



Social Impact Consultants

Discovering better ways
to solve social problems

Living Into Developmental Evaluation: Reflections on Changing Practice

Strategy, Stamina, and Synergy: Essential Elements for Engaging in Developmental Evaluations

*Panel Presentation at the
American Evaluation Association Annual Conference*

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Seattle, WA

November 4, 2011

Developmental Evaluation (DE) is Particularly Useful for Supporting Ongoing Learning in Complex Situations

Definition of DE

An approach to evaluation that is grounded in **systems thinking** and supports **innovation** by collecting and analyzing **real time data** in ways that lead to informed and ongoing **decision making** as part of the design, development, and implementation process. Michael Q. Patton

Developmental evaluation is emergent, learning-oriented, and adaptive

Organizations are Trying to Solve Different Types of Problems

Simple

The **right “recipe”** is essential but once you’ve discovered it, **replication** will get you almost the same result every time



Example:
Baking a Cake

Complicated

The right **“protocols and formulas”** are needed, as are high levels of **expertise** and training – **experience** is built over time to get to the right result, which can be repeated over time with the **expectation of success**



Example:
Sending a Rocket to the Moon

Complex

There are **no “right” recipes or protocols** that work in every situation. There are many **outside factors** that influence the situation, and every situation is **unique**. Experience helps, but in **no way guarantees success**



Example:
Raising a Child

The traditional approach in the social sector has been to treat problems as simple or complicated

In 2008, the Knight Foundation began a \$24M five-year initiative (Community Information Challenge) with Community and Place-Based Foundations

“The most basic problem is a broad decline in the number of education beat reporters. As news organizations have cut budgets, news rooms have seen their beat reporters’ responsibilities stretched to general assignment reporting, and their general assignment reporters covering stories that once constituted a beat.”

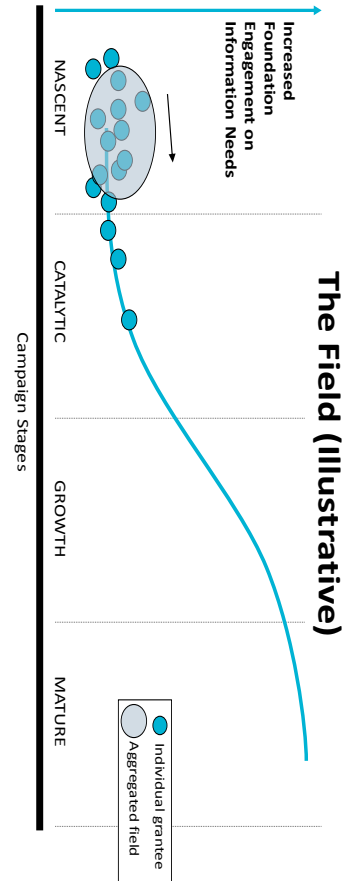
“27 states have no Washington reporters, reports Pew. The number of Washington reporters working for regional papers dropped from 200 in the mid-1990s to 73 at the end of 2008.”

“In Los Angeles, stories about local civic issues like transportation, community health, the environment, education and taxes, took up one minute and 16 seconds of the half hour.”

Primary goals of the KCIC:

1. To increase the engagement of community and place-based foundations in addressing community information needs
2. To create more informed and engaged communities

What Is the Knight Community Information Challenge (KCIC)?



Why Developmental Evaluation for the KCIC Initiative?

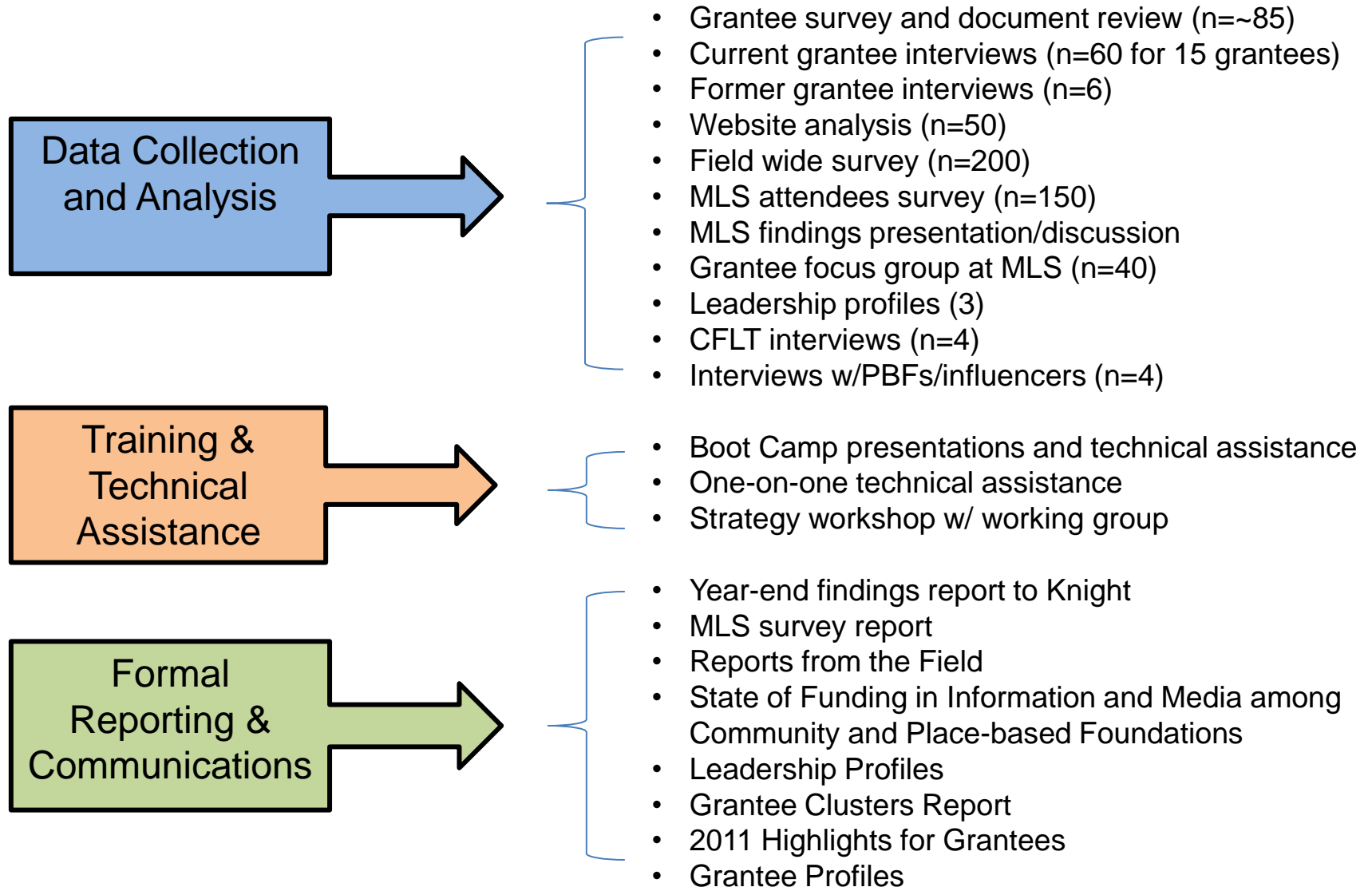
Key Characteristics of the KCIC

- Knight wants to build the field
- Experiment – let 1,000 flowers bloom; seed start-ups
- Desire to change community ecosystems of news and information
- New grantees added each year (cohorts)
- Diverse projects (no one ToC)
- Multiple partners/implementers
- Could not predict all possible outcomes
- Multiple activities and touch points with grantees
- Engagement in continuous learning
- Findings will inform future strategy

Key Characteristics of DE

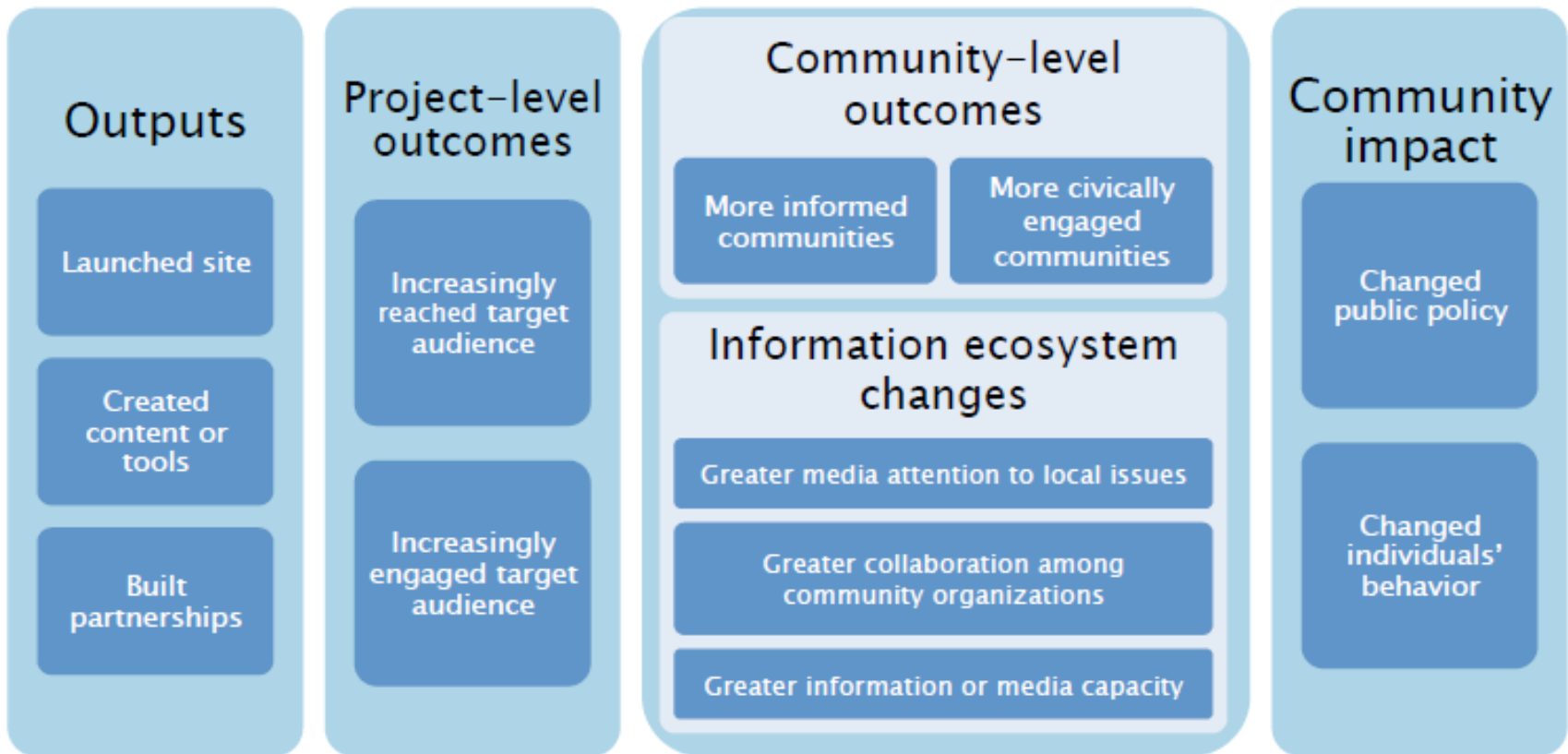
- Emergent
- Learning-oriented
- Adaptive, Flexible
- Responsive
- Ongoing Sensemaking
- Facilitative
- Reflective
- Systems oriented/lens
- Use and influence focused
- Attends to unanticipated consequences
- Multiple communication approaches w/ multiple audiences
- Participatory, collaborative

KCIC Evaluation Activities (2/11-2/12)



Evaluating Community Information Projects Is Difficult, in Part Because Each Project's Theory of Change Is Different

Figure 3. Outcomes Framework for Community Information Projects



Developmental Evaluation Leads to Strategic Questions



- Should Knight consider funding a more intentional **portfolio** of projects, foundations and communities?
- How could Knight provide better **strategic support** to foundations that may be interested in using information to make progress on a community issue?
- How could Knight better leverage its **other programs** to connect foundations with community information projects?
- How could Knight better **connect foundations** to one another to encourage learning?

The KCIC Developmental Evaluation In Action

Focus

To provide information on how well the CIC strategy is being implemented and to make adjustments along the way; to test the assumption that Community and Place-based Foundations are the right mechanism for creating new ways of helping citizens stay informed and engaged.

Continuous Learning

Information from data collection activities is provided using several formats, and engages the foundation and grantees throughout the year (e.g., check-in phone calls, working sessions, issue briefs, blog posts, executive summaries, PowerPoint decks, memos). The focus is on continuous learning and the use of evaluation findings.

Emergent and Adaptive Evaluation Design

An evaluation plan exists, but changes as new questions arise (from the data or elsewhere). This often results in revising instrument questions or adding/eliminating planned data collection methods. The evaluation is flexible and responsive to emerging issues and insights, as well as the evolving strategy.

Evaluator as Strategic Learning Partner and Facilitator

Evaluation team is positioned as a strategic partner. The team's role is to raise questions, challenge assumptions, collect and analyze data in timely ways, interpret and synthesize findings, facilitate learning, and inform strategic decisions and actions. The team interacts with a variety of client stakeholders (e.g., program staff, evaluation staff, communications team, other consultants).

Systems-Orientation

Evaluation questions and data reflect larger ecosystem of community information needs. Attention is being paid to others who may be influencing change, where there is momentum being built and by whom, how CFs are leading change in their communities.