report for stakeholders. Ability to put the report online is helpful (their evaluator did it for them).

TL: Why look for assessments from grantees?

1. Evaluation can make or break a proposal.
2. You must make evaluation your own. Be clear: What is your program?
Funders are seeking their own way just like you are. Be cautious about chasing dollars. A well-thought out program presented clearly is easier for funder to look at.

Intriguing proposals – make sure tools are effective for the audience. Don't use a 4-page evaluation for academically challenged kids. Using stickers for self-measurement is better and more appropriate. Now, not all funders will fund that. So go to funders who are willing to play with you – be cautious of those who want to dictate and hold your program hostage for money, who won't respect your knowledge. You need to find funding PARTNERS!

FT: Remember, some funders are interested in being partners, some aren't. Acknowledge and recognize that.

Roundtable Discussions: We then broke into groups, with each presenter leading a roundtable discussion on a different topic.

TL: The links between evaluation, funding, and program improvement

JM: Learn from CDM's evaluation experience

TM: Using alternative methods in evaluation

FT: How can evaluative information add value to what you do?

Links:

Fay Twersky's Handout:

<http://www.informingchange.com/pub.htm>

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