Snapshot: Examples of Evaluation Capacity-Building Professional Development

Example #1: Learning Community in Action

The snapshot illustrates how participants can support each other within a well- established learning community in which trust has grown through shared grappling with meaningful issues and concepts. Here, practitioners from very different agencies are able to share their expertise, identify challenges, and explore solutions as colleagues in a professional learning community.

During the April 2014 session of the Bowne Foundation's *Evaluation Capacity Building Project*, representatives of participating agencies are working on creating logic models as a step in developing the measurement metrics of outcomes to be held in common across the involved programs.

Program Facilitator Kim Sabo Flores asks the group: "Did everyone bring your logic model -- and a copy to share? Let's start by sharing your logic model with a partner or small group, and providing feedback…."

Following is an excerpt of the discussion among a small group of participants from two organizations located in the same neighborhood. One organization has shared its *Logic Model* and asked for assistance, pointing to challenges in finding a useful curriculum.

Participant 1: *We want to build our own curriculum that focuses on South Asian young men and women [the majority of their program participants]. . . . the needs of young men have changed in the past four years. . . . We've used the [xyz] curriculum, but . . . .*

Participant 2 from the same program recounts the program's struggle: *We used to have truants, but now we have young men who go into high school with a good academic record, but then fall off the track, get in trouble, stop doing their school work, and get involved in drugs. Some are sole providers or contributors to the household. Some . . . are here alone without any support system, staying with an uncle or someone like that.*

Participant A from a different organization: *Your inputs are your curriculum. Your staff is an incredible input, also the cultural competencies. "South Asian" is an incredibly diverse group. What are all the cultures you encompass?*

Participants 1 and 2 quickly enumerate the cultures represented by their participants: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Guyana, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tibet, and Trinidad.

Participant 1: *Gender is very different for all of these cultures.*

Participant A: *There is a knowledge base you have. Even on that simplistic level, listing out the cultures. That depth of expertise on diverse populations is unique in this city. It is an input because* you *know something that the rest of us are guessing about, and that is important.*

Participant 2: *That's a good idea, to put our knowledge base in as one of our inputs. That's what we want to do with schools. One of our goals is to educate guidance counselors. . . . Young girls were getting married at 17 or 18 and the guidance counselors are horrified. That will lose the kids. They need professional development to be educated about South Asian cultures.*

Example #2: Impact on the Field

During the final session of phase one of *Evaluation Capacity Building* (June, 2014), seminar participants share their progress in developing logic models for their programs. In addition, participants from each program discuss the development of their logic models with the Executive Director (ED) of their agency. Session leaders Kim Sabo Flores and Anne Lawrence then engage the directors in relating their perceptions of the benefits and concerns regarding the creation of a common, cross-program and cross-agency instrument.

Kim Sabo Flores: *So now I am going to put all the EDs in the hot seat. We're going to ask all the EDs to sit around this table in the middle, and everybody else circle around them.*

We need to get to where our logic models overlap in order to find some common metrics. That's the exploration for the next year we have together. We want you to talk about the potential of such a shared metric -- your concerns, thoughts about resources needed, and communications.

ED #1: *The description of best practices is something that everyone can use as a common tool across the board.*

ED #2: *I remember distinctly from our first conversation, questions we had about what kind of metrics, and that we don't have the software and the reporting capability. This is what we do, it aligns with best practices. We are moving in the right direction. It was like a light bulb going off that we don't have to invest in all this software.*

ED #3: *To take it a step further, I'd like to take what we learn collectively in order to push back. We've been concerned about the prescriptive nature of the contracts and the way we are being told to work, which is counter to what we believe. Being able to say that we have a theoretical framework and research behind what we do is helpful.*

ED #4: *It worries me if it tends too much to be standardized and fit into boxes that maybe we don't fit. It needs to allow for what is unique and different to the programs. Preserving the diversity as well as what we have in common.*

Anne Lawrence: *That was my concern at the beginning. I didn't believe a common tool was possible. But as we went on, we found that there is so much that we shared. I've learned so much in these six months. It is only taking the responsibility of evaluating a small portion of your program, just that part that you have in common.*

ED #5: *I had the same thought. I think it is critical to share best practices and tools. Every organization is going to have to customize. Pulling something together to share and agree that it is sort of standardized and can be customized.*

ED #6: *Maybe you have this tool that could be customized for collecting data. We also pair with something like case studies, that provides more context. Situated learning and project based learning. How do we preserve those things as well as collecting data?*

Anne Lawrence: *That is why I am comfortable with it being* part *of the repertoire of your evaluation. But complementing it with what is unique about your program will be important. Many years ago, Dianne [Kangisser, first Bowne Foundation Executive Director] was looking for cross-site indicators, something that would look at programs across the city. This gives us a way to look at that. The other thing I like is that when you use evaluation to look at your*

practice, it gives you a way to look at whether you are actually doing what you say you are doing.

ED #3: *This gives you the potential to back up. You can only evaluate at the end. This gives you a way to back up to the beginning. How do you want to train staff?   We know the things we are going to evaluate, and then we know we have the best practices in place to bring about those results.*

ED #2: *To me there is real value in demonstrating to the rest of the field -- to funders, to city, state, and outside world -- that programs that do different things and have different models, can find some common indicators. I think there is real potential in doing this.*

By involving the organizational Executive Directors in a professional development format that encourages discussion regarding a cross-program evaluation tool, facilitators Kim Sabo Flores and Anne Lawrence lay the groundwork for engaging practitioners not only for efforts within their own programs – but also in influencing the practice and development of the field of out-of-school-time youth development.