**It matters who’s asking: lessons about evaluation as a change agent from two public radio newsrooms**

**AEA 2019**

**Overview**

This roundtable explores **two cases where evaluation generated a meaningful, transformative contribution in an environment where evaluators aren’t typically involved, and where there is little familiarity with evaluation – nonprofit newsrooms**. The conversation will explore **how evaluation can get a foothold** in spaces that grapple with evaluative questions, but don’t necessarily know how integral the work of evaluation can be. We’ll invite attendees to discuss **how asking and answering questions about value have contributed to their work**, and how the questions **can lead to learning**, **renewal, culture change, and deep impact**. In the process, we’ll also touch on a variety of topics relevant to the profession as a whole, including how to convince users that evaluation is much more than a requirement for philanthropic funding, but that it can help lead to changes that make the public service industries more essential to the communities they intend to serve.

**Who we are**

[**Yve Susskind**](mailto:yve@praxisassociates.com) ([**Yve@PraxisAssociates.com**](mailto:Yve@PraxisAssociates.com)) is an independent evaluation consultant who works with a small group of others through her company, [Praxis Associates](http://www.praxisassociates.com). Praxis supports organizations to think clearly about - and answer - important questions about what they do, how they do it, what is resulting, and whether what's resulting matters. Working in a wide variety of content areas, mostly with nonprofit and government organizations, Yve specializes in principles-focused and developmental evaluation, along with other evaluation and planning approaches, always with an emphasis on utilization. She and her colleagues often embed evaluation within the larger context of program and strategic planning and organizational development. From the summer of 2015 through 2017, Yve was the lead developmental evaluator for a project with [Journalism That Matters](http://journalismthatmatters.org) and the [Agora Journalism Center](https://agora.uoregon.edu) that articulated principles for, and examined impacts of, journalism and community engagement that supports healthy civic ecosystems. The [report is available here](http://journalismthatmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Journalism-for-Democracy-and-Communities-6.20.17.pdf).

[**jesikah maria ross**](mailto:jmross@capradio.org) **(**[**jmross@capradio.org**](mailto:jmross@capradio.org)**)** Senior Community Engagement Strategist at Capital Public Radio, the NPR affiliate in Sacramento, California. The project she is going to be talking about, Place and Privilege, investigates the history, politics and economics of Sacramento’s housing crisis. It included an hour-long radio documentary, an eight-part podcast, and ten community dialogue events that brought diverse residents together to share stories, listen to one another and explore solutions. On Place and Privilege, jesikah collaborated with a 30 member advisory group representing diverse experiences with housing affordability.

[**Elizabeth Dunbar**](mailto:edunbar@mpr.org) **(**[**edunbar@mpr.org**](mailto:edunbar@mpr.org)**)** is a reporter for Minnesota Public Radio News, where she covers the environment and climate change. In the past couple of years, she has been experimenting with different ways to engage audiences. The project she’ll share involved bringing together Minnesota farmers and urban consumers to talk about the future of agriculture in a changing climate through a closed Facebook group, in-person outreach at a farm show and reporting driven by audience curiosities and insights. The project also involved using various evaluation methods to measure impact.

[**Eric Garcia McKinley**](mailto:eric@theimpactarchitects.com)**, (**[**eric@theimpactarchitects.com**](mailto:eric@theimpactarchitects.com)**)** is a consultant with The Impact Architects, primarily working with media organizations and media funders. He previously worked at American Public Media Group as a Senior Research Analyst. Eric started using evaluation methods while at APMG, where he worked with Elizabeth on that engagement-centered project about food systems in Minnesota. He's also worked as an external consultant with jesikah, writing a summative evaluation of a project about suicide in a rural county outside of Sacramento.

**Roundtable process**

1. I’m going to interview the other three on the questions below for about 15 minutes total.
2. Then we’ll do a discussion, using a few prompting questions to get us started.

**But first,**

**A Few Key Terms**

*Developmental Evaluation*

Adaptive evaluation approach to support innovation, where evaluators are involved throughout the entire process, and learnings are applied while the work is ongoing.

*Impact Evaluation*

Collaborative evaluation approach that identifies an organization’s or project’s desired impact, maps out a path for achieving that impact, and establishes a framework for continued tracking and analysis of a project or organization’s impact so that it can.

*Engaged Journalism*

An inclusive, participatory practice that prioritizes a community’s information needs, creates space for the audience to collaborate with journalists in all aspects of the process and is dedicated to building and preserving trust between journalists and the public.

**Interviews**

1. **Why** was it **important to you** to do evaluation – how you came to decide to include evaluation and why it was important to you to do so. (ED)

* Elizabeth: It was important to figure out what to focus on and measure because didn’t want it to be a one-off. We were innovating, doing something completely different from what we usually do in our newsrooms.

1. **What was significant about *the way* that you did the evaluation**, maybe significant from the perspective of either the people involved in the project or the evaluation, or significant for your newsroom culture and norms? (the process, not it’s impact) (EGM, jmr)

* Eric: I was capacity in the building, didn’t know it was eval yet. Brought a lot of departments together, not just the engagement team - cross silo. Why that was important: de-emphasized “the story,” not having everything rely on the outcomes of the story. Not the go-to metrics. Being multi-departmental played a role in that.
* jesikah: Brought station leadership together in two lunch workshops (food), aligned around what we’d gain by doing eval. CFO participated and so was receptive when I came back for funding. And the team was invested because they were involved from start.   
  Built an eval team. Different types of expertise. 3 woman team. Nuance, useful data.

1. What were the **challenges, barriers, pushback** and **how did you** **address** those? (EGM, jmr)

* Eric: Supervisor was a stakeholder. So didn’t experience pushback. Had leeway to experiment. Challenge was learning on the fly. Getting people to be transparent about how they thought about success - revealing what people cared about, from page views to trust. Learnin
* jesikah: Time, band-width. Bringing in eval team would take work off my plate was wrong. It brought expertise, skills, but a formal rigorous eval took a lot of my time, about 25% over 3 months. Connecting dots, moving forward. You need inline staff who will have time to oversee and fully engage if you want meaningful and relevant data.

1. **What difference did the evaluation make**, what impact did it have, for example for your work, the work that takes place in your newsroom, among reporters in your organization, in the community that you serve? (ED)

* Elizabeth - transformative for me. Having someone like Eric who was thinking differently encouraged me to think differently and then what my impact as a journalist is. I wanted to measure the connections I am making as a J. Before it was only about the stories, the feedback online, the awards. This opened my eyes to other impact. The facebook group is still there and active. We created that. It opened doors for our organization (e.g., funding).
* Culture shift: Demonstrated the value and the trust. More people in the newsroom doing engagement. Long way to go.

**Fishbowl**

**2 empty chairs (plus jmr)**

**Whoever is in the chairs gets to talk**

**They’ll be talking about whatever questions they feel like talking about until someone changes the subject.**

**Here are some other possible questions:**

1. **How did the nature of each organization affect what you focused on in the evaluations, the way you did them, the context, etc.?**
2. **Elizabeth told us that “Adding evaluation led me to a new way to do journalism - renewed and redefined what I value in my work” Tell us more about how adding evaluation led you to understand and do journalism in a different way?**
3. **How have your values and the principles that guide how you do J changed as a result of having included evaluation in your work?**
4. **Objectivity - how do you think about objectivity when you are creating community?**
5. **Were the things you went in thinking were important to measure, what you found to be important to measure in the end?**

**Notes**

* Transparency is the new objectivity. I cover the environment and climate change, the future of ag in a changing climate. Most farmers acknowledged that the climate had changed. So everybody wanted to talk about what the future looks like.
* Why should journalists decide what to cover?
* It’s about building relationships and trying to get it to be inclusive as possible.
* Letting the audience lead the conversation - also helps you identify what your measuring stick might be.
* We chose a limited number of things we wanted to measure and still don’t know how to capture all of them!
* Now in each project I try to facilitate a process with my team to get clear on what the principles are as we approach a project. What came through to me is the importance and utility of guiding principles versus goals and objectives and they help communicate values and help make decisions and get the group aligned what we’re doing and why.
* Would have like to measure actual changes - “such as because of the discussion we’ve had in the FB group I now test my soil.” Did we connect anybody?
* We do anecdotally measure the impact of stories - do they measure change.
* Could do a pre-post: individual, relationships and community.
* There *are* methods to measure those kinds of complex impact - [contact us](mailto:yve@praxisassociates.com)!
* Having a team be part of making the eval plan helps alignment & quick decision making
* Clarifying principles w team & how they helped make decisions & align group.

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