

**Evaluation Capacity Building with  
Community-Based Organizations:  
Results of a yearlong planning  
process & curriculum**

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# What is MACC?

■ **Metropolitan Alliance for Connected Communities**

■ **1999:** Metro-area community center leaders formed alliance to forge new ways of collaborating in programs and operations

■ Composed of 27 nonprofit human service agencies in the Twin Cities, MN

■ **2000:** Became 501(c)(3)

■ **Mission:** To unleash the connective power of communities to build their own futures



# History of relationship

- **2005-6:** Jean King and Boris Volkov (Evaluation Studies doctoral student) develop **ECB Checklist**
- **2006-7:** Jean connects with MACC via relationship with member agency
  - Jean and another Evaluation Studies doctoral student adapt **ECB Checklist** for MACC context

# MACC's Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) Project

- **2007:** MACC formalizes ECB Group that meet monthly to study, raise questions about, hold discussions around evaluation capacity building
- **2008:** Teams at two MACC member agencies meet regularly with Operations Director and Laura Pejsa (Evaluation Studies doctoral student), guided by adaptation of **ECB Checklist**
  - Laura volunteers time piloting the process, collecting dissertation data in the process
  - Teams finish year having completed ECB plans to implement following year

Shanker, Reich, Pejsa & King, 2009



# MACC ECB Curriculum

- **2008:** Laura is hired to develop written **ECB Curriculum** of tools, articles, activities, and other resources from pilot experience
  - Jean and Laura propose to extend ECB project, establishing potential for long-term relationship between MACC & University of Minnesota
- **2009:** Cindy Reich, Vidhya Shanker (Evaluation Studies doctoral students), and MACC's Operations Director begin engaging in process similar to 2008, but with three MACC agencies



# MACC ECB Curriculum, continued

- **Jan-May:** Cindy, Vidhya, and Operations Director further develop **ECB Curriculum**
  - Jean conducts two trainings on evaluation open to all MACC member-agency personnel
- **May:** MACC downsizes; cancels contract with U-MN

# Goals for 2009-10 participating agencies (and beyond)

- To make gains on integrating purposeful evaluation into all areas of their work
- To establish or improve existing infrastructure and processes for making quality evaluation routine, on-going practice
- To create written purposeful ECB plan, including considerations of sustainability
- To and build learning, fun, and socialization into evaluation processes



# Process for 2009-10 participating agencies

- Name ECB teams of members interested in evaluation and representative of organization
- Authorize teams to perform ECB work during regular working hours, adjusting time and duties accordingly
- Request full staff participation as appropriate
  - e.g., **Readiness for Organizational Learning & Evaluation Survey**, periodic evaluation workshops, reviewing logic models, contributing to ECB plan
- Budget to begin implementing ECB plan in 2010



# Challenges through the four frames of Bolman & Deal

## ■ Structural frame

- Role of Operations Director
- Role of doctoral students
- Definition of responsibilities
- Patterns of communication  
(also a political challenge)



# Challenges, continued

## Human Resources frame

-  Recruiting agencies to participate, even without direct costs to them (only staff time)
-  Developing relationships with agency teams



# Challenges, continued

## ■ Political frame

- Relationship between MACC and U-MN
- Decision-making by and role of MACC President



# Challenges, continued

## ■ Cultural frame

- Perceptions of “the university”
- Attitudes about and experiences with evaluation—perceived by some as empty ritual



# Some lessons learned

- Serving as external ECB facilitator requires considerable time, access
- Investing in ECB—though it ultimately saves financial and other resources—is a tough sell to agencies struggling on shoestring budgets
- The value of ECB is not obvious before participating in the process; but organizations are unlikely to participate without realizing its value
- Funders are well positioned to encourage better evaluation practice and ECB among nonprofits



# Questions?

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- Thank You!