DialogWorks
353 Bartlett Street
San Francisco, CA 94110
415.824.8890
www.dialogworks.com

Impact Measurement and Evaluation

Overview

Impact evaluation measures and assesses an organization's impact. It puts in place quantitative metrics to assess progress on an organization's mission. It goes beyond measuring outputs to measure outcomes. For example, going beyond counting attendance at a workshop to look at the down the road affects on the attendees.

Why Impact Evaluation

Provide insight to inform programmatic, managerial and financial decision-making, in order to increase impact.

Demonstrate effectiveness to existing funders and to potential new funders. There is increasing pressure on nonprofit organizations, by funders, government and other stakeholders as well as rating agencies, to measure, report and improve results.

Value is not just in reports and numbers that are created but also the process: clarifying goals, identifying desired outcomes, making assumptions explicit, identifying success factors and risks.

In many situations, measuring impact cannot be boiled down to a crisp black and white number. (Unlike for-profit businesses, which rely heavily on profit.) However, in addition to the value of impact metrics themselves, just the process of considering impact evaluation can help clarify desired outcomes, make assumptions explicit and identify success factors and risks.

What We Do

Work with NPOs to identify impact metrics and put in place systems and processes to collect and utilize these metrics.

Four step process:

1. Assessment

   Discovery on current situation: organizational mission, programs, operations, future plans, existing data, technology systems, current measurements and reporting systems.

2. Design

   One piece of this is metric identification/design. We create a logic diagram that shows the links between program inputs, products and services provided and outcomes. Metrics (quantities, costs, values) are attached to each element.

   The other piece is system design: types of users, usage requirements, data collection, databases and technology, reporting and analysis tools.

3. Development

   Implementation, testing and deployment: data and technology systems, user interfaces, reports and dashboards, integration with other systems and databases, operational processes, documentation.

4. Operation

   Training and support, program operation and adjustments/enhancements.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will I need to spend a lot of time educating you about our programs?

We appreciate that most nonprofit organizations are stretched very thin and this would be yet one more thing. While we do need some face-time to discuss the overall effort and your programs and then follow-up discussions, we do most of our work independently.

Will measuring impact be a burden for our staff, partners and anyone else that might have to be involved?

A key aspect of our work is to create something that is actually used. If the impact measure system requires onerous effort by all involved then it will not be used. So usability in the real world of your organization is a key requirement. Our work is done for the real world, not some utopia with unlimited staff, money and other resources.

Will impact evaluation provide all the answers?

No. But it is one important criteria that can be brought to bear on decision-making, along with other hard data, advice and intuitions.

Can you just tell us what to measure?

Every organization is different in terms of mission, goals and resources. We don't just come in with answers, we need to understand your situation and create an impact measure program that will work for you.

How do you measure non-quantitative or vague goals such as quality of life?

Unlike profit and loss, there is no definitive method for measuring what are, at a high level, fairly qualitative characteristics. That said, there are proxies and established forecasting methods that can be used to measure what might appear to be fully subjective characteristics.

How do I know if it's the right time to measure results?

We belief that it's always the right time. If you are at the beginning of a program, it is a good time to consider how your desired results can be measured and begin to put the necessary processes and data collection system in place. If your organization and programs are more mature, certainly it would be good to have information about how things are working relative to your goals.

No matter where you are, our approach is "crawl, walk, run." Everything that you might want or that could be measured does not have be done immediately, you get started, get a bit of a foundation in place, and go from there.

Will an impact evaluation program make me look bad?

We all have a fear of being measured and judged. On the other hand, we are curious about what is working and why. And in whatever we undertake, we desire to good a good job and improve. Our goal is to provide you with some data and tools to help provide advice as you run your programs.

Who controls impact data and reports?

You decide how to use and share this information. In most organizations the executive director makes decisions about access to data and reports, by staff, board members, donors and anyone else. And this situation is no different.

How much will this cost?

We need to discuss your situation and then we can provide a proposal for you to consider. With a project description in hand, we could approach your funders about supporting the project.