# Building and Cultivating Internal Evaluation in the Not-for-Profit Sector: A Critical Reflection of Our Roles

Facilitators:

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# Expectations for roundtable participants:

- Identify some concrete obstacles to organizational learning

- Critically reflect on our challenges as internal evaluators

- Identify strategies and brainstorm new ones that might help to overcome identified obstacles

- Share information to help further inform the field about the state of internal evaluation and organizational learning within not-for-profit organizations

- Leave with 1 or 2 new goals for our own work and strategies to try out

# Agenda

- Understanding the need for internal evaluation
- Role of internal evaluators
- Challenges of internal evaluation
- Strategies to overcome the challenges for internal evaluation
- Where should we head next

# Evaluation in Not-for-Profits

- External evaluation
  - Primary evaluator: no internal capacity for evaluation or interest in complex evaluation design (for example, impact evaluation)
  - Consultant: staff and time available but need expertise

- Internal evaluation
  - Program staff members with some knowledge (or no knowledge): simple evaluations (for example, participation counts and satisfaction surveys)
    - Carman and Fredericks (2008): 80% relied on program staff
  - Staff members with knowledge and formal responsibilities for evaluation
    - Carman and Fredericks (2008): 4% had internal evaluators
    - Reed and Moriaru (2009): 13% had at least one staff member dedicated to evaluation

- Combination of external and internal evaluation

# Need for Evaluation

- Public funding requirements to measure progress and success of funded initiatives
  - For example, The Government Performance Results Act of 1993

- Private funding requirements to assure investors that money is well spent
  - For example, grant achievement goals

- Sophisticated not-for-profit organizations needs to understand and use their data
  - For example, performance monitoring and strategic planning

- "Telling the story" in order to raise money
  - For example, in an organization attempting to grow its programs

# Internal Evaluators

- Facilitators of the involvement of multiple stakeholders and the process of organizational learning
- Advisors to management
- Contributors to the strategic plan and vision of the organization
- Monitors of program quality
- Developers of useful data for reports for outside funders

# Challenge: Meeting accountability needs

- Staff misconceptions about evaluation processes
- Negative perceptions regarding use of evaluation findings (for example, not use or use to make radical decisions)
- Senior leaders' lack of understanding of evaluation data use
- Lack of program staff trust
- Divergent beliefs about doing research, reporting results, and raising money

# Challenge: Commitment of evaluation resources

- Not enough staff or time frequently reported as barriers

- Small budgets
  - 25% spend the recommended portion of overall budgets on evaluation (Reed & Moriaru, 2009)
  - 29% spend no money on evaluation (Carman & Fredericks, 2008)

- Lack of support for trainings or professional development
  - For example, because external evaluators cannot or do not want to teach program staff about evaluation

- Limiting evaluation to program monitoring
  - Should not be just "input and output"

# Challenge: Promoting a culture of evaluation and learning

- Need for both technical knowledge and knowledge of programs
  - Program and evaluation experts need to collaborate

- Lack of understanding and trust
  - Program staff need to know that evaluation is safe

- Insufficient communication and involvement of stakeholders
  - E.g., an evaluation of a health initiative in the UK was not successful in spite of the involvement and enthusiasm of several stakeholders

# Strategies for Day-to-Day Work

- Get staff buy-in and cooperation
- Involve program staff in evaluation design discussions
- Identify data needs that are critical to the program and times for reporting
- Discuss preliminary results with program staff
- Communicate findings and recommendations in non-threatening ways
- Trainings and conversations explaining what evaluation entails
- Internal guideline for evaluation work that considers the needs of all stakeholders
- Support of senior management staff

# Challenge: Expanding the role of evaluation in organizations

- Thinking primarily in terms of reporting and monitoring
  - Internal evaluators often play a limited role of gathering and reporting output data

- Over-emphasis on evaluation of outcomes
  - Technical assistance is therefore not always relevant
  - Other approaches may also be useful

- Need for evaluation "catalysts" leading to adoption and refinement
  - Stages of growth from crisis through full integration into organization

# Strategies for the field

- Advocacy for funding evaluation efforts

- Creation or expansion of intermediary organizations

- Networks of not-for-profits

# Guiding Questions

- What challenges have we, as internal evaluators experienced?
- What strategies have we used to respond to those challenges?
- What are our desired outcomes for internal evaluation?
- What preconditions need to be met to reach those outcomes?

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