**AEA 2015 Think Tank**

**Evaluation “Street Smarts:” Strategies to Re-Frame Learning in the Context of Real-World Applications**

# Facilitators: Julie T. Elworth[[1]](#footnote-1) & Elizabeth Litzler[[2]](#footnote-2)

Session # 1236: 11/11/15, 6:15-7:00; Rm: Columbus IJ.

Challenging or unanticipated conditions can sometimes make us feel like everything thing we learned about how to do evaluation is wrong. Evaluation ‘street smarts’ can help evaluators in non-profit settings understand when to adjust their frames in the face of challenges, gather more information and context, and engage their organization in evaluation capacity building. This think tank is designed to help evaluators identify and prepare for evaluation experiences that don’t follow the book.

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| **Challenges** | **Indicators** | **Next Steps** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Higher Ed. Group looking at training in the sciences. Proposal for the grant. Working on teasing out a logic model. Trying to work w/ the team to tease out program expectations and processes. | -lack of a logical model  -funder hasn’t indicated what they want vis a vis outcomes  -different lenses of understanding between science profs and social science profs  -difficult structuring of monthly meetings  Contact ([emma.connell@wilder.org](mailto:emma.connell@wilder.org)) for more questions about these notes | Themes: lack of clarity, communication  lessons learned for the future. Context of the organizational structure is key: is it all internal? A large university w/multiple key players? An external client w. difficult point person? Adapt your strategy to fit relationship and other context |
| N/A | N/A | Important to factor in context- nature of organization |
| Can’t get the info needed very easily from program- get everyone on the same page with evaluation | Lack of logic model-  Working with “scientists”-different approach  Lack of funder clarity re outcomes | Build relationships & eval knowledge  Monthly meetings  Flush out logic model |
| Unresponsive program team- bottleneck | One person who holds data is unresponsive  Doesn’t meet timelines | Lay out implications for delays- frank conversation  Clear expectations from the beginning |
| Too ambitious of a proposal, outcomes and evaluation plan | Elements in proposal don’t line up  Unrealistic time frames  Unrealistic/ungrounded goals  Unsure how to measure outcomes  Shifting as you go | Setting boundaries and say we need to report with what you have  Visit and talk with providers to get everyone on the same page  Submit an evaluation revision in the renewal as you go for more realistic goals  Evaluator sets check ins w/project team  Line staff are part of evaluation conversation and planning  Stay flexible and rewrite the contract scope of work. |
| Too ambitious | N/A | N/A |
| N/A | Last pt info not collected  Political factors can effect evals  Grantees results don’t match the evaluation results  Addressing the “elephant in the room”  Client wanting a positive image of the program + PI spinning the results contrary to eval findings  Funders expect problems, but implicated parties don’t always want to share their mistakes | Willingness to admit mistakes, reflect and adapt  Committing to reflective practices and meeting frequently  Creative cross cutting teams between staff, management, and senior leadership to help leaders understand challenges for local staff.  Peer engagement  Getting to the right questions in developmental process. What are you learning and what’s changing in your organization? |

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