



EVALUATIVE THINKING

10. INCREASING PARTICIPATION IN EVALUATION

How are Organization Staff, Evaluators, and Funders typically involved in Participatory Evaluation?

Organization Managers/Staff Roles

To identify programs which will benefit from evaluation, to identify and support staff in all aspects of their efforts to design and conduct evaluations, to promote the widespread practice of assessment within the organization.

To identify questions of consequence (based on expected program outcomes), to carefully select evaluation strategies that will produce usable evaluation findings, to thoughtfully conduct evaluation activities and analyses of data, to use the evaluation results to strengthen programs and enhance program decision-making, and to share evaluation training and other evaluation learning with colleagues.

Evaluators/Roles

To provide training for non-profit staff regarding evaluation planning and methodologies, to assist non-profit staff in the collection and analysis of evaluation data, to promote the widespread practice of assessment within non-profit organizations.

Funder Roles

To learn about the programs being evaluated, the outcomes to measure, and about available evaluation methodologies, to help specify evaluation questions and to encourage grantees to ask questions of consequence, to review evaluation designs, and evaluation findings, and to promote the widespread practice of assessment within non-profit organizations.

Shared Roles

- Promote clear communication about the purposes of the evaluation.
- Design, conduct and support evaluations that are honest and that help promote the continuous improvement of programs.
- Set short-term measures and milestones, but also identify longer-term opportunities for programs to use the information and produce stronger programs and eventually desired outcomes.
- Decide in advance how good is good enough (use prior efforts, external standards, or agreed-upon expectations to determine reasonable program targets).
- Do peer education with colleagues and support policies regarding how outcome evaluation results should be used (i.e., in context, and in conjunction with other findings and documentation).

Organizations that regularly use Evaluative Thinking involve multiple staff members in evaluation capacity building activities and in conducting evaluation. They encourage the “ripple” of evaluation capacity throughout their organizations.

This bulletin was developed by Anita Baker with Beth Bruner to help organizations integrate evaluative thinking into their organizational practice. After a successful effort to help organizations build evaluation capacity (see www.brunerfoundation.org for more information about REP 1996-2003), the Bruner Foundation has been working to help organizations use that capacity in other management areas. The Foundation continues pursuing its strong belief that using evaluation skills, specifically identifying key questions of substance, determining what data are needed to answer questions, gathering appropriate data in systematic ways, analyzing data, sharing results, and developing strategies to act on evaluation findings, is valuable in everyday work of organizations. The contents of this bulletin were influenced by the non-profit organizations in Rochester that are former REP partners and ongoing consumers of these efforts, as well as by the work of Michael Quinn Patton, Paul Connolly, Paul Light, and Peter York, and the many others who thoughtfully add to the evaluation and organizational capacity-building literature.



EVALUATIVE THINKING

What is Ripple Anyway?

“Ripple” was a term coined by REP partners. It refers to the process of extending or spreading evaluation learning throughout an agency.

How do you accomplish Ripple?

Organizations that have enhanced their evaluation capacity have to regularly contend with how to extend and sustain it. The following are ways that partner organizations in the REP initiative accomplished this.

- Involved multiple staff in the processes of designing evaluations, collecting data, analyzing data and summarizing findings.
- Conducted general evaluation training for multiple staff members in the organization.
- Continued to model evaluative thinking in all organizational practice.

What does it look like when Executive Leaders and Management Staff Use Evaluative Thinking

In addition to helping to spread evaluation capacity throughout the organization, Executive Leaders and management staff also should incorporate Evaluative Thinking whenever possible into their daily roles. The following are indicators that it is happening. In organizations that regularly use Evaluative Thinking:

- **Executive leaders support and value program evaluation and evaluative thinking.**
- **Plans for executive leadership succession include attention to evaluation.**
- **Executive leaders support and value program evaluation.**
- **Executive leaders use evaluation findings in decision-making for the organization.**
- **Executive leaders educate staff about the value of evaluation.**
- **Programming decisions are based in part on program evaluation results.**
- **Executive leaders motivate staff to regularly use specific evaluation strategies.**
- **Executive leaders modify the organizational structure as needed to embrace and change in response to evaluation findings.**
- **Executive leaders foster use of technology to support evaluation and evaluative thinking.**
- **Management uses data to set staff goals and evaluate staff performance.**
- **Plans for management succession include attention to evaluation – new managers are to value evaluation and where possible are knowledgeable about evaluation.**
- **Staffing decisions are based on data.**



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How to Use These Bulletins

The *Integrating Evaluative Thinking Bulletins* were developed in response to the continuing need expressed by nonprofit partners to clarify **how** to enhance evaluative thinking and put enhanced evaluation capacity to work. The bulletins are intended to do the following:

- Clarify what evaluative thinking is, why it is important, and who can do it.
- Provide direction regarding the use of the Bruner Foundation's Evaluative Thinking Assessment Tool to inform action plans that will enhance evaluative thinking.
- Describe additional ways that evaluation strategies can be used internally to increase evaluative thinking (e.g., evaluating the effectiveness of staff development efforts or collaborative ventures).
- Help organizations think about creative ways to present and use evaluation findings.
- Provide practical advice on how to hone analytical skills, and use Evaluative Thinking when making decisions about standard organizational procedures including governance, mission development, strategic planning, fund development, leadership, technology, human relations, staff development, alliances and business ventures.

There are 11 individual *Integrating Evaluative Thinking Bulletins* including this edition. They cover the following topics: evaluation basics and definitions, evaluative thinking basics and assessment of evaluative thinking, evaluation and nonprofit boards, commissioning evaluation, collecting, analyzing and using evaluation data, communicating about evaluation, evaluation and technology, evaluation and HR, evaluation and alliances, increasing participation in evaluation and sustaining evaluative thinking. Each bulletin is brief and replete with practical suggestions made by nonprofit partners who reviewed the work (including some very specific pointers highlighted in yellow). A complete set of all Bulletins, as well as other complementary tools and resources are available via the Bruner Foundation website, www.brunerfoundation.org. We encourage all users of the bulletins to:

- Familiarize (or re-familiarize) yourself with basic information about evaluation capacity.
- Orient yourself regarding the Bruner Foundation's Evaluative Thinking Assessment Tool and conduct preliminary assessment in your organization.
- Develop action plans informed by the suggestions found in the bulletins.
- Implement action plans to enhance Evaluative Thinking in your organization.
- Use these specific bulletins as reference materials when needed.
- Visit the Bruner Foundation website Effectiveness Initiatives pages (www.Brunerfoundation.org), to familiarize yourself with the history behind this effort and to access the tools and resources available there.

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