

UNDERSTANDING EVALUATION CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING RESULTS: Findings from the 2013 Former Participant Survey

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Evaluation is an active, dynamic process. It is **evaluation capacity**, the ability to do evaluation—to assess what is taking place with a program, a strategy, or an initiative—that allows an organization to use data to inform its decision making. It has been a tenet of the Bruner Foundation that evaluation capacity used well, supports programs, strategies, and initiatives that in turn lead organizations to better deliver on their missions and better meet the needs of those they serve. To investigate this further, the Bruner Foundation commissioned a retrospective survey to learn more about whether and how former participants have put their *evaluation capacity building* (ECB) training to use, what has been sustained and whether/what organizational benefits exist.

Results of this were very clear and uniformly positive. All former ECB trainees reported that the comprehensive training they received was worthwhile for them individually and that they: continued to use what they learned; valued **evaluative capacity** and its importance in their organizations; avidly use evaluation capacities and **evaluative thinking** for key organizational benefits; extended the training to others. Although they acknowledged challenges to continued evaluation use, most notably time to work on evaluation projects, turnover of trained staff, and unmet technology needs, the former trainees were also clear that ECB has helped their organizations do better evaluation, use evaluative thinking and commission evaluation.

When asked specifically if there were evaluation activities organizations have not conducted since their training, despite need and interest, about half said yes. Time and to a somewhat lesser extent money, were the most frequently cited unmet needs.

These findings help clarify longer term benefits that can be accomplished through support of ECB strategies, as well as areas of ongoing evaluation capacity building need. Grantmakers considering this kind of support for their grantees should deem this ample, long-term evidence of key results. Investments in ECB can have multiple important payoffs. Grantmakers are encouraged to use the Bruner Foundation Evaluation Capacity Building Clearinghouse to compare different strategies and determine if any would be suitable for their grantees. Lastly, grantmakers considering investing in ECB should support training and technical assistance/coaching that helps organizations build evaluation capacity, commit resources that allow staff time to work on evaluation projects, purchase technology and pay for extended participatory assistance with evaluation. Details follow. (See appendix for project-specific results and descriptions of organizations).

Evaluation requires thoughtful, systematic collection and analysis of data about the characteristics, activities and outcomes of programs, strategies and initiatives to reduce uncertainties and inform decision-making.

Evaluation Capacity is the ability of staff and their organizations to do evaluation. Because evaluation is systematic, it involves proficiency in: asking questions, determining what data are required to answer questions, collecting data using appropriate strategies, analyzing collected data and summarizing findings, using and sharing the findings.

Evaluative Thinking is a type of reflective practice that uses the same five evaluation skills listed above, in areas other than programs or initiatives: areas such as human resources, technology, and fund development. It is an approach that fully integrates systematic questioning, data collection and analysis, and action into an organization's work practices.

Evaluative Capacity is the combination of evaluation skills and evaluative thinking. It requires a commitment to doing and using evaluation in programs, strategies, and initiatives *as well as* a commitment to using those same skills in other aspects of organization work.

Evaluation Capacity Building Strategies

The Bruner Foundation has directly invested in or partnered with others to help organizations build evaluation capacity since 1996. As part of that work, The Foundation has developed and posted an interactive site containing detailed information about its comprehensive strategies (click here to visit the [Bruner Foundation Evaluation Capacity Building Program Clearinghouse](#)). The Clearinghouse, a key component of the Bruner Foundation's Evaluative Thinking web portal, summarizes multiple features and evaluation results for nine different evaluation capacity building projects. A recent [Foundation Review](#) article noted the portal is a valuable resource for those exploring ways to build evaluation capacity.

The projects highlighted through the Clearinghouse used combinations of different evaluation training components¹ including:

- Basic evaluation training – multiple content presentations and hands-on activities to introduce/practice evaluation skills.
- Advanced evaluation training – more complex content, plus guided evaluation projects.
- Applied learning – application of basic and advanced evaluation skills with guided evaluation projects.
- Coaching and technical assistance – direct support from evaluation professional to address evaluation-related needs and interests.
- Networking – learning from peers.
- Alumni study groups – continued evaluation training for more staff members, to address new or additional evaluation projects.
- Anchoring – whole staff training in organizations that have already conducted basic and advanced training.
- Funding collaboratives/shared governance – use of data-based decision making to direct evaluation capacity building project.

The Bruner Foundation's web portal
"is a helpful one stop site for resources for funders and their partners on evaluation capacity building and evaluative thinking."

Gale Berkowitz, *The Foundation Review*, 2013, Vol. 5:4

All projects described in the Clearinghouse were evaluated and findings showed that staff from participating organizations enhanced their evaluative capacity (i.e., their capacity to do evaluation well and to think evaluatively). Further, participants from the projects indicated they intended to continue using what they learned to strengthen the work of their organizations.

¹

Please note, all of the projects highlighted through the Evaluation Capacity Building Program Clearinghouse involved multiple session, in-person training workshops supported by use of written materials and hands-on activities. For many, the training included individualized coaching and technical assistance and guided evaluation projects.

Retrospective Study of Evaluation Capacity Development

Despite positive project-based findings regarding evaluative capacity development, and consistent evidence that training to develop the capacities described above could be delivered using a variety of strategies in a variety of settings (Rochester, NY, New York City, Hartford, CT, MetroWest, MA), two key questions remained, regarding the broader usefulness of evaluation capacity development. First, though it was known from informal contacts that many participating organizations had maintained their enhanced evaluative capacities to varying degrees, **the Bruner Foundation wanted to know in a systematic fashion whether former trainees continued to use what they learned and the capacities they developed.** Second, **the Foundation wanted to ascertain whether enhanced evaluation capacity had organizational benefits and to determine what unmet needs persist.** To address these questions, Anita Baker Evaluation Partner, and Beth Bruner designed a study with two components: **a comprehensive survey of former ECB training participants from four projects (see box at right); and a set of comprehensive interviews conducted with organization leaders who participated in ECB training delivered through various strategies.** The results of the survey are described in the remainder of this report (interview results are available in [Evaluation Capacity Building and Organization Change: Voices from the Field](#)).

Who Answered the Surveys?

A total of 97 former Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) project participants completed the survey including 86 who answered it fully and 11 who provided only partial responses. As shown in Table A in the Appendix, respondents represented all seven REP classes; all three BEC classes; and both the fall and winter OBPI classes (all MWEI respondents came from the first Institute conducted Fall 2011). Time since training for all respondents was at least six months. The respondent group was robust and varied (different projects, different classes) especially given time since training for many former participants, but also likely somewhat positively pre-disposed. While concerted efforts were made to hear from all past participants, the likelihood of self-selection bias is acknowledged. The findings reflected herein represent only those of the former trainees who elected to answer.

Targeted Survey Participants

Four of the projects represented in the Clearinghouse responded to the ECB former participant survey:

- **Rochester Effectiveness Partnership** (REP – Rochester New York, 1997 – 2003, Bruner Foundation and other area funders).
- **Building Evaluation Capacity** (BEC – Hartford, Connecticut 2006 – 2013; Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, project is ongoing).
- **MetroWest Evaluation Institute** (MWEI – Framingham, MA 2011, MetroWest Community Health Foundation, project is ongoing)
- **OBPI (Outcomes-Based Planning Institute**, PASE and the Department of Youth and Community Development, New York, NY, winter/spring 2012).

For a list of interview respondents please see *Evaluation Capacity Building and Organization Change: Voices from the Field*.

Response

Respondents to this ECB follow-up survey represent four different training programs with both important similarities and differences. The ECB training curriculum, based on Participatory Evaluation Essentials² was very similar, but the delivery strategies, activities, and participant evaluation project requirements were different (see box previous page for overview, [Clearinghouse](#) for details). The Rochester Effectiveness Partnership (REP) and Building Evaluation Capacity (BEC) Initiatives were the most intensive of the four projects, but separated by many years. The Outcomes-Based Planning (OBPI) training and the MetroWest Evaluation Institute (MWEI) were conducted using condensed strategies.

The four groups are quite varied in size as well. Detailed results by project are provided in the appendix, but the reader is reminded not to compare respondent groups to one another. There were 60 BEC respondents, 20 REP respondents, but only 7 MWEI respondents and 10 OBPI respondents.³ Together these 96 respondents represent voices from multiple evaluation capacity building experiences, broadly inclusive of the many organizations and individuals who have participated over the years.

Current Respondent Evaluation Roles

Table 1 presents the current employment affiliation of respondents and some other details about their current roles in evaluation. As shown in the table and clarified in the text box below, most former ECB participants are still working in the organizations where they worked when they participated in training. As shown in the Appendix ([Appendix Table 1](#)) this was true for all of the MWEI and OBPI respondents, a total of 88% of the BEC respondents and about 60% of the former REP respondents whose time since training was by far the longest. [Table 1](#) also shows that **most former participants have not been involved in additional evaluation training, but most have at least some ongoing involvement in evaluation. Many have more responsibility for evaluation since their training.**

² Participatory Evaluation Essentials, the manual, was first published in 2004, after all seven REP classes. It was updated in 2010. The manual included the compendium of all materials that were presented to REP participants as part of their provider training.

³ The organizations represented in this study also varied considerably in terms of work focus, staff size and annual budget. Descriptions of participating organizations are included in the appendix.

Table 1. Current Status of the ECB Retrospective Survey Respondents

| | TOTAL N=97 |
|---|---------------|
| Percent of respondents who: . . . | |
| Are still with original organization | 84% |
| Have transitioned to new workspace* | 16% |
| | |
| Have participated in other evaluation training since completing ECB | 28% |
| | |
| Percent of respondents who are involved in evaluation now: | 95% |
| Have <i>some</i> involvement in evaluation now | 62% |
| Have <i>a lot</i> of involvement in evaluation now | 33% |
| | |
| Have more responsibility for evaluation since participating in ECB | 51% |
| | |
| Percent of respondents who | |
| Participated in ECB training before 2011 | 54 (56%) |
| Participated in ECB training between 2011 and 2013 | 43 (44%) |

- Relatively few respondents (28%) have participated in other evaluation training, even among the REP group whose ECB participation was at least 10 years ago.
- Almost all respondents (95%) have *at least some* current involvement in evaluation (about 1/3 have *a lot* of involvement).
- About half of the respondents (51%) have more responsibility for evaluation since participating in ECB training, especially among the former REP participants. (Note also that about 55% of former REP participants also indicated their training helped them obtain their current positions.)

| Work Status for Former Participants who Transitioned (n=15) | |
|---|---|
| Not-working (retired, unemployed) | 0 |
| Different Non-Profit Organization | 7 |
| Consultant | 1 |
| For Profit Organization | 2 |
| Other | 5 |

How did participants respond to the training and what has been sustained?

Strikingly large proportions of the former participants, regardless of the project they participated in and when it was conducted, provided positive feedback about their ECB training. Further, they verified that they continue to use evaluative thinking and many evaluation-related strategies, and that they continue to find those skills important.

Quality of Training

[Table 2](#) presents ratings from each group regarding the value of the training for individuals and for the organizations in which they work (see table note). The table also shows responses about ECB alumni groups from those who participated. It can be seen in the table that **all participants in retrospect, indicated both the initial training and the Alumni training were at least somewhat worthwhile for themselves and for the organization. Most participants indicated the training was very worthwhile.** Though not shown in the table, when timing is factored in, even more participants perceive the training as valuable: a total of 85% of those who participated in training before 2011 (i.e., those from REP and the earliest classes of BEC) compared to 80% of those who were trained in 2011 or beyond (i.e., the OBPI, MWEI and BEC class of 2013) indicated the training was *very valuable*.

Table 2. Quality of Training Experiences in Retrospect

| | TOTAL N=97 |
|--|---------------|
| Value of Initial Training* to Individual | |
| <i>Very Worthwhile</i> | 83% |
| <i>Somewhat Worthwhile</i> | 17% |
| Value of Initial Training* to the Organization** | |
| <i>Very Worthwhile</i> | 84% |
| <i>Somewhat Worthwhile</i> | 16% |
| Value of Alumni Group*** to the Individual | |
| <i>Very Worthwhile</i> | 84% |
| <i>Somewhat Worthwhile</i> | 16% |
| Value of Alumni Group*** to the Organization | |
| <i>Very Worthwhile</i> | 87% |
| <i>Somewhat Worthwhile</i> | 13% |

* Initial training includes classroom-based learning AND the evaluation project

** Organization = organization where respondent obtained ECB training

*** Alumni Group = continued evaluation study/projects for organizations that completed Initial Training. Includes only those who attended the alumni group as part of the REP and BEC projects.

Use of Skills Learned/Practiced Through ECB Training

[Table 3a](#) and [Table 3b](#) show the proportion of respondents from each group who are still using the evaluation planning and data collection/analysis skills they learned through ECB. It can be seen in the table that **a substantial majority of respondents overall are using all the evaluation skills they learned and practiced through the training.** As shown in Appendix Table 3, use of skills has continued over-time, **REP participants – those trained longest ago – are using the skills, demonstrating sustained effects of the training.** This is also true for the BEC participants from the Class of 2008 whose training occurred more than 5 years ago.) Specific findings include the following.

- All (100%) of the participants from every group indicated they are still incorporating Evaluative Thinking into their regular work (about 10% of respondents reported they did this before their ECB training, about 1/3 indicated they incorporated Evaluative Thinking into their regular work *sometimes*, and all the rest indicated they incorporated Evaluative Thinking into their regular work *a lot*).
- Almost all participants (i.e., 90% or more overall) are using many of the key ECB evaluation planning strategies including selecting data collection strategies, specifying evaluation questions, developing evaluation designs and presenting findings from evaluation.
- Although only about 10% had used the ECB skills before their training. More than two-thirds of respondents reported they continue to use all the ECB skills.

Table 3a. Evaluation Planning Skills Former Trainees Continue to Use

| | Did this Before | Still do this Sometimes | Still do this A Lot | TOTAL N=97 |
|--|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Incorporating Evaluative Thinking into regular work | 10% | 34% | 56% | 100% |
| Selecting data collection strategies to use for evaluation | 8% | 57% | 32% | 97% |
| Specifying evaluation questions | 7% | 43% | 45% | 95% |
| Developing evaluation designs | 8% | 55% | 27% | 90% |
| Presenting findings from evaluation | 12% | 45% | 33% | 90% |
| Writing an evaluation findings section in program reports | 8% | 47% | 27% | 81% |
| Writing evaluation reports | 11% | 43% | 22% | 76% |
| Writing an evaluation plan section in program proposals | 10% | 39% | 23% | 72% |

As shown in Table 3b, more than two-thirds of former participants are also still using the data collection and analysis skills they developed for use of observations, record reviews, interviews and especially surveys.

Table 3b. Data Collection and Analysis Skills Former Trainees Continue to Use

| | Did this Before | Still do this Sometimes | Still do this A Lot | TOTAL N=97 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Developing surveys | 12% | 48% | 35% | 94% |
| Planning for survey administration | 11% | 48% | 30% | 89% |
| Analyzing survey data | 11% | 41% | 41% | 93% |
| | | | | |
| Developing interview guides/protocols | 12% | 54% | 20% | 86% |
| Conducting evaluation interviews | 11% | 40% | 23% | 73% |
| Analyzing interview data | 10% | 45% | 27% | 82% |
| | | | | |
| Developing record review protocols | 10% | 44% | 22% | 76% |
| Analyzing record review data | 9% | 43% | 29% | 81% |
| | | | | |
| Developing observation tools | 9% | 43% | 16% | 68% |
| Conducting evaluation observations | 9% | 45% | 13% | 67% |
| Analyzing observation data | 7% | 42% | 23% | 72% |

As clarified by one respondent . . .

I would say that I used most of these skills prior to the training, but am using them at a much more enhanced level and understand it better.

Outcomes of ECB Projects

[Table 4](#) shows the proportion of respondents who indicated important, desired outcomes of ECB training had been accomplished for themselves or their organizations. (Please note the ECB project curricula are designed to directly address these outcomes.) It can be seen in the table that

a substantial majority of respondents overall indicated their ECB training had delivered in all of the key outcome areas. Specific findings include the following.

- A total of 94% or more of the respondents indicated it was *somewhat* or *very true* that their ECB training had: taught them to look at programs from different perspectives, improved the quality of data their agency obtained, helped their agency conduct better evaluations and understand why evaluation is valuable, taught them the importance of involving multiple stakeholders in evaluation, and helped make their agency more responsive to customers. It is especially noteworthy that 100% of REP respondents reported these outcomes were *somewhat* or *very true*. (See Appendix Table 4).
- A sizeable proportion of participants (89%) indicated it was *somewhat* or *very true* the ECB training had helped their agency incorporate evaluation practices into daily practice. The latter, though promising, underscores the ongoing challenge to move ECB training to the level where it recognizably promotes organizational benefits.

Table 4. Outcomes of Evaluation Capacity Building Projects

| % of Respondents who Indicated the Following were <i>Somewhat or Very True</i> : ECB training . . . | Somewhat True | Very True | TOTAL N=97 |
|---|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Taught me how to look at programs from different perspectives | 28% | 70% | 98% |
| Improved the quality of data our agency obtained | 38% | 58% | 96% |
| Helped my agency conduct better evaluations | 30% | 65% | 95% |
| Helped my agency understand why evaluation is valuable | 43% | 52% | 95% |
| Taught us the importance of involving multiple stakeholders in evaluation | 45% | 51% | 95% |
| Made my agency more responsive to our customers | 50% | 44% | 94% |
| Helped my agency incorporate evaluation practices into daily practice | 50% | 39% | 89% |

One respondent commented further . . .

I don't think I can overemphasize the impact that BEC had on my previous employer. It completely transformed the agency's mindset and during my time there, the importance of evaluation was internalized and integrated into all of its programming.

According to former ECB training participants, how important are evaluation capacity and key uses for it?

Almost all former participants agreed that Evaluation Capacity is *very important* to organizations. Further, four key uses promoted in Bruner Foundation-related projects were also identified as *very important* by a substantial majority of former participants.

Importance and Use of Evaluation Capacity for Organizations

[Table 5](#) shows the proportion of respondents who identified key organization uses for evaluation capacities as important. Specifically, it can be seen in the table that more than 90% of participants indicated it was *very true* that evaluation capacity is important because it helps organizations build evaluation into the planning process (93% said *very true*), improve their quality of service (93% said *very true*), revise programs based on real data (92% said *very true*), and helps organizations develop instruments that measure valued outcomes (92% said *very true*).

Table 5. Evaluation Capacity Importance and Use in Organizations

| % of Respondents who Indicated Evaluation Capacity is <i>Important</i> because it can help organizations . . . | Somewhat True | Very True | TOTAL N=97 |
|--|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Build evaluation into the program planning process | 7% | 93% | 100% |
| Improve their quality of service | 7% | 93% | 100% |
| Revise programs based on real data | 8% | 92% | 100% |
| Develop instruments that measure the types of outcomes valued by stakeholders | 8% | 92% | 100% |

Importance of Different Strategies of ECB Training

As shown in [Table 6](#), respondents were also clear that the key strategies used in ECB training were important.

- All respondents indicated that opportunities for consultations from a professional evaluator were *important* (including 86% who indicated they were *very important*).
- All but 1 respondent indicated opportunities to conduct guided evaluation during the training were important (including 83% who indicated they were *very important*).

- All respondents indicated that opportunities to continue learning new information were *important* (including 76% who indicated they were *very important*).
- All but 2 respondents indicated that opportunities to continue guided evaluation projects through alumni study were *important* (including 68% who indicated they were *very important*).

Table 6. Importance of ECB Training Strategies

| % of Respondents who Indicated the following aspects of the ECB training were <i>Very Important</i> . | Important | Very Important | TOTAL N=97 |
|---|-----------|----------------|------------|
| Opportunities for coaching and consultations from a professional evaluator | 14% | 86% | 100% |
| Opportunities to conduct guided evaluation during the training | 15% | 83% | 98% |
| Opportunities to continue learning new information about evaluation | 24% | 76% | 100% |
| Opportunities to continue guided evaluation projects through alumni study | 28% | 68% | 96% |

How and to what extent have former ECB participants *rippled*, or extended what they learned?

Almost all former participants report that they have rippled/extended their ECB training including 32% who said they did so a lot and 66% who said they did so at least a little. They have used a variety of different strategies that include presentations, continued evaluation work and commissioning external evaluation.

Extending Evaluation Capacity: Ripple

As shown in [Table 7](#), many former participants have been involved with extending their knowledge and skills to others in their organizations. Specifically, respondents have done the following, *some* or a *lot*:

- Shared evaluation knowledge or strategies with other staff through meetings, training, projects (99%).
- Presented evaluation results both internally with other staff or board members (94%) and externally to funders and other stakeholders (86%).

- Initiated new evaluation projects (79%) or continued/expanded projects they did through their ECB training (75%).

Many have also tried agency-wide strategies such as developing organizational evaluation plans or policies (64%) or committing more staff time to program evaluation (62%). Almost half have collaborated with other organizations on evaluation-related work (46%), or purchased equipment or software to use in their evaluation projects (40%). About one-third hired an evaluation consultant to assist them (31%).

Table 7. RIPPLE! Participant Responses to Questions about Extending Evaluation Capacity

| Percent who report they have done the following . . . | Some | A Lot | TOTAL N=97 |
|---|------|-------|---------------|
| Shared evaluation knowledge or strategies with other staff (through meetings, training, projects, etc.) | 74% | 25% | 99% |
| Presented evaluation results /findings to internal staff or board | 63% | 31% | 94% |
| Presented evaluation results /findings to external audiences or stakeholders | 66% | 20% | 86% |
| Initiated a new program evaluation project | 43% | 36% | 79% |
| Continued or expanded upon your original evaluation project | 48% | 27% | 75% |
| Developed an organizational evaluation plan or policy | 52% | 12% | 64% |
| Increased the number of staff or staff hours dedicated to program evaluation | 51% | 11% | 62% |
| Collaborated with one or more other organizations on evaluation-related work | 39% | 6% | 46% |
| Purchased equipment, software or materials for use in an evaluation project | 37% | 3% | 40% |
| Hired an evaluation consultant to assist their organization | 20% | 11% | 31% |

Use of Evaluation Results

As shown in [Table 8](#), most former participants report using evaluation results *some or to a great extent* to inform their practices and communicate with stakeholders. This includes 100% who use them to assess quality of a program, 99% who use results to improve services or programs, 98% who use them to report to a funder, 93% who use them to get additional funding or to design ongoing monitoring of the program and 92% to assess implementation of a program. About 85% of respondents reported they use results to improve outreach, 84% use evaluation results to eliminate un-needed services or programs and about 73% indicated they use them to train staff.

Table 8. Current Use of Evaluation Results: Percentage of Respondents who Agreed They use Evaluation Results for the Following, *Some or To a Great Extent*

| | Some | To a Great Extent | TOTAL N=97 |
|---|------|-------------------|------------|
| To assess quality of a program | 44% | 56% | 100% |
| To improve services or programs | 38% | 61% | 99% |
| To report to a funder | 39% | 59% | 98% |
| To get additional funding | 47% | 46% | 93% |
| To design ongoing monitoring processes | 53% | 40% | 93% |
| To assess implementation of a program | 47% | 45% | 92% |
| To improve outreach | 51% | 34% | 85% |
| To eliminate un-needed services or programs | 56% | 28% | 84% |
| To train staff | 49% | 24% | 73% |

[What are the barriers and challenges to getting evaluation done and sustaining evaluation capacity?](#)

Despite their reports of continued use of evaluation skills, former participants clarified there were both unmet needs as well as barriers and challenges regarding sustaining evaluation in their organizations. Most respondents identified resources and especially time as difficulties that prevented organizations from doing all the evaluation they wanted done and as the biggest challenges to sustaining evaluative capacity.

Unmet Evaluation Needs

Almost half (49%) of the respondents indicated there were some evaluation activities they have not conducted although they wanted to. Among the 41 respondents who indicated this, the two most common reasons were lack of staff availability and insufficient resources. A few respondents also indicated that there was insufficient support from organization leaders and that despite ECB

training they still had limited evaluation expertise in evaluation. Further a few individuals commented that they had not done all they wanted with evaluation because *it is not a funded activity* or because they are *only working on one program at a time*.

Challenges to Sustaining Evaluation Capacity

Despite reporting they continued to use what they learned through ECB training, that they had ongoing evaluation responsibility, and that they continued to recognize the importance of evaluation for themselves and their organizations, many respondents indicated there were challenges associated with sustaining evaluation capacity. As shown in Table 9, the reasons most commonly identified as *challenging* regarding sustaining evaluation capacity were time to work on evaluation projects and maintaining staff expertise. All but one respondent (98%) indicated insufficient time for evaluation work was a challenge (57% of respondents indicated it was *very challenging*) and many respondents (91%) also said maintaining staff expertise was challenging.

Table 9. Percentage of Respondents for Whom the Following were *Challenges to Sustaining Evaluation Capacity*

| | Somewhat | Very | TOTAL N=97 |
|--|----------|------|---------------|
| Lack of time to work on evaluation projects | 41% | 57% | 98% |
| Maintaining staff expertise | 63% | 28% | 91% |
| Turnover of trained staff | 50% | 28% | 78% |
| Absence of technology for working on evaluation projects | 52% | 25% | 77% |
| Insufficient funds for working on evaluation projects | 31% | 24% | 55% |
| Insufficient organizational support from leaders/other staff | 35% | 20% | 55% |

More than half of the respondents also identified turnover of trained staff, absence of technology, insufficient funds for working on evaluation projects and lack of support from leaders and others as challenges to sustaining evaluation capacity. It is noteworthy that beyond the issue of time, which also has financial implications, most respondents indicated other concerns, even the need to maintain staff expertise, were only *somewhat challenging*. This highlights the need to make sure participant efforts to use their evaluation skills are supported (for example by making evaluation time spent a priority, providing additional training boosters when needed, updating technology, earmarking funds, ensuring access to evaluation professionals) so that the enhanced evaluation capacities can be sustained.

How do former participants think ECB training helped their organizations?

With very few exceptions, former ECB participants think their participation in evaluation capacity building training helped their organizations. A total of 99% indicated the training had helped their organization *some* or *a lot* to do better evaluation of programs, 95% indicated the training helped them use evaluative thinking skills in multiple aspects of their work, and 92% indicated participation helped them commission better evaluations.

Table 10. Percent of Trainees who Think Participating in Evaluation Capacity Building Helped Their Organization* do the Following *Some* or *A Lot*

| | Some | A lot | TOTAL N=97 |
|--|------|-------|---------------|
| Do better evaluations of programs | 42% | 57% | 99% |
| Use evaluative thinking skills in multiple aspects of work | 43% | 52% | 95% |
| Commission better evaluation | 43% | 49% | 92% |

* Organization = organization where respondent worked when they participated in training. Excludes respondents who indicated they didn't need help.



Conclusions and Recommendations

Results of this survey of former ECB participants, all of whom had completed their training between 6 months and 10 years ago, were very clear and uniformly positive. Former trainees reported that the training was worthwhile for them individually and that they continued to use evaluation skills and evaluation results, that they continued to view evaluation capacity as important to their organizations; and that they extended the training to others. Most respondents indicated the strategies, especially consultations from a professional evaluator and opportunities to conduct guided projects, were *very important*. Although former trainees acknowledged challenges to sustaining evaluation capacity, most notably time to work on evaluation projects, maintaining staff expertise, minimizing turnover of trained staff, and meeting technology needs, the former trainees were also clear that ECB has helped their organizations do better evaluation, use evaluative thinking and commission evaluation.

When asked specifically if there were evaluation activities organizations have not conducted since their training, despite the need to do so, about half said yes. Time and to a somewhat lesser extent money, were the most frequently cited reasons for not doing evaluation.

This project was designed to help determine in a systematic fashion whether former trainees continued to use what they learned and the capacities they developed. It was also designed to help ascertain whether enhanced evaluation capacity had organizational benefits and if there were unmet needs. Survey findings answered both evaluation questions and clarified, for the funding community, benefits that can be accomplished through support of ECB strategies, as well as key challenges organizations face when trying to use and sustain evaluation capacity.

Grantmakers considering evaluation capacity building support for their grantees should:

- Deem this ample, long-term evidence of key results. Investments in ECB can have multiple important payoffs. The training is well-received, capacities get used and can be sustained.
- Use the Bruner Foundation Evaluation Capacity Building Program Clearinghouse to compare different strategies to determine if those or related, modified efforts could work for them. Strategies that provide consultations from a professional evaluator and opportunities to conduct guided evaluation were most noteworthy.
- Use the appendix to this report and the evaluation results available in the Clearinghouse to compare results of longer-term more comprehensive projects such as REP and BEC to shorter-term more streamlined projects such as MWEI and OBPI.
- Invest in supports that help organizations build and sustain evaluation capacity by committing resources that allow staff time to work on evaluation projects, purchase technology and pay for extended help.

APPENDIX

Retrospective Survey Responses by Project

| | PROJECT | LOCATION | DATES |
|------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| REP | Rochester Effectiveness Partnership | Rochester, NY | January 1997 – June 2003 |
| BEC | Building Evaluation Capacity* | Hartford, CT | September 2007 – June 2013 |
| OBPI | Outcomes-Based Planning Institute | New York City, NY | December 2011 – May 2012 |
| MWEI | MetroWest Evaluation Institute* | MetroWest Region, MA | September – December 2011 |

Appendix Table A: Respondent Association

| PROJECT | CLASS | NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS* |
|---------|--|------------------------|
| BEC | Class of 2008 (9/07 – 6/08) | 18 |
| | Class of 2010 (9/09 – 6/10) | 16 |
| | Class of 2013 (1/12 – 6/13) | 26 |
| REP | Class 1 (1997 – 98) | 1 |
| | Class 2 (1998 – 99) | 6 |
| | Class 3 (1999 – 00) | 1 |
| | Class 4 (2000 – 01) | 5 |
| | Class 5 (2000 – 01) | 3 |
| | Class 6 (2001 – 02) | 2 |
| | Class 7 (2002 – 03) | 2 |
| MWEI | MWEI Institute 1 (Fall 2011) | 7 |
| OBPI | Outcomes-Based Planning (12/11 – 2/12) | 5 |
| | Outcomes-Based Planning (3/12 – 5/12) | 5 |

* Includes 6 partial responses from BEC participants, 2 from REP, 1 from MWEI and 2 from OBPI.

Expectations for response varied. Where most Building Evaluation Capacity (BEC) participants were still in the Hartford area and in contact with the trainer, having completed their training between 6 months and 5 years ago; most Rochester Effectiveness Partnership (REP) participants were dispersed and challenging to find due to employment changes, organizational change and retirement, not to mention drastic changes in electronic communications since REP had been an active project more than 10 years prior. MetroWest Evaluation Institute (MWEI) participants, like those from BEC were mostly locatable, but communication with Outcomes Based Planning Institute (OBPI) participants with whom the trainer had the least direct connection, was limited.

- **BEC.** The survey was administered to 89 individuals including the 60 who answered, 18 who did not answer, and 11 that were sent to unverified addresses. (Note that 10 additional former participants were identified as possible respondents but no current address

information was available for them – not even unverified addresses. This included participants who had retired, moved from the Hartford area, or left the sector after their organization closed.) The response rate for those with verified email addresses (60/78) was 77%.

To date there have been 34 organizations that have sent staff and leaders to participate in BEC (see list of participating organizations in the appendix). All but 5 of these organizations are represented in the survey. (Note that among the 5 un-represented organizations, two were closed – Family Life Education and Shelter for Women and the other three (Aids Project Hartford, CWEALF, and Noah Webster House) experienced key leadership/staff transitions.

- **REP.** The survey was administered to 63 individuals including the 20 who answered, 9 who did not answer, and 34 that were sent to unverified addresses. (Note that 69 additional former participants were identified as possible respondents but no current address information was available for them – not even unverified addresses. This included participants who had retired, moved from the Rochester area, or left the sector after their organization closed.) The response rate for those with verified email addresses (20/29) was 69%.

The 20 respondents represent 16 different organizations (among the 27 who were partners) including Action for a Better Community (ABC, 3), Community Place, Compeer, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Humane Society at Lollypop Farm, Learning Disabilities Association (LDA), Lifespan of Greater Rochester, Inc. (2), Neighborhood Housing Service, Norman Howard School, Planned Parenthood of the Rochester/Syracuse Region, Sojourner House, Urban League, Wayne ARC, and YWCA (2).

- **MWEI.** The survey was administered to 12 individuals including the 7 who answered, 4 who did not answer, and 1 that was sent to an unverified address. (This represents all former MWEI participants.) The response rate for those with verified email addresses (7/11) was 64%. At least one respondent from each participating agency answered the survey.
- **OBPI.** The survey was administered to 57 individuals including the 10 who answered. All OBPI addresses were non-verified. The 10 individuals who responded represented 7 different participating agencies (2 agencies had 2 respondents each).

Appendix Table B: Response by Project

| | BEC | MWEI | OBPI | REP |
|--------------------|-----|------|------|-----|
| Administered | 89 | 12 | 57 | 63 |
| Answered | 60 | 7 | 10 | 20 |
| Did not Answer | 18 | 4 | -- | 9 |
| Unverified Address | 11 | 1 | 47 | 34 |
| No Address | 10 | 0 | 0 | 59 |

Appendix Table 1. Background Information: ECB Retrospective Survey Respondents

| | BEC N=60 | MWEI N=7 | OBPI N=10 | REP N=20 | TOTAL N=97 |
|--|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| AFFILIATION | | | | | |
| Still with original organization | 88% | 100% | 100% | 60% | 84% |
| Transitioned to new workspace* | 12% | | | 40% | 16% |
| | | | | | |
| Have participated in other evaluation training since completing ECB | 34% | 0 | 25% | 21% | 28% |
| | | | | | |
| Level Of Involvement In Evaluation Now | 93% | 100% | 100% | 94% | 95% |
| Some | 60% | 43% | 75% | 68% | 62% |
| A lot | 33% | 57% | 25% | 26% | 33% |
| | | | | | |
| Respondents Have More Responsibility For Evaluation Since Participating In ECB | 47% | 43% | 50% | 65% | 51% |
| | | | | | |
| Participated in training . . . (numbers only) | | | | | |
| Before 2011 | 34 | | | 20 | 54 |
| Between 2011 and 2013 | 26 | 7 | 10 | | 43 |

Appendix Table 2. Quality of Training Experiences in Retrospect

| | BEC N=60 | MWEI N=7 | OBPI N=10 | REP N=20 | TOTAL N=97 |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Value of Initial Training* to Individual | | | | | |
| <i>Very Worthwhile</i> | 78% | 86% | 100% | 90% | 83% |
| <i>Somewhat Worthwhile</i> | 22% | 14% | 0 | 11% | 17% |
| | | | | | |
| Value of Initial Training* to the Organization** | | | | | |
| <i>Very Worthwhile</i> | 89% | 71% | 57% | 84% | 84% |
| <i>Somewhat Worthwhile</i> | 11% | 29% | 43% | 16% | 16% |
| | | | | | |
| Value of Alumni Group*** to the Individual | n=21 | | | n=10 | |
| <i>Very Worthwhile</i> | 86% | | | 80% | |
| <i>Somewhat Worthwhile</i> | 14% | | | 20% | |
| | | | | | |
| Value of Alumni Group*** to the Organization | | | | | |
| <i>Very Worthwhile</i> | 95% | | | 70% | |
| <i>Somewhat Worthwhile</i> | 5% | | | 30% | |

* Initial training includes classroom-based learning AND the evaluation project

** Organization = organization where respondent obtained ECB training

*** Alumni Group = continued evaluation study/projects for organizations that completed Initial Training. Includes only those who attended the alumni group.

Appendix Table 3. Skills* Former Trainees Continue to Use**

| | BEC N=60 | MWEI N=7 | OBPI N=10 | REP N=20 | TOTAL N=97 |
|--|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Incorporating evaluative thinking into your regular work | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Specifying evaluation questions | 98% | 86% | 87% | 100% | 96% |
| Identifying which data collection strategies should be used for evaluation | 98% | 86% | 87% | 100% | 96% |
| Developing surveys | 94% | 85% | 100% | 94% | 94% |
| Analyzing survey data | 90% | 86% | 100% | 100% | 93% |
| Developing evaluation designs | 92% | 71% | 87% | 94% | 91% |
| Presenting findings from evaluation | 90% | 100% | 75% | 94% | 90% |
| Planning for survey administration | 94% | 71% | 71% | 89% | 89% |
| Develop interview guides/protocols | 86% | 71% | 100% | 83% | 86% |
| Analyzing interview data | 81% | 43% | 83% | 94% | 81% |
| Writing an evaluation findings section in program reports | 82% | 71% | 57% | 94% | 81% |
| Analyzing record review data | 80% | 86% | 67% | 83% | 80% |
| Developing record review protocols | 74% | 86% | 67% | 83% | 76% |
| Writing evaluation reports | 72% | 70% | 62% | 94% | 76% |
| Conducting evaluation interviews | 75% | 43% | 83% | 78% | 73% |
| Analyzing observation data | 72% | 43% | 100% | 72% | 72% |
| Writing an evaluation plan section in program proposals | 73% | 57% | 50% | 82% | 72% |
| Developing observation tools | 68% | 43% | 86% | 67% | 67% |
| Conducting evaluation observations | 68% | 43% | 100% | 61% | 67% |

* Note this includes individuals who indicated they used the skill before training, and those who indicated they use the skill *sometimes or a lot*.

** There are differences between the groups which is reflective of the different emphases possible and intensities of training (again only REP and BEC included comprehensive evaluation projects and TA).

Appendix Table 4. Outcomes of Evaluation Capacity Building Projects

| % of Respondents who Indicated the Following were <i>Somewhat or Very True</i> : ECB training . . . | BEC N=60 | MWEI N=7 | OBPI N=10 | REP N=20 | TOTAL N=97 |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Taught me how to look at programs from different perspectives | 98% | 86% | 100% | 100% | 98% |
| Improved the quality of data our agency obtained | 98% | 86% | 87% | 100% | 96% |
| Helped my agency conduct better evaluations | 96% | 83% | 87% | 100% | 95% |
| Helped my agency understand why evaluation is valuable | 94% | 100% | 88% | 100% | 95% |
| Taught us the importance of involving multiple stakeholders in evaluation | 94% | 100% | 87% | 100% | 95% |
| Made my agency more responsive to our customers | 90% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 94% |
| Helped my agency incorporate evaluation practices into daily practice | 88% | 83% | 87% | 94% | 89% |

Appendix Table 5. Importance of Evaluation Capacity in Organizations

| % of Respondents who Indicated Evaluation Capacity is <i>Very Important</i> because it can . . . | BEC N=60 | MWEI N=7 | OBPI N=10 | REP N=20 | TOTAL N=97 |
|--|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Help organizations build evaluation into the program planning process | 91% | 100% | 87% | 91% | 93% |
| Help programs improve their quality of service | 91% | 100% | 87% | 100% | 93% |
| Help an organization revise programs based on real data | 89% | 100% | 87% | 100% | 92% |
| Help organizations develop instruments that measure the types of outcomes valued by stakeholders | 89% | 100% | 87% | 100% | 92% |

Note these questions used a three point response scale: *not important, somewhat important, very important*. The proportions shown above reflect only those who indicated a capacity was *very important*.

Appendix Table 6. Importance of Evaluation Capacity Building Strategies

| % of Respondents who Indicated the following aspects of the ECB training were <i>Very Important</i> . | BEC N=60 | MWEI N=7 | OBPI N=10 | REP N=20 | TOTAL N=97 |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Opportunities for consultations from a professional evaluator | 89% | 100% | NA | 78% | 87% |
| Opportunities to conduct guided evaluation during the training | 87% | NA | NA | 78% | 85% |
| Opportunities to continue learning new information about evaluation | 72% | 86% | 88% | 78% | 76% |
| Opportunities to continue guided evaluation projects through alumni study | 100% | NA | NA | 80% | 94% |

Appendix Table 7. RIPPLE! Participant Responses to Questions about Extending Evaluation Capacity

| | BEC N=60 | MWEI N=7 | OBPI N=10 | REP N=20 | TOTAL N=97 |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| To what extent have participants rippled or extended what they learned about evaluation? | | | | | |
| Not at all | 2% | 0 | 13% | 0 | 2% |
| A Little | 65% | 50% | 88% | 65% | 66% |
| A Lot | 33% | 50% | 0 | 35% | 32% |
| Percent who report they have done the following <i>some or a lot</i> . . . | | | | | |
| Shared evaluation knowledge or strategies with other staff (through meetings, training, projects, etc.) | 98% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 99% |
| Presented evaluation results /findings to internal staff or board | 93% | 100% | 86% | 100% | 94% |
| Presented evaluation results /findings to external audiences or stakeholders | 85% | 60% | 100% | 88% | 85% |
| Initiated a new program evaluation project | 83% | 80% | 40% | 78% | 79% |
| Continued or expanded upon your original evaluation project | 72% | 100% | 100% | 69% | 75% |
| Developed an organizational evaluation plan or policy | 73% | 40% | 100% | 59% | 64% |
| Increased the number of staff or staff hours dedicated to program evaluation | 60% | 60% | 67% | 71% | 62% |
| Collaborated with one or more other organizations on evaluation –related work | 38% | 60% | 50% | 61% | 46% |
| Purchased equipment, software or materials for use in an evaluation project | 36% | 40% | 75% | 41% | 40% |
| Hired an evaluation consultant to assist your organization | 24% | 60% | 50% | 29% | 31% |

Appendix Table 8. Percentage of Respondents who Agreed They use Evaluation Results for the Following, *Some or To a Great Extent*

| | BEC N=60 | MWEI N=7 | OBPI N=10 | REP N=20 | TOTAL N=97 |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| To assess quality of a program | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| To improve services or programs | 98% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 99% |
| To report to a funder | 98% | 100% | 100% | 94% | 97% |
| To get additional funding | 94% | 80% | 100% | 88% | 91% |
| To design ongoing monitoring processes | 90% | 100% | 100% | 94% | 91% |
| To assess implementation of a program | 90% | 100% | 100% | 89% | 91% |
| To improve outreach | 90% | 80% | 87% | 67% | 87% |
| To train staff | 73% | 80% | 87% | 67% | 73% |
| To eliminate un-needed services or programs | 83% | 60% | 100% | 89% | 15% |

Appendix Table 9. Percent of Respondents who Indicated the Following were *Challenging**

| | BEC N=60 | MWEI N=7 | OBPI N=10 | REP N=20 | TOTAL N=97 |
|--|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Time to work on evaluation projects | 98% | 83% | 100% | 100% | 98% |
| Turnover of trained staff | 73% | 33% | 86% | 83% | 74% |
| Technology for working on evaluation projects | 82% | 100% | 100% | 71% | 76% |
| Funds for working on evaluation projects | 90% | 100% | 100% | 89% | 93% |
| Insufficient organizational support from leaders/other staff | 56% | 20% | 100% | 44% | 55% |

*Includes those who indicated the above were *somewhat* or *very* challenging.

Appendix Table 10. Percent of Trainees who Think Participating in Evaluation Capacity Building Helped Their Organization* do the following *some or a lot*

| | BEC N=60 | MWEI N=7 | OBPI N=10 | REP N=20 | TOTAL N=97 |
|--|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Do better evaluations of programs | 98% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 99% |
| Use evaluative thinking skills in multiple aspects of work | 96% | 100% | 87% | 94% | 95% |
| Commission better evaluation | 88% | 100% | 87% | 94% | 92% |

* Organization = organization where respondent worked when they participated in training. Excludes respondents who indicated they didn't need help.