



Helping Grantees Evaluate Their Work

Workshop on internal evaluation for grantees

SUMMARY

Between 2004 and 2009, staff at [OMG Center for Collaborative Learning](#) (OMG) in Philadelphia conducted a series of training workshops, provided follow-up technical assistance and held a "closing convening" to build self-evaluation capability among grantees of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). Three successive grants allowed OMG to pilot and revise its training strategy.

Key Results

- Project participants applied the training and technical assistance they received to a variety of evaluation activities, such as developing a theory of change (a strategy to achieve long-term goals), developing survey instruments, conducting surveys and focus groups and developing evaluation measures.
- Participants were generally satisfied with their self-evaluation training and indicated that it had increased their interest in, understanding of and knowledge about conducting an evaluation, as well as the likelihood that they would actually conduct one.
- OMG staff saw evidence of "evaluative thinking" among participants, particularly those who received the more intensive level of training provided as part of the third grant. They considered this change in mindset even more significant than the specific evaluation skills participants learned.

Funding

RWJF supported this project with three grants totaling \$460,200 to OMG Center for Collaborative Learning between October 2004 and October 2009.

CONTEXT

RWJF's Interest in the Area

Program evaluations are a cornerstone of RWJF's efforts to learn from its work. In any given year, RWJF conducts between 30 and 40 evaluations, accounting for about 5 percent of its annual grantmaking.

However, many RWJF grantees do not participate in evaluations, and many evaluations of national programs do not focus on outcomes for individual sites. "This project was part of a series of efforts to improve and advance the capability of individual ad hoc or [national program] grantees to produce high-quality evaluations," said Laura Leviton, Ph.D., RWJF special adviser for research and evaluation.

RWJF staff believed that improving grantees' ability to conduct internal evaluations would improve their organizational sustainability. "The ability to self-evaluate and to measure what effect you're having makes you a much stronger candidate going forward with funders," said Claire B. Gibbons, Ph.D., RWJF program officer. "We wanted to build evaluation skills among grantees who have not had exposure to evaluation. Developing self-evaluation capability is an investment in an organization."

About OMG

OMG Center for Collaborative Learning is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit research and consulting organization with expertise in philanthropic evaluation, strategic research and development and capacity building.

THE PROJECT

This project was funded through three successive grants to strengthen the capacity of RWJF grantee organizations to conduct self-evaluations.

- Nine RWJF grantee organizations participated in the pilot project (ID# 050180) in which OMG conducted two one-day workshops at RWJF's offices in Princeton, N.J., in January 2005. During a five-month follow-up, participants applied their training to evaluation projects at their organizations, with technical assistance provided by OMG via telephone and the Internet.
- Under the second grant (ID# 050689), eight grantee organizations attended a two-day workshop in January 2006, and 11 attended a two-day workshop in April 2006, both at RWJF's Princeton offices. The April training included eight organizations—seven project sites plus the national program office—involved in the Community-Based Childhood Obesity Prevention Program within the *Injury Free Coalition for Kids* national program.

Following these workshops, OMG again provided telephone and Internet follow-up, this time for six months, as participants applied their evaluation training to internal projects.

In response to suggestions during the pilot, OMG added a "closing convening" for grantees to share accomplishments and lessons learned and to receive input from OMG. "The relationships across grantees are really important, they learn from each other," said Emily Byrne Wykle, OMG project manager.

- Under the third grant (ID# 050690), OMG used two strategies:
 - A *less intensive approach*, similar to the earlier training sessions, involved a two-day workshop, six months of follow-up and a closing convening. Two cohorts participated in the workshops, which were held in Chicago. The first, held December 2007, brought together 11 staff members from RWJF national program offices. The second, held April 2008, involved 13 staff of *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Local Funding Partnerships* grantees. Local Funding Partnerships connects RWJF with local grantmakers to fund promising projects to improve the health of vulnerable people in their communities.
 - A *more intensive approach* involved three two-day workshops held over a five-month period, from October 2009 to February 2010, at the RWJF offices and attended by representatives of 15 grantee organizations in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. OMG provided limited technical assistance during the workshop period, and greater support for six months afterward.

OMG provided some of its technical assistance at the grantee sites and fostered the development of an informal tri-state network of grantees building evaluation capacity.

Among other topics, the workshops explored ways to:

- Structure a theory of change (i.e., a strategy for achieving long-term goals)
- Develop pathway maps to depict the paths for reaching those goals
- Determine short-term and long-term outcomes
- Select appropriate evaluation measures and design
- Create evaluation questions
- Conduct focus groups and surveys
- Analyze qualitative and quantitative data
- Communicate and use findings

RESULTS

OMG staff reported their results in reports to RWJF; many of the results reported to RWJF were drawn from project evaluations completed by participants.

- **With technical assistance from OMG, most of the grantees made significant progress in developing their own evaluation projects.** For example:
 - During the pilot project funded by the first grant, five grantees developed plans to conduct client surveys or focus groups, three began developing evaluation measures and data collection strategies and one was refining an evaluation strategy for a larger initiative. All but one had completed at least a significant portion of their planned evaluation activities five months after the workshop.
 - Among the 19 grantees involved in trainings funded by the second OMG grant, seven developed survey instruments and six developed an evaluation plan, at least in part. Less frequently, they had refined their evaluation plans, organized client focus groups and developed data collection tools or pathway maps. (Some grantees had multiple accomplishments.)
 - Among participants in the less intensive workshops under the third OMG grant, five developed a theory of change, four developed an evaluation plan and six developed a survey or assessment tools.
 - Among participants in the more intensive workshops, nine developed a theory of change, and nine developed an evaluation tool.

Less frequently, participants in both types of workshops funded by the third grant had conducted a survey or assessment, conducted focus groups or developed a database or a planning/management tool.

- **Satisfaction with the self-evaluation training was generally high.** For example, according to participant surveys:
 - All 12 participants in the pilot project funded by the first grant said the second day of the workshop "will further my ability to conduct evaluations of our work." Nine said the same thing about the first day.
 - Of 22 respondents who participated in the second set of trainings (some grantees sent more than one participant), 17 were "very satisfied" with the overall project. Most of the "somewhat satisfied" responses came from the obesity prevention grantees in *Injury Free Kids*.
 - All 10 participants in the more intensive training who completed surveys indicated they were "very satisfied" with the training, as did 11 of the 15 participants in the less intensive training who completed surveys.
- **Most participants indicated that the "closing convening" was a positive experience.**

- Staff from four of the eight grantee organizations that participated in the January 2006 workshop attended a closing session, and all reported being "very satisfied" with it.
- Twelve people, representing all eight participating sites of the Community-Based Childhood Obesity Prevention Program within the *Injury Free Coalition for Kids* program, attended a closing convening. Two-thirds of them reported that the convening "helped me learn more about self-evaluation" and "added value for me."

Six reported being "very satisfied" with the convening, four "somewhat satisfied" and two "not at all satisfied." OMG believes this may have reflected some confusion about the purpose of the session, since the agency was, separately, evaluating the *Injury Free Kids* national program for RWJF.

- **Most participants who received self-evaluation training gained knowledge as a result:**

- Participants in the pilot project and the second OMG set of trainings generally reported "some increase" in their interest in, understanding of and knowledge of how to conduct evaluations, and the likelihood that they would conduct an internal evaluation in the future.
- Participants in the final round of OMG trainings typically said their interest, understanding and knowledge had "increased a lot" (the data did not distinguish here between the more and less intensive training).
- Some of the obesity prevention grantees indicated they had derived less benefit from the training than other participants. OMG staff believe this may reflect their perception that the training was an RWJF requirement, not a choice, the pressure of other grant obligations and their prior evaluation training, which may have made this additional training seem redundant.

- **OMG staff saw evidence of increased "evaluative thinking" among participants, particularly those who received more intensive training.** This was apparent in the questions participants asked at the closing convening about their programs, their data-collection strategies and their ideas about the use of data.

OMG considered the indication of a developing mindset for evaluation even more significant than the skills they were developing along the way.

For examples of the evaluation projects, see the [Appendix](#).

Conclusions

Both the more intensive and less intensive models for training have specific strengths; RWJF and OMG staff believed the three-part model—workshop, follow-up technical

assistance and closing convening—worked well with either approach. "It is good to do both," said Program Officer Gibbons.

With the more intensive training, "greater progress was made in developing participants' evaluative thinking skills," according to an OMG report. OMG staff was able to explore a broader range of evaluation methods in depth during the workshops, and participants became more invested in one another's work and could provide more nuanced feedback. "We hadn't done this before and didn't know if it would work," said Gibbons. "We found there was demand for it and good participation throughout."

An advantage of the less intensive training was its appeal to more grantees because of the more limited time commitment. "While the content is not as deep as that of the more intensive training, it provides the necessary foundation in evaluative thinking that can potentially shift organizational practice without requiring a year-long commitment," noted OMG staff.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **When selecting organizations for self-evaluation training, consider whether their staff members have time to apply what they learn during training.** Lack of staff time was one of the greatest challenges to participants' ability to implement their self-evaluation projects. Including more than one representative from each organization increases the likelihood that new learning will be used. (OMG staff and OMG Project Manager/Wykle)
2. **Select participants who have a specific short-term evaluation goal in mind before they come to the training workshop.** Afterwards, they are more likely to engage quickly in an evaluation project since it is fulfilling an identified need. (OMG staff)
3. **Always involve an RWJF program officer in selecting grantees to participate in self-evaluation training.** The program officers know best which grantees can afford the staff time to attend the training and to apply the knowledge to a follow-up project. (OMG Project Manager/Wykle)
4. **If possible, include grantee organizations that already have some evaluation capacity.** That way, participating staff have resources to draw upon when they apply their training. "The most successful participants are from the larger nonprofits that have some evaluation capacity," said Wykle.
5. **Organize trainings for participants who have something in common, and then design the training to fit the specific needs of that cohort.** Geographic proximity is useful because it allows grantees to stay connected after the training. One training involved only staff from RWJF national program offices and another was just grantees from RWJF's *Local Funding Partnerships*. "Having some commonality across grantees helped move the work forward," said Wykle.

AFTERWARD

This project ended with the completion of the third grant (ID# 050690).

Continuing its efforts to improve self-evaluation capacity, RWJF now offers [evaluation guidance](#) to grantees on its websites that includes:

- A [description](#) of RWJF's approach to evaluation
- A [guide](#) to handbooks and primers on evaluation
- An online [guide](#) for qualitative evaluation
- A variety of other [evaluation tools](#)

OMG staff continues to provide some evaluation training to other RWJF grantees— "there are little pieces of this project in a lot of other projects," said Wykle. For example:

- Two grants to OMG (ID#s 063405 and 067963) help provide national program offices in RWJF's Human Capital Portfolio with tools to improve their capacity to self-evaluate.
- OMG is working with RWJF's [Evaluation Fellowship Program](#) to train fellows who are underrepresented in program evaluation (including ethnic and racial minorities, first-generation college graduates and people from low-income communities).

Report prepared by: **Mary B. Geisz**

Reviewed by: Karyn Feiden and Molly McKaughan
Program Officer: Claire B. Gibbons, Laura C. Leviton
RWJF Team: Enterprise Level

APPENDIX

Examples of Evaluation Projects

Leadership for Healthy Communities, National Program Office

RWJF's *Leadership for Healthy Communities* is a \$10 million national program designed to support local and state government leaders in efforts to reduce childhood obesity through public policies promoting active living, healthy eating and access to healthy foods.

Staff from the national program office located at Global Policy Solutions, a Washington policy consulting firm, developed and implemented a "social network analysis" to identify and describe existing policy-maker networks that provide peer support for policy leaders who support active living and healthy eating policies. During the follow-up period, staffers:

- Developed and fielded a survey of policy-makers with whom they work
- Partnered with OMG to analyze the survey data
- Developed a report detailing findings from the study

From Prison to Parenthood, Maternity Care Coalition, Philadelphia

From *Prison to Parenthood* is a collaboration between a large prison and the Maternity Care Coalition in Philadelphia that helps women transition successfully to parenthood after incarceration. RWJF's *Local Funding Partnerships* program provides support for this project.

Maternity Care Coalition staff, who participated in the more intensive training, developed a theory of change, an evaluation plan and a structured interview to identify the factors that determine whether mothers who gave birth while incarcerated, or shortly afterwards, breastfed their infants. Coalition research and evaluation staff worked with OMG staff to analyze data from the first 25 interviews and identify trends in order to inform programming and staff training.

Safety Counts, South Jersey AIDS Alliance

Safety Counts, a prevention program of the South Jersey AIDS Alliance, offers an intervention to help drug-using individuals define their risk-reduction goals and supports their efforts to meet those goals.

As participants in the more intensive training, staff developed a theory of change and an evaluation plan. The plan included a database of demographic and programmatic factors that might explain why many clients were unable to complete the Safety Counts program.

Staff used this database to train others at the AIDS Alliance about using data to improve programming. They also met with Safety Counts' primary funder to explain how they were using data to help determine why the project was not functioning effectively and were encouraged by the funder to identify another approach.