REAL-TIME LEARNING FOR SOCIAL INNOVATIONS:

FACILITATING EVALUATION AND STRATEGY LEARNING CIRCLES

PRESENTATION

FOR

MATAN/UNITED WAY ISRAEL

by

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I.   PRESENTATION OUTLINE

Evaluation and Strategy Learning Circles: Definition and Purpose

The Evaluation and Strategy Learning Circle (ELC) is a shared study experience whose purpose is to inform strategic learning and decision-making. The ELC is an integral part of an organization's strategic learning approach. It provides iterative opportunities for the organization's leadership, project staff, and participants to examine real-time data, reflect on the strategic implications of findings, and identify action steps.

This "how to" session is illustrated through the case example of the Community Health Advocate (CHA) project. The CHA project is funded and staffed by a philanthropic organization, the Comprehensive Health Education Foundation (C.H.E.F.), located in Seattle, Washington. A brief summary of the project and its Theory of Change can be found at the end of this handout.

Setting the Stage for an ELC

Initial steps that prepare an organization for engaging with an ELC include:
1.   Start with Appreciative Inquiry
2.   Articulate a Theory of Change
3.   Embed Learning Circles

Convening and Facilitating the ELC

The Learning Circles are convened quarterly, for two-hour sessions. Each session follows the same format**.**

Preparing for the Learning Circle
1.   Identify one salient strategic question
2.   Prepare agenda
3.   Assign data reporting tasks
4.   Collect Independent findings

Facilitating the Learning Circle
1.   Set the stage for reflection
2.   Relate progress towards outcomes
3.   Review new data
4.   Discuss strategic implications
5.   Capture action steps

After the ELC: Applying Data to Strategy

The ELC discussion informs ongoing decisions about which aspects of the project to continue and which to cut; uncovers new areas for project development; identifies opportunities for strategy changes; and surfaces areas where further clarity and new thinking is needed relating to the scope of work and overall project direction.

II.   BACKGROUND NOTES

Following are some background notes which may be of interest. First, I included some insights on the use of strategic learning from the cutting edge thinkers. These papers are all available for download as well through the Center for Evaluation Innovation. Second, I added some background on the CHA case example to provide a bit more context for those who are interested.

A Few Insights on Evaluating Social Innovations and Strategic Learning

Evaluation Strategies for Strategic Learning

"Evaluation for strategic learning is the use of data and insights from a variety of information-gathering approaches—including evaluation—to inform decision making about strategy. It is evaluation with a specific objective—improving strategy, in the same way that some evaluations aim to demonstrate impact. Different evaluation approaches, including developmental, formative, and summative evaluations, can be used for strategic learning." (Williams, Anna. *Evaluation for Strategic Learning: Assessing Readiness and Results*. Center for Evaluation Innovation: 2014, in press, p.1)

"Foundations increasingly are adopting the concept of strategic learning to describe their efforts to incorporate reliable data and ongoing reflection into their social change strategies. This concept is particularly important for those strategic philanthropists who recognize that difficult problems often require transformative solutions, and who, in response, are adopting dynamic approaches to social change that think big and aim high. Their strategies are often complicated—i.e., with multiple causal paths or ways of achieving outcomes—and complex—i.e., emergent, with specific goals and activities that develop while the strategy is being implemented.

Foundations that take on these strategies must be willing to live with uncertainty and acknowledge that their plans, no matter how well laid out, will likely shift as the circumstances around them evolve. Strategic learning promises that the lessons that emerge from evaluation and other data sources will be timely, actionable, and forward-looking, and that strategists will gain insights that will help them to make their next move in a way that increases their likelihood of success. [1]" (Coffman, Julia, and Beer, Tanya. *Evaluation to Support Strategic Learning: Principles and Practices*. Center for Evaluation Innovation: 2011, p.1)

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[1] Rogers, P. (2005). Evaluating complicated—and complex—programs using theory of change. The Evaluation Exchange, 11, 13.

<u>Evaluation and Social Innovation</u>

"The front edge of the philanthropic sector has spent the last decade experimenting with innovative grantmaking in the hopes of triggering significant and sustainable change. But the sector's approach to evaluation is not keeping pace with these innovations. In many cases, traditional evaluation approaches fail to meet the fast-paced information needs of philanthropic decision makers and innovators in the midst of complex social change efforts. At worst, the application of traditional evaluation approaches to innovative change initiatives may even decrease the likelihood of success because they restrict implementers to pre-set plans that lose their relevance as the initiative unfolds.... A parallel trend intended to improve grant makers' effectiveness is the sector's attention to strategic philanthropy. Undoubtedly, the core principles of strategic philanthropy (e.g., clearly articulated goals, a plausible theory of change, well-aligned partners and grantees, attention to performance metrics, and evaluation to measure progress against desired outcomes) have led to sector-wide improvement in performance. However, we are witnessing that the practical implementation of these principles can often work against social innovation, resulting in "calcified" social change strategies as innovators become beholden to plans and metrics that don't evolve in response to the dynamic context. This can have the unintended consequence of acting as a drag on, if not completely snuffing out, innovation." (Preskill, Hallie, and Beer, Tanya. *Evaluating Social Innovation*. FSG and the Center for Evaluation Innovation: 2012).

Community Health Advocate Case Background

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. (World Health Organization[2])

The Comprehensive Health Education Foundation (C.H.E.F.), located in Seattle, Washington, has served as a leader in health education since 1974. In 2011, the foundation transitioned its long-standing focus to a new content area: community-based health solutions. Its signature piece of this work, the Community Health Advocate (CHA) project, is a community empowerment model designed to engage low-income housing residents in improving their own health, and the health of their community, through forging and strengthening individual connections and community networks. The project theory of change is grounded in encouraging norm and behavior changes through a peer–to-peer model, a concept which has gained traction in both domestic and international development settings. Lessons learned from the first three years of the project are currently being applied to replication sites around the state. The Theory of Change Roadmap is included as the last page of this handout.

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[2] Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

III.   PRESENTER INFORMATION

Carolyn Cohen is the owner of Cohen Research & Evaluation, LLC, based in Seattle, WA. She works collaboratively with clients, using strategies such as Evaluation and Strategy Learning Circles and Appreciative Inquiry to build evaluation capacity, facilitate the use of results for strategic learning, and effect social change.

Feel free to connect with Carolyn on LinkedIn at http://www.linkedin.com/in/cohenevaluation , or to contact her at cohenevaluation@seanet.com .

COMPREHENSIVE
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Community Health Advocate Theory of Change

IMPACT

⬤ **Low income housing residents have improved health and a better quality of life.**

Evaluate and Improve

Ongoing research and evaluation, internal learning circles, knowledge exchange with other model projects and external audiences

OUTCOMES

6–10 Years

CHA model residents demonstrate improved health outcomes
- Healthy lifestyles are a norm
- Reduced chronic disease rate
- Increase in social network connections
- Engaged in healthy living support network

CHA project serves as model
- Successfully replicated/adapted
- Nationally recognized
- Cost effective

Salishan CHA project is sustainable
- Supportive policies and practices in place (THA, organizational, other public policies)
- Funding mechanism established

C.H.E.F. informs organizations, policymakers, and researchers working at the nexus of health and housing

3–5 Years

CHAs spearhead community change
- New projects in place (e.g., health fairs, community gardens)
- CHAs support and mobilize residents to advocate for health and safety infrastructure

Social networks contribute to health changes
- Residents advocate for policy and systems changes that support healthy lifestyles
- Residents support one another's healthy lifestyles

Salishan residents adopt healthy lifestyles
- Increase in health awareness
- Increase healthy choices

C.H.E.F. influences policy and programmatic changes to promote the health of low income housing residents

1–2 Years

CHA project is in place
- Social networks/natural helpers identified (ongoing)
- CHAs recruited, trained, competent
- CHAs initiating individual and community activities

CHA project is known and respected in Salishan and relevant communities
- CHAs sought out by residents and organizations
- Project is visible in community

CHAs adopt and model healthy lifestyles
- Increase in health awareness
- Increase healthy choices

Community networks and leaders that impact Salishan are supported by C.H.E.F.

STRATEGIES

Establish C.H.E.F. Credibility in THA Community

Identify Relevant Networks/Natural Helpers (social, geographic, ethnic/language spoken)

Forge Partnerships (with Housing Authority, DOH, funders, e.g., Greater Tacoma Community Foundation, ethnic-based CBOs, health department)

Pilot and Support Salishan CHA Model (identify, recruit, train, support CHAs)

Build Community Capacity/Infrastructure within Salishan (3–5 year timeframe)

Raise Awareness of Salishan Model (3–5 year timeframe)

Replicate/Adapt CHA Model (3–5 year timeframe)

RESOURCES

Personnel C.H.E.F. coordinator, other C.H.E.F. staff

CHAs

Partnership/In-kind Support Local health departments, nearby community health clinics, housing authorities, other nonprofits

Funding C.H.E.F., philanthropies, DOH, partners

THA Community Members

C.H.E.F. Board Members

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KEY
- 🟨 Community/Systems Change
- 🟩 Individual Change
- 🟧 C.H.E.F. Capacity Building