

Evaluation Capacity  
& Evaluative Thinking  
in Organizations

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## About the Bruner Foundation

**F**ounded in 1963, the Bruner Foundation has continued to adhere to farsighted funding strategies which have influenced national policy and practice in health care delivery, Holocaust studies, education, non-profit evaluation methodologies, organizational effectiveness and the urban built environment.

In its early years, the Foundation strategy was to support innovative programs that challenged existing social patterns and introduced new models of practice. More recently, the Foundation has developed and continues to direct innovative programs of its own that have established new standards of practice in their respective fields.

The Foundation led the Rochester Effectiveness Partnership/REP (1996-2003), the Evaluative Thinking in Organizations Study (ETHOS 2003-2004) and the development of Evaluative Thinking Assessment tools. These initiatives have resulted in the creation of new models for improving the effectiveness of non-profit service delivery.

Similarly, the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence, founded in 1987, is dedicated to discovering and celebrating urban places that are distinguished by quality design and by their social, economic and contextual contributions to the urban environment.

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**KIM SABO, PH.D.**, independent consultant also contributed to this publication. Dr. Sabo served as a REP Evaluation Partner from 2000 – 2003 and as an ETHOS Evaluation Partner.

**ANN MARIE COOK**, Executive Director of Lifespan also contributed to this publication. Mrs. Cook originally participated in this work as a Class 5 REP trainee (while serving as the Chief Operating Officer and VP for Programs.) She and her organization also participated eagerly as ETHOS non-profit partners.

## Foreword

Thomas E. Backer, PhD  
Human Interaction Research Institute

**E**valuation Capacity and Evaluative Thinking in Organizations is a rich and detailed account of the work of two innovative programs for community change, both based in the Rochester, New York area. Developed over ten years with the participation of many partners, both programs have potential for inspiring change in other communities. And both go far beyond the realm of evaluation, or even that of capacity building because they present a distinctive way for grantmakers and nonprofits to work together over time to produce significant results for their communities.

To realize that potential, community leaders reading this report must consider how these approaches fit with local priorities and environments. A careful custom-tailoring is always essential to “transfer the technology of change” effectively from one setting to another (Backer, 1995). REP and ETHOS each contain strong concepts and promising practices that can be used in new places – but adaptations will be needed to reach local goals for building evaluation capacity and evaluative thinking. Input from funders, nonprofits and evaluation professionals in each new setting can help greatly with such adaptations, while maintaining essential fidelity to the Rochester models, which have been shown to work. In fact, that local input from community partners, brought to the table as equals for an ongoing process of change, is at the heart of what has made these approaches successful!

In addition, potential users of the REP and ETHOS approaches can benefit from understanding the larger national context which influenced the initiatives and which continues to influence the fields of philanthropy and nonprofit management.

\* Since the early 1990s there has been considerable growth in the national movement to promote evaluation in foundations (see Boris, 1992 for an early appraisal). The pioneering Grantmakers Evaluation Network is now

part of Grantmakers for Effective Organizations – a merger symbolizing the close relationship between evaluation and capacity building that is so critical to REP and ETHOS. In addition, the Evaluation Roundtable coordinated by Patti Patrizi periodically brings together evaluation staff of foundations across the country to examine critical issues in evaluation for philanthropy.

\* Overall developments in evaluation approaches, many of which date back to the 1970s, and now include national professional associations like the American Evaluation Association, as well as an extensive literature relating to conceptual approaches and instrumentation. Some of these approaches have been adapted for work in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors.

\* Approaches to participatory evaluation pioneered by such evaluation leaders as Michael Quinn Patton (an ongoing voice in the Rochester work), Abe Wandersman and David Fetterman, have fundamentally reshaped how we think about the whole process of evaluation. They bring those whose work is being evaluated, and the community at large, into the decision process about how evaluation is conceptualized and conducted (Fetterman, Wandersman & Kaftarian, 1996; Patton, 1986). These approaches also are at the center of the Rochester effort.

\* There is a growing body of work on how to create and sustain community collaborations of all sorts, involving nonprofits, government, private funders and others (see Asker & Weiss, 2003; Backer 2003). Such collaborations are widely valued, but difficult to create and sustain. For that reason, there is increasing pressure to evaluate the process and outcomes of collaborations, as summarized in a recent book, *Evaluating Community Collaborations* (Backer, 2003).

\* There is also a growing interest from both philanthropic and nonprofit organizations in becoming learning organizations – using methods from related work from the corporate sector, such as Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline* (see Backer & Barbell, 2005).

\* There is an emerging effectiveness movement in philanthropy, in which foundation leaders as well as policymakers and stakeholders are looking more specifically at how foundations can increase the impact of their grantmaking and other activities (see Patrizi, Spector, Backer & Freedman, 2005).

\* Increased Federal and state regulation and oversight, which compels interest in evaluation in ways not imaginable even five years ago, before U.S. Senator Grassley and others started their quest to insure that foundations are more accountable for their use of funds held in the public interest.

In sum, the mission of the REP and ETHOS programs, and the decade of community change work in Rochester reported here, is to put the local work of philanthropy and nonprofits into the larger frame of evaluation and evaluative thinking, so that better results can be achieved. This work is informed both by theory and national trends which provide an overarching context and framework. For those who may find value in applying the learnings reported here in their own environments, the rest of the context for change is what you bring from your own community, just as our Rochester colleagues did from theirs.

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## Acknowledgments

**T**his monograph both details and summarizes the work of more than 150 partners in Rochester, New York who studied and learned together about participatory program evaluation, evaluation capacity building and evaluative thinking.

To each of the participants, partners in a long and rewarding journey, we thank you for your willingness to travel with us, to take risks, to speak truth.

Special thanks to Emily Axelrod from the Bruner Foundation and Annette Weld from the Halcyon Hill Foundation for your editorial comments. And, to Tom Backer from Human Interaction Research Institute, our thanks for your wise counsel in the structure and content of the paper.

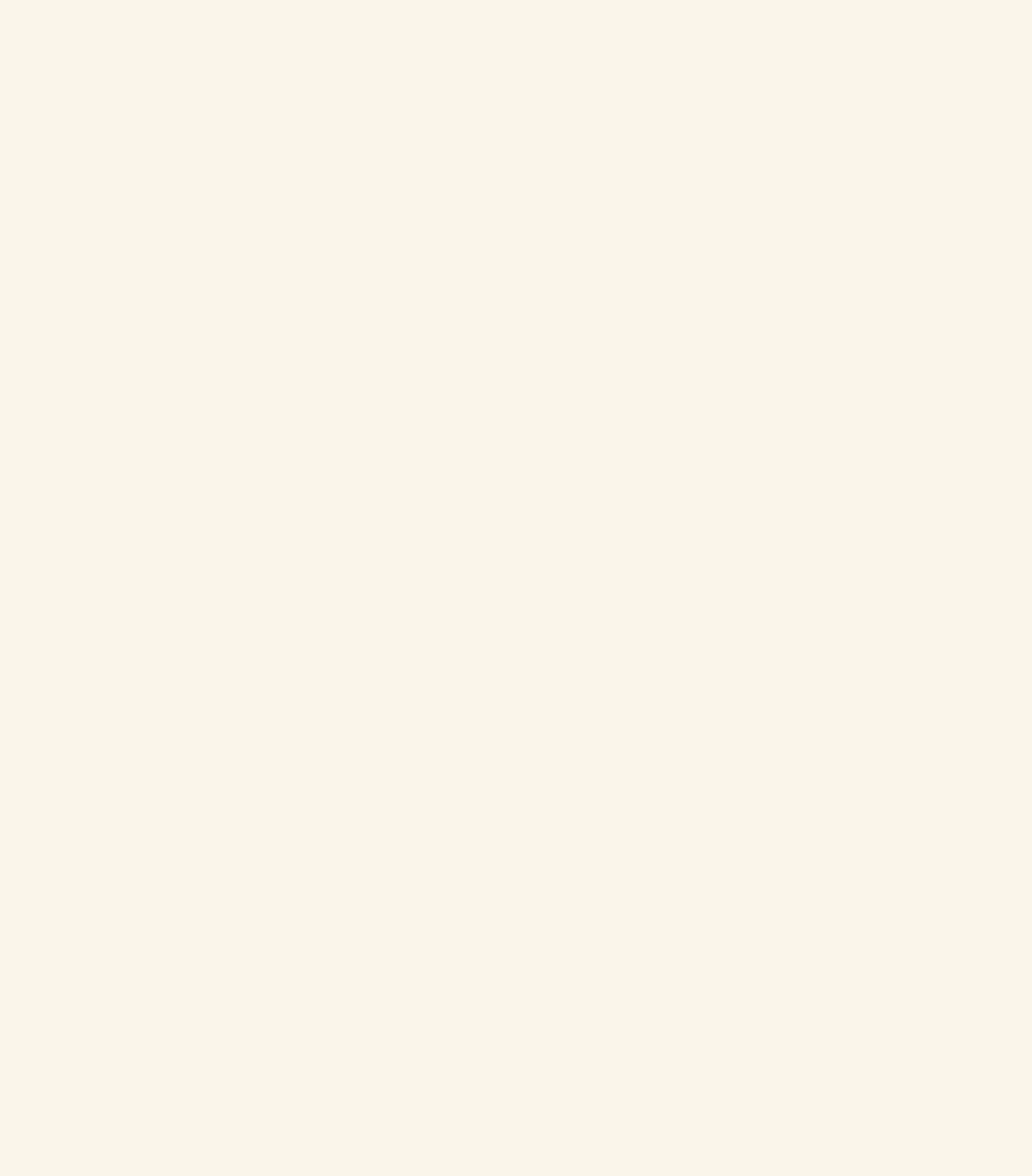
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## About the Monograph

This monograph documents what was learned by the Bruner Foundation and its partners in the course of a 10-year journey. It is intended to inform, to spark discussion and to promote change in the important fields of building evaluation capacity, organizational evaluative thinking\* and collaborative partnership. You will note that the authors of the monograph represent different perspectives – funder, professional evaluator, service provider organization. These three voices are integral to the work itself – a true collaboration, a learning community.

Preliminary work on the Rochester Effectiveness Partnership (REP) began in 1995. Between 1996 and 2003, over 150 people in Rochester, NY participated directly in the initiative whose outcome was to build individual and organizational evaluation capacity using a participatory model. A second interactive initiative, Evaluative Thinking in Organizations Study (ETHOS) was conducted throughout 2004. It was developed for the purpose of understanding more about the relationships between increased evaluation capacity and the use of evaluative thinking in other areas of management. Follow-up training sessions for REP took place in 2005. Executive summaries and details of each initiative can be found in the pages that follow.

\* For our purposes, we defined the core components of evaluative thinking as: asking questions of substance, gathering relevant data, analyzing the data and developing action plans based on the data

This monograph asks the question, “what have we learned during the last decade and why is it important?”

First and foremost, REP demonstrated that it is possible to increase individuals’ capacity to understand and use participatory program evaluation and that as a result programs can be strengthened and clients better served.\*\* But this increased capacity didn’t happen overnight or after short-term, large group training sessions. A small, select group of participants spent between 12 and 18 months working together with a professional evaluator. A detailed curriculum was developed\*\*\* and on-going coaching for specific projects was provided. To shift attitudes, knowledge and behavior in a lasting way in adults takes time and is labor intensive. All of us know this intuitively, but we seem often to forget it when we craft new initiatives. We want change and we need it now.

Through REP and ETHOS we learned that collaborative endeavors need time and nurturing in order to build trust, to accomplish specific outcomes and to become true learning communities. This, too, seems obvious, and is a subject about which much has been written, but sadly it is often overlooked in exchange for expediency. In addition to the implicit “common purpose” which brings a working partnership together, **we offer these 10 tenets from our experience:**

- Have a strong, visible champion who can bring funding resources to the collaborative for at least 3-5 years
- Don’t be afraid to start small – growing is always easier than downsizing
- All partners must be willing – there should be no implicit or explicit coercion
- Be clear about roles, commitments, expectations at the beginning of the initiative
- Consider both stability and readiness when adding partners
- Don’t tolerate “trump cards” – agree on how to share power and make decisions as a group
- Find strong, competent meeting facilitators AND technical assistance providers
- Take time on the front end to establish mechanisms for communication and operations
- Come to a mutually agreed upon evaluation plan
- Commit to transparency and mid-course alterations as needed based on data

\*\* For the complete REP evaluation go to [www.brunerfoundation.org](http://www.brunerfoundation.org)

\*\*\* Downloadable manuals are available at [www.brunerfoundation.org](http://www.brunerfoundation.org)

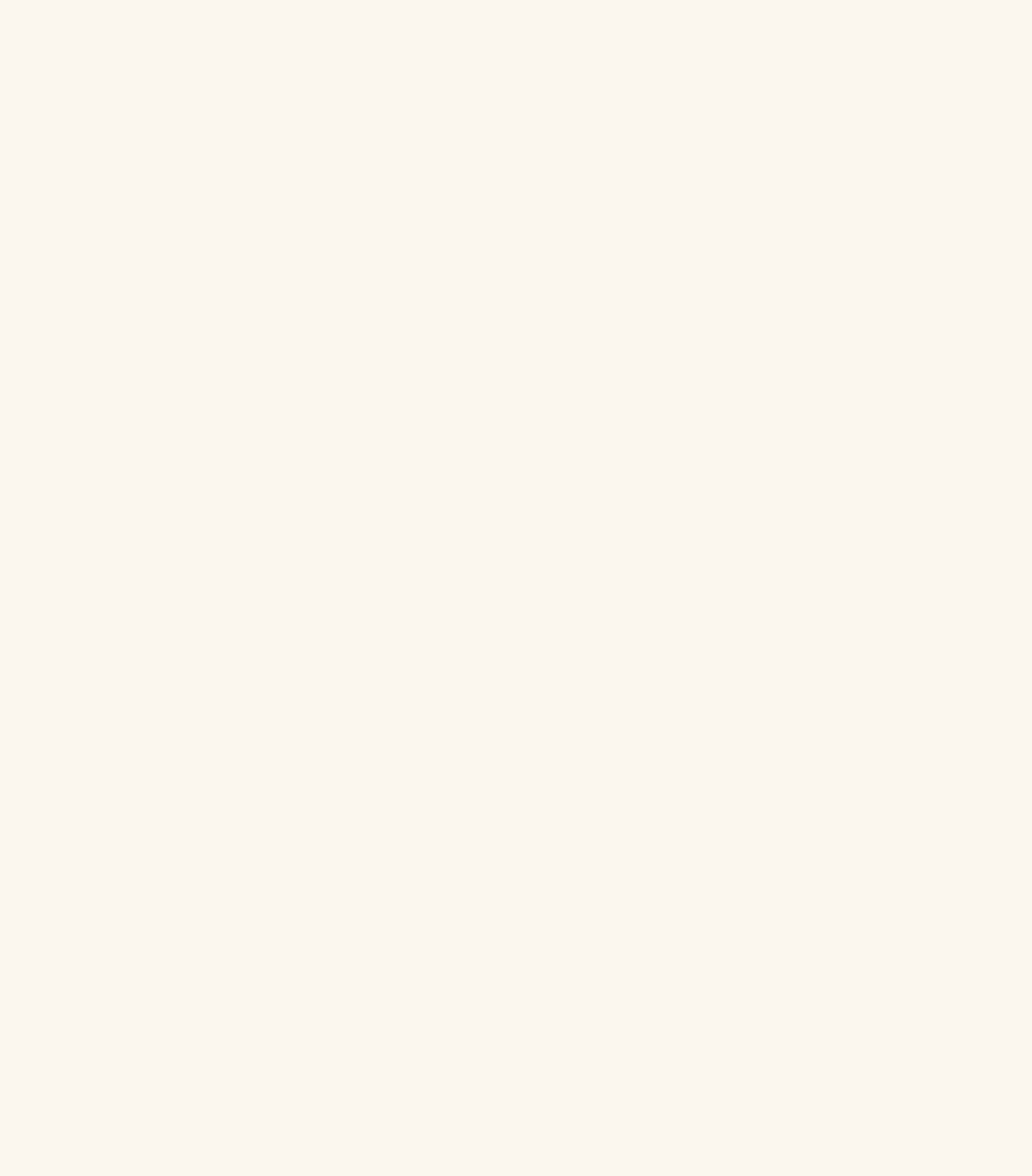
Lastly, through the ETHOS project, Bruner Foundation, the evaluation consultants and 11 CEOs from the social service delivery field developed an Evaluative Thinking Assessment tool.\* The tool was designed to assess the level of evaluative thinking taking place in an organization in 15 core areas, ranging from evaluation to communications/marketing to fund development and human resources through multiple organizational stakeholders. It also provides a vehicle for sorting the findings leading to clear, prioritized action steps. Because many participants had worked together for years throughout the REP initiative, a high level of trust and mutual respect had already been established, making the experience of developing the tool both positive and successful. This tool has not been used outside of Rochester.

**It is our hope that it can be used in its entirety or as a springboard for others looking to grapple with assessing the presence of evaluative thinking.**

ETHOS partners found the tool useful in thinking about how to increase evaluative thinking capacity in certain areas, how to communicate with various stakeholders where discrepancies occurred and how to clearly see organizational strengths and gaps.

As you embark on your own initiatives, as you grapple with these issues, we applaud you and trust that our experience will be of value to you.

\* The tool can be downloaded from [www.brunerfoundation.org](http://www.brunerfoundation.org)





# Building Evaluation Capacity Through Participatory Evaluation

## Executive Summary

The Rochester Effectiveness Partnership, REP, was initiated in the summer of 1996 in Rochester, New York. Throughout, it was a self-governing partnership of funders, non-profit service provider organizations and evaluation professionals committed to increasing knowledge and use of participatory program evaluation<sup>1</sup> through comprehensive training<sup>2</sup> and guided evaluation projects.<sup>3</sup> Between 1996 and 2003, 166 individuals including 2 evaluation professional, 14 funding organizations and 32 social service provider organizations were part of the REP experience. The Rochester Grantmakers Forum housed the initiative and provided administrative support while the Advertising Council of Rochester provided guidance in strategic communications.

Throughout the initiative, the REP partners remained committed to four overarching principles.

### *Collaboration*

- The partners believed that the pooling of funds from a variety of public and private philanthropic sources, in varying amounts, would make the initiative stronger.

<sup>1</sup> Evaluation here and throughout this document is defined as: the thoughtful, systematic collection and analysis of information about the activities, characteristics and outcomes of programs, for use by specific people, to reduce uncertainties, and inform decisions about those programs. Adapted from Patton, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> A copy of the training manual is available at [www.brunerfoundation.org](http://www.brunerfoundation.org).

<sup>3</sup> For specifics about program design, see figure 1.

- The partners believed that each participating funder and nonprofit service provide organization would have an equal voice in the partnership – one organization/one vote.
- The partners took time and invested dollars in the administrative aspects of the collaborative including meetings, communication, and logistics.

#### *Capacity Building for*

##### *Individuals and their Organizations*

- REP was designed to systematically build capacity to understand and use evaluation. Partners were exposed to a rigorous curriculum and expected to complete actual studies.
- REP fostered the improvement of programs so that clients could benefit in demonstrable ways.
- REP taught organizations to be better consumers of evaluation studies.

#### *Transparency*

- REP tackled tough issues and vowed not only to make changes in the partnership based on data, but also to speak and write about the project.

#### *Measuring Impact of the Work*

- REP developed logic models and outcome measures for the partnership and evaluated each phase.

Through evaluation of REP, the partners documented important findings and lessons learned. A full copy of the REP final evaluation report is available at [www.brunerfoundation.org](http://www.brunerfoundation.org).

## PARTNERS

The REP project involved many organizations and individuals as social service provider partners, funding partners and other partners.

PROVIDERS		FUNDERS
Action for a Better Community	Lifespan	Bruner Foundation
Aesthetic Education Institute	Monroe-2 Orleans BOCES	City of Rochester
Catholic Family Center	National M.S. Society, Upstate NY Chapter	Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation
Community Place	Neighborhood Housing Services	Frontier Corporation
Compeer	Pittsford Youth Center	Golisano Foundation
Cornell Cooperative Extension	Planned Parenthood	Halcyon Hill Foundation
Epilepsy Association	PRALID	Monroe County*
GCASA	Rochester City School District	Rochester Area Community Foundation
Girl Scouts of Genesee Valley	Roosevelt Children's Center of Wayne ARC	Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation
Grace Urban Ministries	Society for the Protection and Care of Children	United Way of Greater Rochester
Hillside Work-Scholarship	Sojourner House	Wegmans Food Markets
Humane Society at Lollypop Farm	The Health Association	<b>OTHER PARTNERS</b>
Institute for Human Services	The Norman Howard School	Rochester Grantmakers Forum
Learning Disabilities Association	Threshold	Advertising Council of Rochester
Legal Aid Society	Urban League of Rochester	Anita Baker, Evaluator
Lewis Street Center	YWCA	Kim Sabo, Evaluator

\* Rochester Americorps and The Seligman Fund also participated as associate funding partners.

\*\* Rochester-Monroe County Youth Bureau, Monroe County Office of the Aging, Monroe County Department of Social Services. For additional details about participation, see following section.

## KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- It is possible to systematically build evaluation capacity in both the funding and provider communities – REP partners know more about participatory evaluation, they do better evaluations, and they commission better, more useful and user-friendly evaluations.
- It is possible to sustain a funding collaborative over time. REP operated for 7 years using approximately \$800,000 of pooled community resources to accomplish measurable impact.
- Funders and service delivery organizations can work together and learn from each other.
- It is possible to make data driven program decisions that benefit service delivery to clients – REP partners can demonstrate clear changes to their programs including terminations, expansions, alterations – based on evaluation data.
- Mastering new paradigms and skills is intense and expensive. REP was not a project about finding simple answers, or providing one-shot workshops. Rather, it was about understanding complexity and integrating new ways of thinking and systems of operating into the every day functions of individuals and programs.

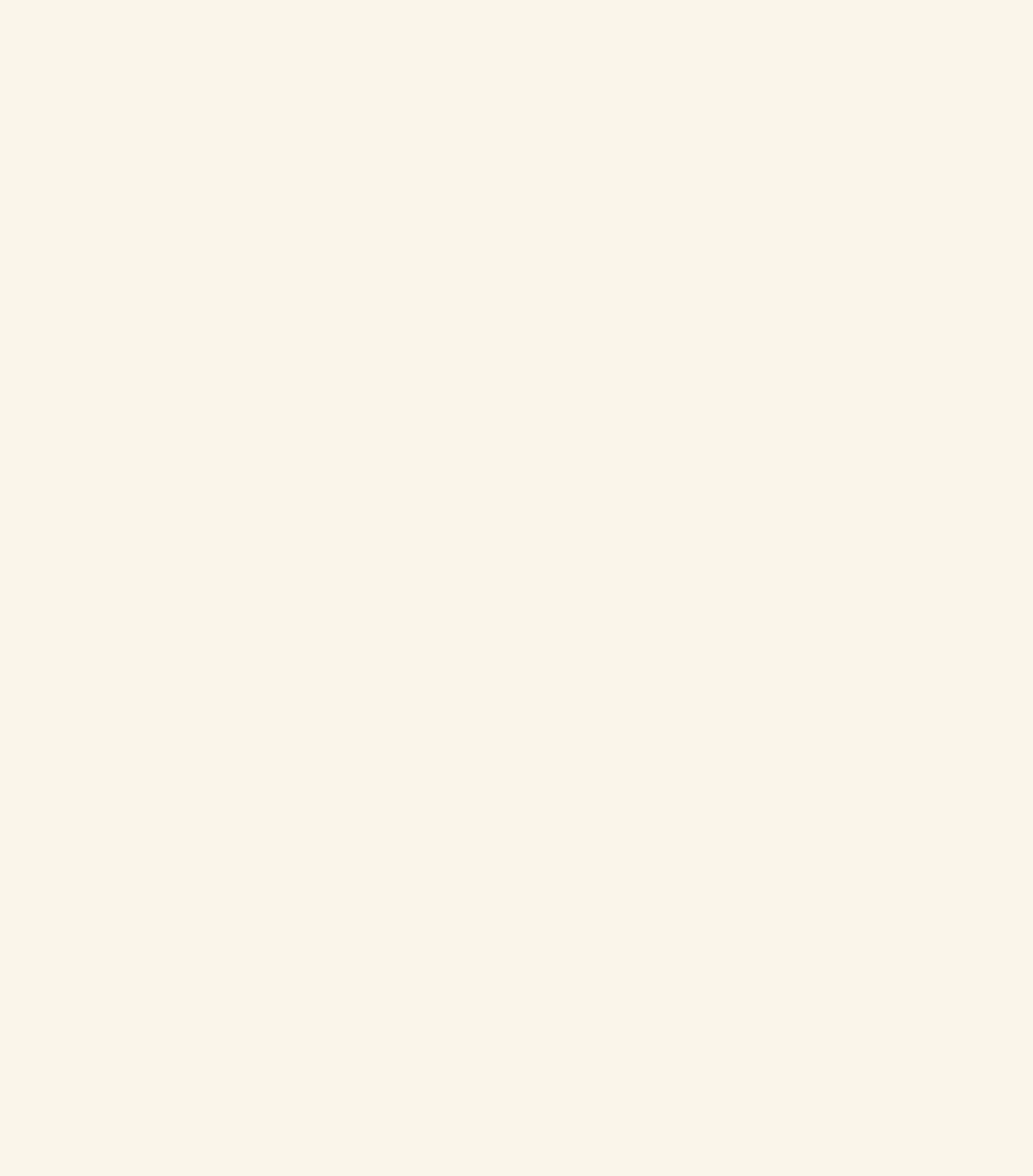
## CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

- **Project duration and intensity.** It was hard to determine in advance the path REP would take beyond the two-year pilot. Consideration was given to practical realities when decisions about increasing the number and types of service provider and funding partners were made. There were some who thought that more service providers should have been involved and that REP should go on indefinitely. *The partners ultimately decided that maintaining project quality required REP to stay small enough to be manageable, and that a finite term was acceptable.*
- **Evaluation of REP.** During each phase of REP, the partners grappled with how and whether to involve external evaluators in the REP evaluation process. *Because REP was firmly committed to self-governance and meaningful participatory evaluation, the partnership ultimately decided to use internal strategies for evaluation of the first and third phases of REP. In the second phase, the REP partners hired an external organization (Innovation Network Inc.) with participatory evaluation expertise to conduct the evaluation. Partners were satisfied with the accuracy and utility of results from all project evaluation.*

- **Project cost and financial sustainability.** Several partners questioned whether making some aspects of training fee-based would have increased REP's value, utility and sustainability. This issue was reviewed before beginning each new phase. *The lead funder believed strongly that participating organizations were contributing significant amounts of time to the project in lieu of fees. Data show that without fees, participation was high, training valued, and skills used.*
- **Evaluation partners.** Both evaluation partners came from locations outside of Rochester, resulting in additional costs for the partnership. Meaningful roles for other evaluators, including some locally-based evaluation consultants were not developed. *The partners believed that the need for expertise in participatory evaluation was critical to the project's success, so were willing to trade location for qualifications.*
- **Alliances between REP and the higher education community.** A few REP partners questioned whether local universities might have made a valuable contribution. However, no formal alliances were sought. *The project involved both funder and social service provider organizations and the Rochester Grantmakers Forum was identified as the organization that had the best fit and connection with all partners.*

*"REP has contributed to community understanding. Rochester is in a different place now than seven years ago. REP participated in that process."*

*REP Provider Partner, Class 1*



# From REP to ETHOS: Studying Evaluative Thinking In Organizations

## Executive Summary

*“REP broadened our knowledge about effective and qualitative ways to demonstrate that we’re achieving our objectives. It also helped us to involve more staff in the process and modify existing tools so that we’re collecting more useful data. Participatory evaluation helped us make evaluation much more than merely measuring results with numbers.”*

*REP Executive Director*

By the conclusion of the Rochester Effectiveness Partnership (REP) in 2003, the Bruner Foundation and its partners had learned a great deal about building evaluation capacity in individual participants and their organizations using a systematic curriculum and providing ongoing consultation with professional evaluators (see Executive Summary of REP, Part I).

While we had documented the spread or “ripple” of REP evaluation skills, we were curious to understand more about a possible relationship between increased evaluation capacity and the use of that capacity beyond the program level. In other words, could evaluation skills be applied to human resources, governance, communications and marketing as well as other organizational management areas?

ETHOS was designed as a year-long interactive study among service provider CEOs and facilitated by evaluators, Anita Baker and Kim Sabo. The study was based on the following hypothesis:

*If you go through an evaluation capacity-building process that is long-term, hands-on, uses a curriculum and includes coaching, like the REP project, then the use of evaluative thinking in multiple organizational capacity areas (which the literature shows is linked with organizational effectiveness) should be evident, and challenge areas should be identifiable.*

The ETHOS project was guided by the following questions.

- 1) What does evaluative thinking look like within various organizational capacity areas?
- 2) How are evaluative thinking and organizational effectiveness related?
- 3) What is needed to enhance and broaden evaluative thinking?

Senior management staff members or CEOs from each of the 11 participating organizations met together 6 times to further define evaluative thinking, to develop the ETHOS evaluative thinking assessment tool, to discuss findings across sites and to further reflect on the process of assessing, sustaining and

extending evaluative thinking in organizations. In addition, the ETHOS partners arranged for, oversaw and participated in ETHOS site visits to their organizations, reviewed their organization's assessment findings, and helped develop initial action plans to promote evaluative thinking.

## PARTNERS

A total of 11 of the former REP partners elected to participate. The organizations were diverse in terms of staff size, annual budget and services provided. For a list and additional descriptive information see Table A.

## KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- It is possible for a diverse group to design an assessment tool (and guidelines for its use) which is tailored to their organizations.
- Involving multiple stakeholders from an organization in completing an assessment can provide a basis for important dialogue within the organization.
- Results of the pilot use of the Evaluative Thinking Assessment tool showed that there were differences between both organizational areas and partner organizations. For example some partners thought



that they had strong indications of evaluative thinking in the area of organizational mission, while others thought evaluative thinking was less prevalent in that area. As a group, the partners thought that evaluative thinking was more prevalent in their organizations' governance, executive leadership, program development, mission, alliances/collaboration and strategic planning; and it was less prevalent in the areas of management/leadership, communications/marketing, human resources, technology acquisition and staff development. These results can help to inform how technical assistance is requested and provided for different organizations.

- An organization which is strong in the use of evaluative thinking is more likely to seek out an evaluation capacity building process.

*“Providers came out of it seeing how they could, through participatory process, get buy-in and ongoing commitment to the practice of evaluation. Prior to REP, evaluation was something that happened to them.”*

*REP Funding Partner*

## CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

- ETHOS participants encouraged the continued study and documentation of the links between evaluation capacity and evaluative thinking.
- There is a need for ongoing technical assistance in maintaining and broadening evaluation skills and capacity.



## Participating Organizations

REP was a project committed to active partnership that included multiple voices. Three types of partners regularly worked together: service provider partners, funding partners, and evaluation partners. They were further supported by an assisting partner that provided communication and strategic assistance and an administrative partner that housed and oversaw the initiative. The following describes who our partners were and how they participated in the work.

### WHO WERE THE REP AND ETHOS PROVIDER PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS?

Between 1996 and 2003, 166 individuals including 2 evaluation professionals (Anita Baker and later Kim Sabo), 32 social service provider organizations (see Table A), 13 funding and 2 other supportive organizations (see Table B) were part of the REP experience. As Table A illustrates, REP attracted many different kinds of service provider organizations. In large part this was due to the fact that the criteria for becoming a provider partner related to organizational readiness and commitment to evaluation capacity building as opposed to service program area. Almost all service provider partners served youth and families, and provided some type of educational services; many provided employment

services, community development and housing services. Some also provided services to the homeless, to survivors of domestic abuse, and to those with substance abuse prevention or treatment needs. Among the 32 service provider partners:

- Two were schools (The Norman Howard School and Roosevelt Children’s Center of Wayne ARC)
- Four provided residential services (Society for the Protection and Care of Children, Sojourner House, The Health Association, and the YWCA)
- One-third of the partners were local affiliates of national organizations (such as Planned Parenthood and the National MS Society)
- Most were *medium* or *small* in terms of both budget (up to \$5 million) and staff size (25 or fewer full time equivalents)

Regardless of overall organization size, only a small team, and representation of only one or two actual programs, participated in REP. (For additional information about these organizations please see the full list of organizational partner contact information at [www.brunerfoundation.org](http://www.brunerfoundation.org) and visit their individual websites.)

Table A also shows which REP social service partners later elected to become ETHOS partners (see highlighted rows). These 12 partners chose to continue to learn about evaluation and evaluative thinking and how their organizations could benefit from continued development and refinement of these skills. Of those, only one could not fully participate in the site visits and data collection. Despite the fact that the organizations were not being financially supported, and in fact were contributing their time and thinking to data collection for this project, staff from all participating organizations came consistently to all meetings, completed site visits and data collection and earnestly participated in analytic activities. Their insights regarding the role of evaluation capacity building and evaluative thinking were invaluable.

TABLE A: REP AND ETHOS PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

ORGANIZATION	SERVICE AREAS								Organizational Size***	National Affiliate
	Youth	Elderly	Families*	Employment	Education	Community Development**	Substance Abuse			
Action for a Better Community	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			Medium	
Aesthetic Education Institute	✓				✓				Small	YES
Catholic Family Center	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			Large	YES
Community Place	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			Medium	
Compeer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				Medium	YES
Cornell Cooperative Extension	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			Medium	YES
Epilepsy Association	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				Small	YES
GCASA	✓		✓				✓		Small	
Girl Scouts	✓		✓	✓	✓				Medium	YES
Grace Urban Ministries	✓		✓		✓				Small	
Hillside Work-Scholarship	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			Medium	
Humane Society @ Lollypop	✓		✓	✓	✓				Medium	YES
Institute for Human Services	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Small	
Learning Disabilities Ass'n.	✓		✓	✓	✓				Medium	
Legal Aid Society	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				Medium	YES
Lewis Street Center**	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			Small	
LIFESPAN		✓	✓	✓	✓				Medium	
Monroe-2 Orleans BOCES	✓		✓	✓	✓				Medium	
National M.S. Society		✓	✓	✓	✓				Small	YES
Neighborhood Housing Svc.			✓	✓		✓			Small	
Pittsford Youth Center	✓		✓	✓	✓				Small	
Planned Parenthood	✓		✓		✓				Large	YES
PRALID			✓	✓	✓				Small	
Rochester City School District	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			Large	NA
Roosevelt Childrens Center.	✓		✓		✓				Small	
Society for Protection Care of Children	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		Small	
Sojourner House	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		Small	
The Health Association	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			Large	
The Norman Howard School	✓		✓		✓				Medium	
Threshold	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		Small	
Urban League of Rochester	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			Medium	YES
YWCA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Medium	YES

\*Services to Women including domestic violence services are included in this category. \*\*Housing and Services to the Homeless are included within this category.

\*\*\*Small, Medium and Large size are descriptions based on both number of staff and amount of annual budget. Color type signifies ETHOS participation.

## SUPPORTING PARTNERS

ETHOS was a one year study with select social service provider partners and was funded solely by the Bruner Foundation. REP involved multiple funders including 13 public and private grantmakers who financially supported the project while learning about evaluation and evaluation capacity building (see Table B). The funder partners represented many of the key funding organizations in Rochester. They contributed varying amounts to the partnership, and joined at different phases. All but two funding organizations, where funding priorities changed, maintained their support throughout the duration of the project. Funding partners were also involved in governance of the project and many chose to participate in evaluation training specifically designed for funders. For Phases 1 and 2, there were 9 funder organizations. During Phase 3, two new associate funders and two new full funding partners were added. Additionally, one private funder left for part of Phase 3, but returned again for the final year of the project. The Advertising Council of Rochester served as the assisting partner to REP throughout Phases 1, 2 and 3 and provided many supports to the initiative such as communications training, brochure development, and conference workshops. The Rochester Grantmakers Forum served as the administrative partner throughout the initiative. The evaluation

partners worked with all of these partners throughout the initiative.

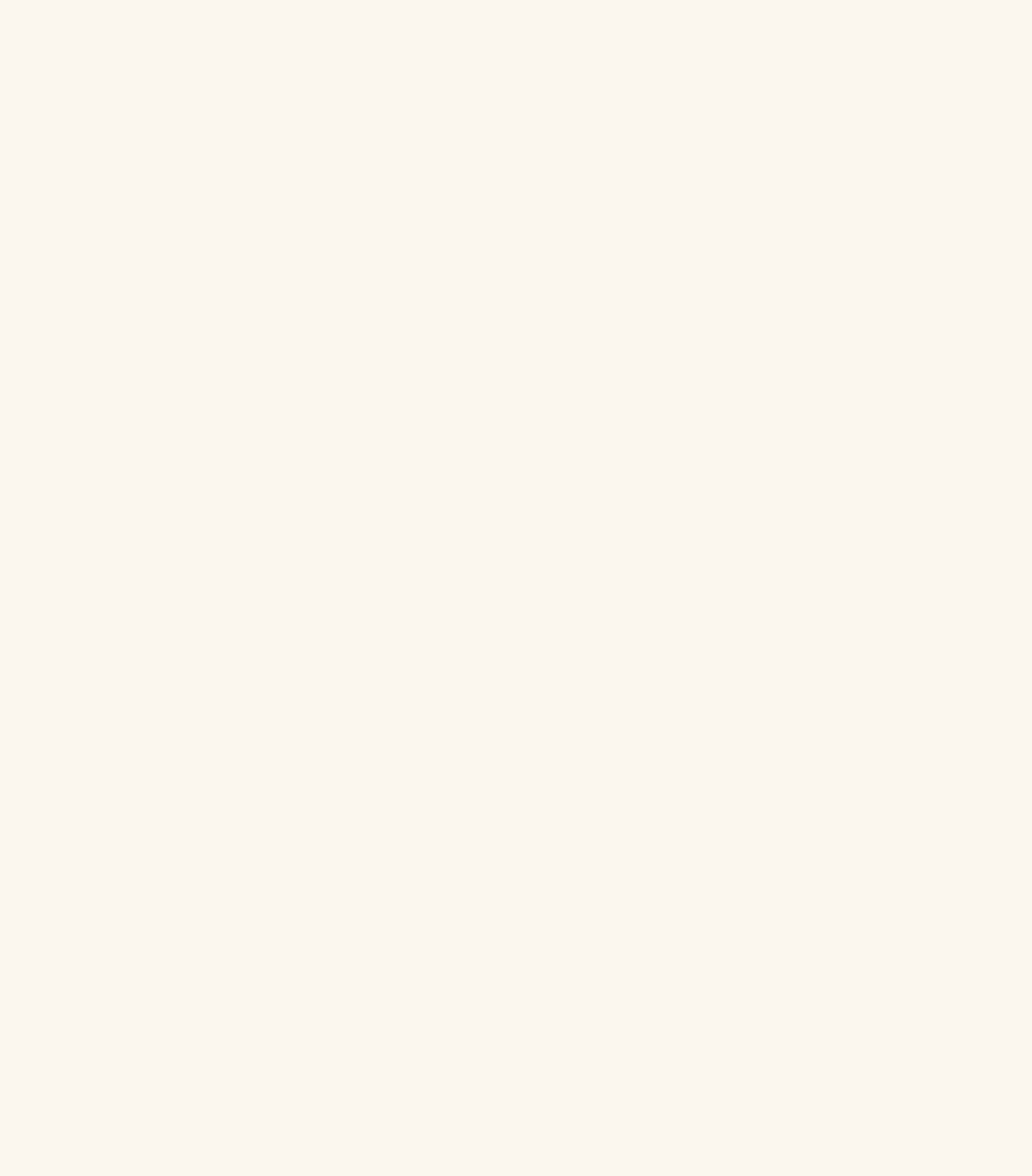
REP was not an inexpensive project, but as described above, funds were dedicated to it by multiple funders. REP was fully implemented with the available funds, and it was continued for three complete phases. The involvement of a funding collaborative, regular budget assessment by the full partnership, and commitment by the Bruner Foundation as the lead funder kept the project financially manageable. (Note that the Bruner Foundation contributions, though substantial, did not exceed initial commitments for the project, and that grant dollars were reduced for each phase as additional funders joined the collaborative or made larger contributions.) REP maintained a balanced budget for each of its phases, and ended the project with a small surplus. The total cost of the initiative was \$781,629.

TABLE B: REP FUNDING PARTNERS

FUNDER PARTNERS	Type	Phase I	Phase II	Phase III
Bruner Foundation	Private Foundation	✓	✓	✓
City of Rochester*	Public Funder	✓	✓	✓
Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation	Private Foundation	✓	✓	✓
Frontier Corporation	Corporate	✓		
Golisano Foundation	Private Foundation			✓
Halcyon Hill Foundation	Private Foundation	✓		✓
Monroe County**	Public Funder	✓	✓	✓
Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation	Private Foundation			✓
Rochester Americorps (Associate Funder)	Other			✓
Rochester Area Community Foundation	Community Fdn.	✓	✓	✓
Seligman Fund (Associate Funder)	Private Fund			✓
United Way of Greater Rochester*	United Way	✓	✓	✓
Wegmans Food Markets	Corporate	✓	✓	✓

\* The City of Rochester and the United Way of Greater Rochester served as assisting partners during the first year of the initiative, but joined as full funders in Year 2. See Figure 1 in Section I for a definition of phase time periods.

\*\* Included three departments (Office of the Aging, Youth Bureau, Department of Social Services)





*Part 1*



# Building Evaluation Capacity Through Participatory Evaluation



# Building Evaluation Capacity Through Participatory Evaluation

## CONTEXT

In 1995, the Bruner Foundation began planning an initiative in Rochester, New York that would build on its history of bringing wise minds together to tackle major social issues and on its specific expertise in the area of evaluation. As far back as the mid-1970s, Bruner trustees had written about and funded pioneering work in evaluation because they understood that programs and organizations could be more effective if they had the internal capacity to use data to make decisions. Looking back from our vantage point in 2005, this approach seems a “blinding glimpse of the obvious,” but it wasn’t always so clear.

A decade ago, the United Way of America published its manual, *Measuring Program Outcomes*, and Rochester was selected as one of six demonstration sites. Rochester’s Regional Association of Grantmakers had convened community level conferences for non-profit service providers and funders with a focus on the importance of measuring program effectiveness and demonstrating accountability. Professional evaluators were debating the value of different types of evaluation – qualitative

and quantitative, formative and summative, research-based and participatory. Funders were looking to leverage their grant dollars. Talk of “return on investment” and “collaborations” abounded.

On this stage, the Rochester Effectiveness Partnership (REP) was born as a self-governing partnership of funders, non-profit service providers and evaluation professionals committed to increasing knowledge and use of participatory program evaluation<sup>4</sup> through comprehensive, systematic training and guided evaluation projects. Between 1996 and 2003, 166 individuals including 2 evaluation professionals, 13 funding organizations and 32 social service provider organizations were part of the REP experience. The Rochester Grantmakers Forum (Rochester’s Regional Association of Grantmakers) housed the initiative and provided administrative support while the Advertising Council of Rochester provided guidance in strategic communications.

When the partnership began, participants naively believed that an initiative based on intensive training and hands-on applications of participatory evaluation skills for program staff would lead to individual, program and organizational change. We knew that building evaluation capacity would take more than a few workshop sessions, but we underestimated how consuming the task would become.

As the partnership evolved, evaluations confirmed that individuals had changed their thinking and their behavior and that programs (and hence, clients) had benefited from changes based on data. An unintended outcome was the partners’ increased willingness and ability to tackle ever more complex issues. Funders were able to admit that while they valued evaluation and expected it from their grantees, they had limited expertise themselves; provider partner CEOs understood that they, too, needed at least some understanding of evaluation basics; trainees who had mastered the intensive curriculum and were using program evaluation with more skill and frequency began to ask for assistance in “sustaining what they had learned” and “rippling the evaluation skills to other individuals and departments in their organizations.” As a result, additional trainings for funders and CEOs, alumni study groups and detailed strategies for “rippling” were successfully added to REP along the way.

What the REP partners experienced, but only began to name toward the end of the initiative, was the value of a “learning community” or a “peer network” – a group of individuals coming together to learn, to do and to share their expertise. As was reported in the Summer, 2005 issue of *OMG Linkages*, by Marcela Gutierrez-Mayka, “OMG’s mounting experience with learning communities suggests that they are a promising approach to capacity building in

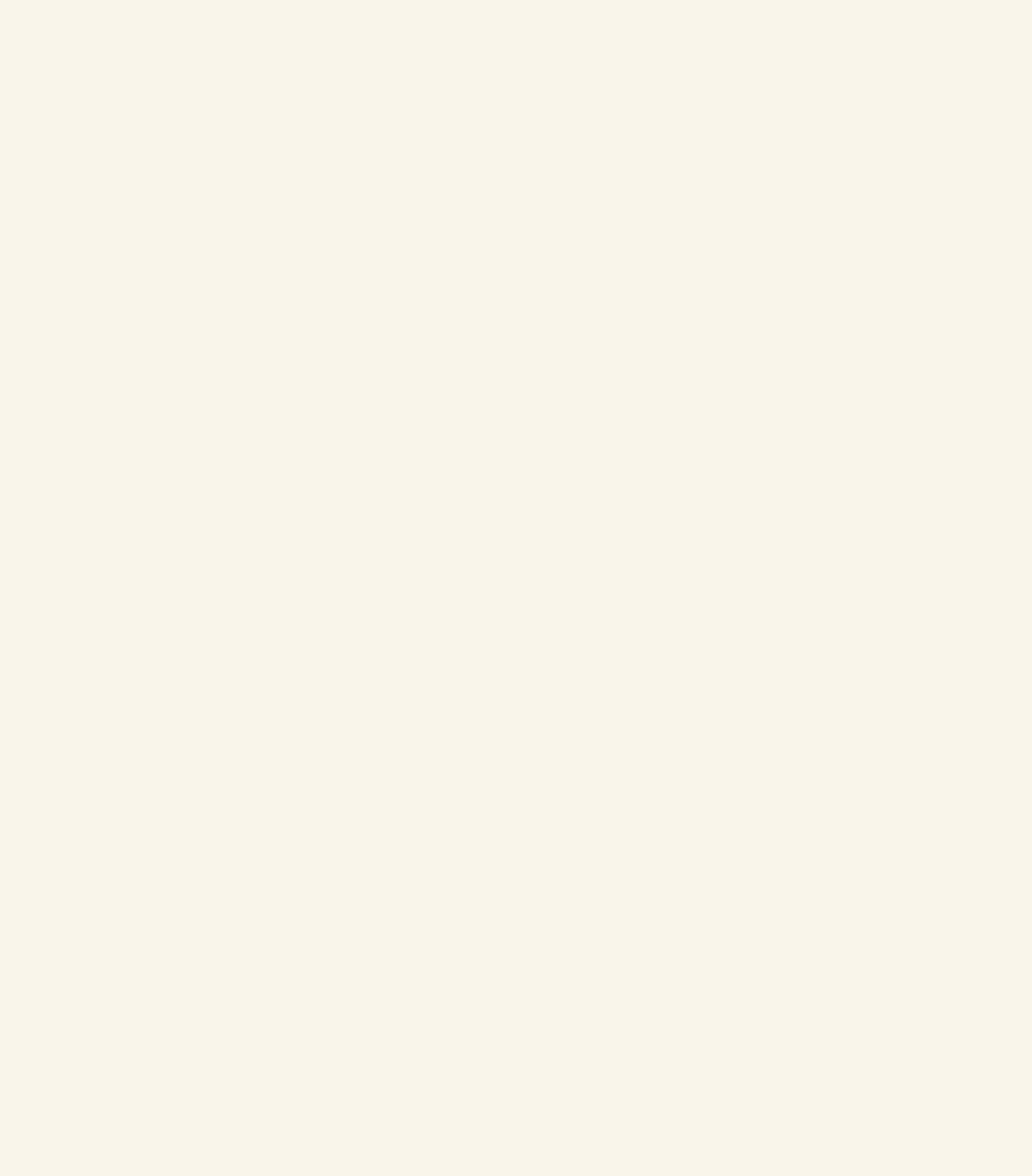
<sup>4</sup> Evaluation here and throughout this document is defined as: the thoughtful, systematic collection and analysis of information, about the activities, characteristics and outcomes of programs, for use by specific people, to reduce uncertainties, and inform decisions about those programs. Adapted from Patton, 1997.

almost any area, from policy change to programming and evaluation.” It was that networking community which purposefully continued through the addition of REP groups and training opportunities.

In this section, details are provided about how REP was implemented. Outcomes of efforts to help organizations build evaluation capacity (i.e., the results of REP) are also reported. (For additional information about this project and the Bruner Foundation’s other efforts to help organizations develop/enhance evaluation capacity, please visit the Bruner Foundation website.

*“The REP experience got people in an evaluation frame of mind: thinking about outcomes, thinking about inputs, output and resources. It helped to get the thinking past the directors of organizations down into the “ranks” and helped to develop an appreciation for the process, as well as the importance of accountability.”*

*REP Provider Partner, Classes 2 and 7*



## Rochester Effectiveness Partnership Implementation

**R**EP was a complex project that involved many partners. It was characterized by staged change informed by project results. In total there were three phases spanning the seven-year history. Collaboration among providers, funders and evaluators and evaluation capacity building through comprehensive and applied study remained a steady focus.

### REP PROJECT DESIGN

REP was initiated by the Bruner Foundation, Rochester Grantmakers Forum, the Advertising Council of Rochester, Frontier Corporation, Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation, Halcyon Hill Foundation, the City of Rochester, United Way of Greater Rochester and Anita Baker, a professional evaluator. All these collaborators were committed to helping non-profit service provider and funding organizations learn and use a set of participatory evaluation skills. The initial project design identified five types of partners:

- **service provider partners** – staff (at least two from each organization) and CEOs of the non-profit service provider partner organizations to participate in systematic training;

- **funding partners** – public and private grantmakers to financially support the project and learn about evaluation and evaluation capacity-building;
- **assisting partners** – organizations to provide critical in-kind support such as communication training and expertise;
- **an administrative partner** to oversee project operations; and
- **evaluation partners** to provide training on evaluation planning and methodology.

The design (summarized in Figure 1) called for 18 months of comprehensive evaluation training for non-profit service provider staff; 6 hours of training for the CEO/Executive Director; a specialized but much more limited version of evaluation training for funding partners; project oversight through regular meetings of a Governance Team including representatives of all partner organizations; and formal participatory evaluation of the project by the partners at the end of each phase, to inform the Governance Team of project status.

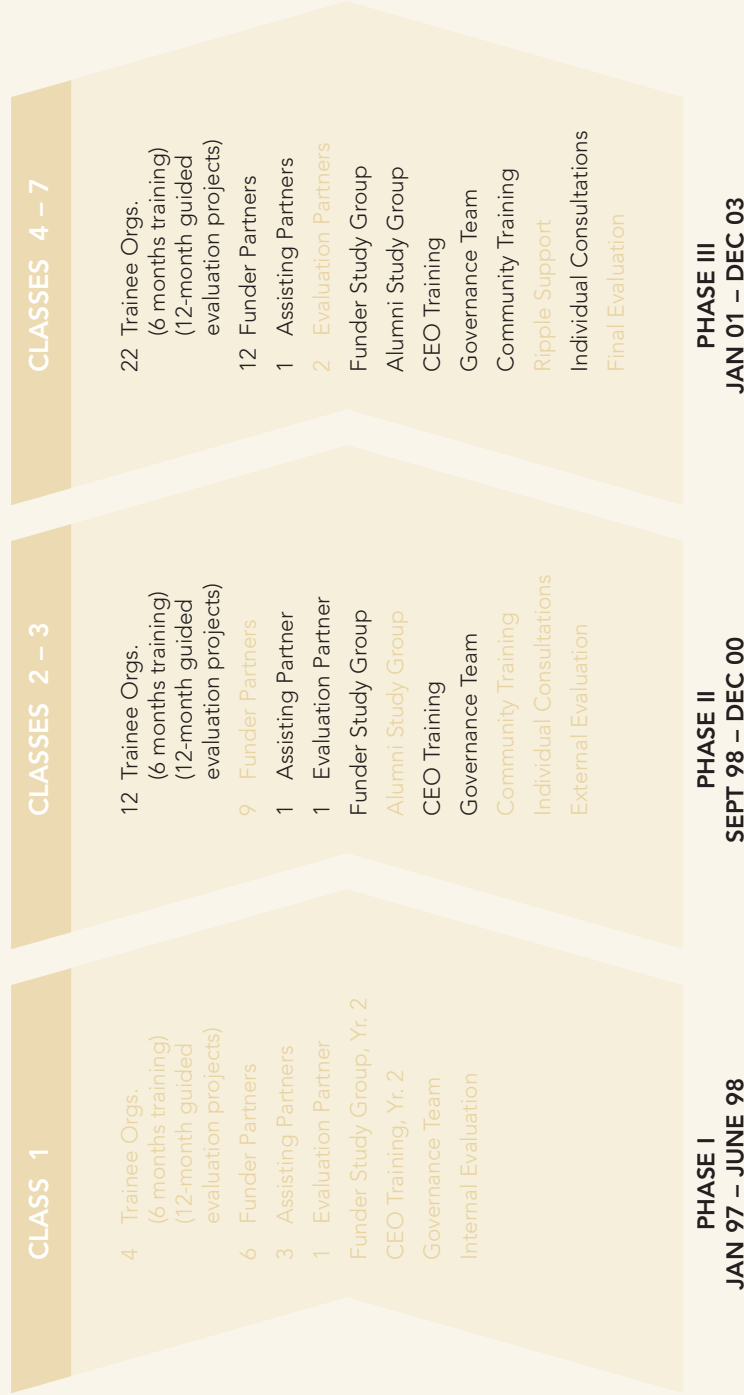
At the conclusion of the two-year pilot, evaluation findings indicated that REP had achieved its initial outcomes. On the basis of this evaluation, the Governance Team decided to refine, expand and continue the project for another 28-month period, (Phase II September 1998 through December 2000).

In Phase II, REP expanded its services to include opportunities for alumni partners to continue their training through an alumni study group, up to 5 hours of independent consultation for all partner organizations on evaluation-related issues beyond REP projects, and multiple strategies to systematically address the need for partner organizations to sustain and extend or “ripple”<sup>5</sup> their learning beyond the individuals and programs involved in the REP training classes. During Phase II, the REP Governance Team also commissioned an external evaluation (conducted by Innovation Network, Inc.) to help assess accomplishments and challenges and inform a process for future project development. At the conclusion of Phase II, all partners agreed that REP should be continued for another project cycle (Phase III – January 2001 through December 2003), again with modifications based on evaluation findings (see timeline following page). All evaluation reports including that developed by Innovation Network, Inc., in December 2000, are available on the Bruner Foundation website.

<sup>5</sup> “Ripple” was a term coined by REP partners. It refers to the process of extending or spreading evaluation learning throughout an agency.



FIGURE 1: EVOLUTION OF THE ROCHESTER EFFECTIVENESS PROJECT



\* Note in all three phases there were annual conferences, some of which were internal and some of which included attendees from non-partner organizations. All project components shown in color were new to the phase.

## KEY PARTNER STATUS

During REP's three phases, the key partners included 166 individuals from 32 social service provider organizations, 13 funder organizations (including 2 involved as associate funders), 1 assisting partner, 1 administrative partner (the former and current Executive Directors of the Rochester Grantmakers Forum) and 2 evaluation partners (including one who was added for the final phase). Each time a new REP training phase was initiated, a new cohort or class of organizations requested involvement through a comprehensive Request for Proposal (RFP) process.<sup>6</sup>

## ATTENDANCE, ATTRITION AND PARTICIPATION

There were different expectations regarding attendance, retention and participation for the various REP partners, at various stages of the project.

- During Phases 1 and 2, all 16 *service provider partner organizations* were retained in the basic training; During Phase III, most, but not all (14 of the 20), *service provider partner organizations* were retained in the basic REP training. Attrition was largely attributable to organization challenges such as staff turnover. Attendance for those who remained in the training was excellent with at least one, and usually two, trainees from each organization in attendance at each session.
- In addition to the comprehensive REP training there were other opportunities for service provider partners to continue participation in the initiative (see Table 1). Once trainees in classes 1 through 5 completed their training, they had the option to join the alumni study group. Many used this vehicle to introduce others from their organizations to REP. There were also special training sessions for CEO's/Executive Directors. In addition, at least six partner organizations also sent trainees to more than one class. As shown in Table 1, provider partner organizations took advantage of multiple REP options.
- A total of 13 *funding partners*, representing many of the key funding organizations in Rochester supported REP. They contributed varying grant amounts to the partnership, and joined at different phases. All but two, one whose funding priorities changed, and one who participated in Phase I and then came back again in Phase III, maintained their support throughout the duration of the project. The attendance of funder partners at training sessions and governance meetings, however, was not consistent, especially in the final phase of the initiative.
- The original *evaluation partner* served REP throughout all three phases. An additional evaluation partner was successfully integrated into the partnership for Phase III.

<sup>6</sup> The REP RFP process included development of a comprehensive letter of interest signed by the Executive Director and Chair of the Board of Directors, and participation in a two-hour selection interview conducted by small groups of REP partners.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPATION IN REP TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

ORGANIZATION	TRAINING CLASSES							ALUMNI STUDY GROUP		CEO Training
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Active*	New Staff	
Action for a Better Community	✓			✓				✓	✓	
Aesthetic Education Institute			✓					✓	✓	✓
Catholic Family Center		✓				Training				
Community Place						WD	WD			✓
Compeer				✓						
Cornell Cooperative Extension			✓					✓	✓	
Epilepsy Association			✓					✓		✓
GCASA			✓				✓			✓
Girl Scouts	✓							✓		✓
Grace Urban Ministries				WD						
Hillside Work-Scholarship		✓						✓		✓
Humane Society @ Lollypop		✓						✓		✓
Institute for Human Services					Training					
Learning Disabilities Ass'n.					✓			✓	✓	✓
Legal Aid Society			✓			✓		✓		
Lewis Street Center**	✓									
LIFESPAN					✓			✓		✓
Monroe-2 Orleans BOCES						✓				✓
National M.S. Society					✓			✓		✓
Neighborhood Housing Svc.						✓				✓
Pittsford Youth Center				WD						
Planned Parenthood	✓							✓	✓	
PRALID					WD					
Rochester City School District				✓				✓		
SPCC		✓						✓	✓	
Roosevelt Childrens Center.(Wayne ARC)		✓						✓	✓	
Sojourner House								✓		✓
The Health Association					✓			✓		
The Norman Howard School							✓			
Threshold				✓						✓
Urban League of Rochester				✓				✓		✓
YWCA		✓					✓	✓		

A ✓ in the ASG active column indicates that the organization participated for at least one year. Classes 6 and 7 were not eligible for ASG. A ✓ in the new staff column indicates that the organization used the ASG to involve a new person in a REP training opportunity. \*\* Lewis Street Center merged to become part of Community Place after 1998

- The Rochester Grantmakers Forum, the project's *administrative partner*, kept a thorough accounting of all fiscal and administrative matters and reported to the partnership at each Governance meeting.
- The Advertising Council of Rochester provided communications support, *as an assisting partner* to the project in all phases.
- Training was also provided to 150 additional individuals through three-hour community training workshops. More than 200 individuals attended REP-sponsored conferences.

Because REP continued to evolve based on evaluation findings, by Phase III there were ten key components. This included provider training, alumni training, funder training, CEO training, "ripple" support, and consultations, plus Governance Team meetings, community training and other outreach, partner conferences, and four final REP sessions. A description of the implementation of each component and partner accomplishments and response are summarized in the following table.

Table 2: REP Implementation and Partner Response, Phase 3

IMPLEMENTATION/SERVICE DELIVERY	PARTNER ACCOMPLISHMENTS
<p><b>Provider Training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A total of 30 hours of basic evaluation training to participants in each class.</li> <li>• A total of 10 hours of follow-up training &amp; coaching for participants from each class</li> </ul> <p>Training topics included: evaluation definitions and terminology; evaluation design components; logic model use and assessment; use and selection of surveys, interviews, observations and record review data collection strategies; analysis of record review, survey, interview and observation data; evaluation design development; and evaluation reporting.</p> <p>* For a more complete listing of all training topics and materials see the Bruner Foundation website.</p>	<p><i>The 27 provider groups that completed the training produced evaluation designs and completed evaluation projects culminating in written reports. These designs and evaluations demonstrated trainees' abilities to apply what they had learned about evaluation. Their quality varied, but was similar to that of students completing graduate courses in program evaluation.</i></p>
<p><b>Alumni Training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A total of 10 2-hour sessions conducted each year with graduates of Classes 1 – 5</li> </ul> <p>Training topics included a review of evaluation basics as well as advanced sessions on survey scale construction, evaluator math, training/workshop assessment, phone surveys, development of web-based surveys, use of Excel to manage and analyze data.</p>	<p><i>Most participants continued to work on individual evaluation projects at their own organizations and all provided their organizations with basic evaluation-related expertise such as design review, instrument development and evaluation project oversight. In 2001, two group projects were completed (mini-study of collaboration, and assessment of the REP Governance Team). As the group became too large after 2001, no more group projects were undertaken, but one or more full evaluations were conducted by at least 10 alumni partner organizations. These studies included an extension of the previous work (3 partners), or whole new evaluations conducted each year of participation.</i></p>

Table 2: REP Implementation and Partner Response, Phase 3

IMPLEMENTATION/SERVICE DELIVERY	PARTNER ACCOMPLISHMENTS
<p><b>Funder Training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seven 2-hour sessions and two 2-hour tutorials for new members in 2001</li> </ul> <p>Members addressed topics such as capacity building, assessing special events, organizational readiness to conduct evaluation, and common outcome measurement projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nine 2-hour sessions, 2002</li> </ul> <p>First three sessions were conducted by guest speakers presenting community profile data. Remaining sessions included evaluation refreshers; individual reports about funder evaluation work; and dialog about evaluation-related issues unique to funders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five 2-hour sessions, 2003</li> </ul> <p>All sessions focused on a specific data collection and analysis strategy (including use of Excel to manage and analyze data). The final session provided an opportunity for funders to devise a post-REP plan.</p>	<p><i>Representatives from almost all (private and public) funder organizations participated regularly. In 2001 the group initiated a mini-study to collect basic information about the use of better practices strategies among REP partners. This gave them an opportunity to experience evaluation, and all its challenges first hand.</i></p> <p><i>Representatives from most funder organizations (private and public) participated regularly. Public and private funders worked hard to discuss and increase understanding about the relevance of evaluation strategies for funders and to learn more about the challenges and successes of each funding entity.</i></p> <p><i>Representatives from many of the funder organizations (private and public) continued to participate regularly. Public and private funders worked to discuss and increase understanding about the relevance of evaluation strategies for funders.</i></p>
<p><b>CEO Training 2001, 2002</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four 2-hour sessions</li> </ul> <p>CEO's/Executive Directors from both new and alumni service provider partner organizations participated in basic training sessions about evaluation planning, logic models, data collection, evaluation reporting and "ripple."</p>	<p><i>Participants from 14 service provider partner organizations that had not been previously involved in CEO training attended at least 3 of the 4 sessions. Those in attendance reported that they increased their understanding of evaluation and were more able to provide support to staff undertaking evaluation roles.</i></p>

Table 2: REP Implementation and Partner Response, Phase 3

IMPLEMENTATION/SERVICE DELIVERY	PARTNER ACCOMPLISHMENTS
<p><b>“Ripple” Support, 2001 and 2003</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two 3-hour workshops</li> </ul> <p>All service provider partners sent non-trainee staff and board members to participate in fast-paced workshops about evaluation basics including evaluation planning, logic models and a summary of data collection methods.</p>	<p><i>More than 70 people attended each session and feedback indicated the sessions were rated favorably, contributed to participants’ basic knowledge of evaluation, and helped establish the groundwork for ripple.</i></p>
<p><b>Partner Consultations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultations were provided to both funder and alumni REP partners as needed.</li> </ul> <p>The partners used the consultation services to design new studies, discuss organizational service delivery (or portfolios in the case of funders), provide training about evaluation to other staff groups, and to address data collection challenges such as sample size, evaluation design, and instrument development/revision.</p>	<p><i>Two-thirds of the funding partners and almost half of the service provider partners availed themselves of consultation time, especially during 2001 and 2002. All partners who used this service reported the consultations had been helpful.</i></p>
<p><b>Governance Team Meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Five meetings/ year in each year of Phase 3</li> </ul> <p>The Governance Team provided ongoing project guidance; oversaw service delivery for the final phase; revised the REP provider selection criteria, and selected 12 new trainee groups for Classes 6 and 7; oversaw development and delivery of REP community conferences in June of 2001, 2002 and 2003, and a recruitment conference in October 2001. The governance team also oversaw REP evaluation.</p>	<p><i>Until the final months of Phase 3, the Governance Team meetings were well attended, especially by service provider partners. Partners routinely praised the executive team<sup>7</sup> for running timely, informative and interactive meetings. Partners also regularly reported appreciation for opportunities to bring funders and providers together.</i></p>

<sup>7</sup> The executive team was composed of a representative from the Bruner Foundation and the Rochester Grantmakers Forum and both the evaluation partners.

Table 2: REP Implementation and Partner Response, Phase 3

IMPLEMENTATION/SERVICE DELIVERY	PARTNER ACCOMPLISHMENTS
<p><b>Community Training and Other Outreach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two sessions delivered by REP partners at the 2001 United Way conference.</li> <li>• Brochures and Fact Sheets were produced</li> <li>• Partners presented a session about REP at the American Evaluation Association 2001 conference, and several partners presented talks about their REP participation at their local or national conferences.</li> </ul> <p>United Way Conference sessions addressed basics of data collection and data analysis.</p>	<p><i>About 60 people attended each United Way workshop. Session assessments conducted by the United Way were favorable regarding the presentations overall, the materials, and participant learning.</i></p>
<p><b>Partner Conferences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Conference, June 2001</li> <li>• Recruitment Session, October 2001</li> <li>• Partner Conferences, June 2002, June 2003</li> </ul> <p>Partner conferences provided opportunities for REP partners to present the results of their evaluation work and to further discuss “ripple,” and strategies to sustain capacity in their organizations.</p>	<p><i>Summary assessments conducted at the end of each conference showed that the conferences had been well received and that the partnership had achieved its conference goals.</i></p>



Table 2: REP Implementation and Partner Response, Phase 3

IMPLEMENTATION/SERVICE DELIVERY	PARTNER ACCOMPLISHMENTS
<p><b>Final Partner Sessions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four final training sessions were held for provider and funder partners</li> </ul> <p>The sessions addressed: report writing and use of tables and figures, using Excel and SPSS to manage and analyze data, using the internet and developing theories of change, and advanced techniques for administering and analyzing data from web-based surveys.</p>	<p><i>Each of these sessions included attendees from both funder and service provider partner organizations, as well as representatives from each of the seven classes of graduates. Each session was attended by about 15 partners. Those that participated valued the sessions and potential use of the strategies.</i></p>

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CORE REP TRAINING ACTIVITIES

The final REP survey asked participants directly about what REP opportunities were important. In alignment with their attendance, survey responses indicated that almost all partners thought it was important to continue *learning new information about evaluation* (95% of providers and 100% of funders), to have *access to consultations* (93% of providers and funders), and to have opportunities to continue doing guided evaluation projects through the alumni study group or the funders study group (94% of providers and 86% of funders). All of the funders who answered the survey indicated that REP provided important opportunities for providers to continue learning about evaluation and to obtain consultations.

*“We needed this training and we loved having someone come in with tools that made sense. It was like going to a master’s course.”*

REP Trainee Class 4

## COSTS AND BENEFITS

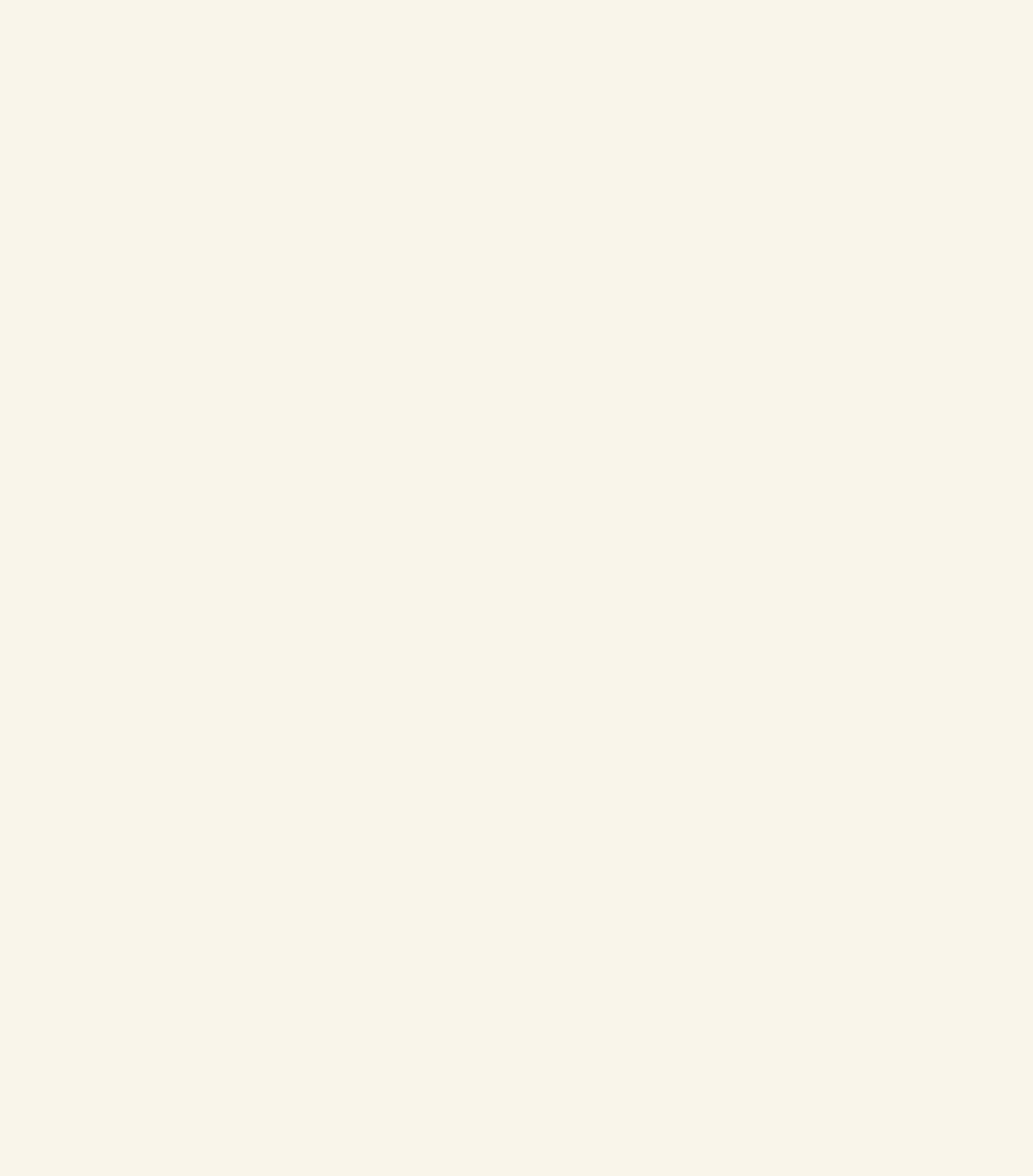
A total of \$796,148 was raised by the funding partners to support all REP activities throughout its seven years. The total expense for all three phases of REP was \$781,629. The evaluation partners’ fees<sup>8</sup> and travel and other direct costs accounted for 60% of these expenses. Other expenses included administration of the project by the Rochester Grantmakers Forum and costs associated with the production of community and partner conferences. REP maintained a balanced budget for each of its phases, and ended the project with a small surplus that was used for production and distribution of the final report and to host one final community conference.

Per person/per agency costs and cost benefits were challenging to determine, as different participants had different levels and duration of interaction. The following provides some clarification regarding REP benefits.

<sup>8</sup> More than 750 days of evaluator time were dedicated to this project. Evaluator time included development of materials, delivery of training to all participants, review of evaluation projects and individual consultations.

- Over the three phases of REP, a total of 76 trainees each completed 30 hours of direct, hands-on training in participatory evaluation, and 20 additional hours of supervised evaluation project assistance.
- About half of the eligible trainees also participated in 20 - 40 additional hours of training through the alumni study group.
- A total of 44 evaluations were completed as part of the REP project (including 14 that were done by members of the alumni study group).
- A total of 8 hours of evaluation training was provided to 15 Executive Directors (note that four others completed the full 30 hours of training).
- Fifteen funders (including representatives from the Advertising Council and the Rochester Grantmakers Forum) also received 12 hours of training (using funder-specific materials). In addition, most of those funders had access to an additional 18 hours of training and consultation annually by the evaluation partner.
- A total of 5 hours of individual consultation were available for all partners, annually, for evaluation-related issues (in addition to the comprehensive individual consultation available about specific REP-related evaluation projects). On average, between 6 and 8 partners each year availed themselves of this REP service.
- Approximately 150 individuals from the REP partner organizations attended 3-hour, hands-on group training sessions with the REP evaluation partners.
- Evaluation guidebooks which provided information about evaluation planning, data collection, data analysis and reporting evaluation findings were developed specifically for each of the different REP training activities (provider training, funder training, executive director training, evaluation essentials for the group training).
- More than 125 people attended the five 3-hour community conferences sponsored by REP (including the final conference).
- Finally, the initiative was evaluated each year by the partners (including contributions to the external evaluation conducted by Innovation Network, Inc.), with more comprehensive efforts being undertaken at the end of each phase.

It is clear from the above that substantial levels of service were provided to REP participants. At fair market prices, the costs for these services would easily have equaled or exceeded the resources that were provided for the initiative. The impact of what was provided will be addressed in the next section.



# Rochester Effectiveness Partnership Outcomes

In addition to summarizing project implementation, the final evaluation of REP focused on project outcomes. Specifically, we investigated whether partners learned about evaluation, inquired about whether they had applied what they learned, and studied how they were extending or “rippling” their training through their organizations. In addition, we characterized the value and importance of REP.

## EVALUATION LEARNING

More than three-fourths of all REP survey respondents reported learning *a lot* (as opposed to learning only *some* or *none*) about each of the four key steps in planning a program evaluation: developing logic models, specifying evaluation questions, developing evaluation designs, and about choosing evaluation methods.

## METHODS

Most of the service provider partners reported that they learned *a lot* about basic methods of collecting evaluation data including use of surveys (74%), interviews (73%) and observations (66%). As one

would expect, given the nature of their REP training, much smaller proportions of funders indicated they had learned *a lot* about each of these topics (although almost all indicated they had learned at least *a little* about each method).

### ANALYSIS

Providers and funders were also taught the more challenging tasks of collecting and analyzing data. Almost all provider respondents indicated that through REP, they had learned about analyzing record review, survey, interview, and observation data. Specifically, 65% said they learned *a lot* about analysis of record review data, 70% had learned *a lot* about survey data analysis, 68% had learned *a lot* about interview data analysis, and 58% had learned *a lot* about the analysis of observation data. Results for funders were consistent with the nature of their training. Most learned at least *a little* about each type of analysis, with one-third reporting they learned *a lot* about each.

During Phase III, the evaluation partners also introduced both providers and funders to Excel as a tool for managing and analyzing survey and record review data. More than three-fourths of the respondents, including 82% of the providers and 70% of the funders, confirmed that they had learned to use Microsoft Excel as a tool.

### REPORT WRITING

The final evaluation learning task for REP participants was to prepare an evaluation report of findings. Although they learned about what was important to include in such reports, funders did not undertake these tasks. Almost two-thirds of providers (62%) reported that they had learned *a lot* about writing reports (another 36% said they learned at least *a little*). A total of 75% of providers reported they learned *a lot* about presenting findings of their work, and about half (52% and 54% respectively) said they learned *a lot* about critically reading their own work and the work of others.

### APPLICATION OF REP LEARNING

Across the three phases of REP, a total of 44 full evaluation projects and reports were completed, including 14 that were done while organizations were in the alumni study group. The evaluation projects varied in terms of focus, scope and difficulty, but all providers completed these projects, developed and implemented action steps from the findings, and presented the findings at partner conferences and other meetings within their organizations.

While evaluation reports were the key products, the REP project was also designed to teach partners to use components of their training in their everyday work. As such, we asked providers whether they had

learned how to run stakeholder meetings so they could encourage meaningful involvement of others in evaluation design, data collection and analysis; incorporate evaluation into their daily practice; and share REP training with other staff members. A total of 30% said they learned *a lot* about how to run a stakeholder meeting (an additional 66% stated they learned *a little*), 71% stated they learned *a lot* about how to incorporate evaluation practices into daily practice (an additional 26% stated they learned *a little*), and 50% said they had learned *a lot* about sharing REP training with other staff members (an additional 47% reported they learned *a little* about sharing REP training).

Funders were also asked if they had learned about incorporating evaluation practice into their daily practice. A total of 55% indicated they had learned *a lot* and an additional 36% reported they had learned a least *a little* about how to incorporate what they were learning through REP.

### EXTENDING REP: RIPPLING

Beyond learning about evaluation practice and methodology, REP participants, especially service provider partners, were expected to extend or “ripple” their experiences to others in their organizations. What we found through the survey is that REP partners have definitely begun to “ripple”

what they have learned. We also learned that “ripple” is happening in many different ways, and that service providers intend to continue “rippling” what they learned in REP even though the initiative is over. The “ripple” findings also highlight the challenges of extending and sustaining the training, and suggest where additional technical assistance may be needed.

### EXTENT OF RIPPLE

The majority of REP providers (65%) have “rippled” REP at least *a little*, and about a third of the providers reported that they have “rippled” REP *a lot*. Funders’ perceptions of provider “ripple” were somewhat different. Most funders were aware that “ripple” was happening in provider organizations, but they were not aware that some organizations have done it *a lot*.

It is interesting to note that nine out of the ten former service provider partners who have moved to a different organization have “rippled” their REP learning into the organizations where they now work. This speaks clearly to the transportability and staying power of REP.

### *What is Ripple Anyway?*

*“Ripple” was a term coined by REP partners. It refers to the process of extending or spreading evaluation learning throughout an agency.*

#### TYPES OF RIPPLE

Most of the providers (90%) have shared the process of REP (i.e., what they learned and why) with staff within their organizations. In addition, almost all REP partners shared the findings of their evaluation projects with their whole organizations. Interestingly, and again in good participatory style, a substantial majority of the providers (85-88%) reported that they have provided evaluation training to other staff. Almost three-fourths of the provider respondents (73%) have provided training to staff within their larger organizations, and about two-thirds (67%) have encouraged stakeholders to attend REP “ripple” training. About half of the providers reported that they have shared the findings from their REP evaluations and the process of REP with other organizations in the community.

#### IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Beyond “rippling” what they learned to others within their organizations, partners reported they were able to build overall organizational capacity in several key areas. Representatives from all of the service provider partner organizations that participated in the focus groups (n=11), stated that they had improved their evaluation capacity, program development, and alliances and collaborations *a lot* due to participation in REP. All but one organization (ten out of eleven) thought they had increased their staff development process *a lot* due to participation in REP.

#### THE VALUE OF REP

The findings of the final REP evaluation provided substantial evidence that service provider partners experienced positive outcomes at individual, program and organizational levels and that funders shared those perceptions about provider outcomes.



A substantial majority of providers (88%) and funders (85%) reported that REP had enhanced the individual abilities of providers as communicators and changed their understanding of their programs. More than three-fourths of the providers also agreed that REP was important because it helped their organization get instruments in place to measure outcomes they valued, incorporate evaluation into their daily practice, look at programs from different perspectives, and conduct better evaluations of programs.

In addition, REP providers and funders agreed that REP had influenced their use of evaluation at the program level. Almost all providers (91%) and three-fourths of the funders reported that REP had helped them to build evaluation into their program planning and to revise programs based on real data.

Finally, funder and provider stakeholders of REP stated that the collaborative impacted funder/provider relationships and communication within provider organizations, increased the level of knowledge and clarity about evaluation throughout the community, and showed that all partners understood the value of engaging frontline staff in the participatory evaluation process.

## CHALLENGES AND TIPS FOR REPLICATING REP

REP was a complex and comprehensive initiative that involved many different people and organizations over its seven years. As such, there were some project design-related aspects of the work that others would have done differently and that developers of similar projects should carefully consider.

- **Project duration and intensity:** It was hard to determine in advance the path REP would take beyond the two-year pilot. Consideration was given to practical realities when decisions about extending the partnership and expanding the number of service provider and funder partners were made. There were some who thought that more service providers should have been involved and that REP should go on indefinitely. The partners ultimately decided, however, that maintaining project quality required REP to stay small enough to be manageable and that a finite term was acceptable.
- **Project cost and financial sustainability:** The REP governance team reviewed projected and actual budgets at each of its meetings, in addition to assisting with outreach to new funders. The group assessed financial options each time a new phase was initiated. Several partners questioned whether making some aspects of the training fee-based would have increased REP's value and

utility. The lead funder believed strongly that the participating organizations were contributing significant amounts of time to the project in lieu of fees. Data showed that without fees, participation was high, training valued, and skills were used and passed on to others in the organizations.

- **Evaluation partners:** While REP successfully integrated many partners, its connection with local evaluators proved more elusive. Both evaluation partners came from locations outside of Rochester, resulting in additional costs for the partnership. Meaningful roles for other evaluators, including some locally-based evaluation consultants, were not developed. The partners believed that the need for expertise in participatory evaluation was critical to the project's success and were willing to trade location for qualifications.
- **Alliances between REP and the higher education community** in Rochester were not made. A few REP partners thought about whether the universities might have made a valuable contribution. However, no formal alliances were sought out. The fit and connection with the Rochester Grantmakers Forum continued to make sense throughout the three phases of REP.
- **Evaluation of REP:** During each phase of REP, the partners grappled with how and whether to involve external evaluators in the REP evaluation process. Because REP was a project firmly committed to self-governance and meaningful participatory evaluation, the partnership ultimately decided to use more internal strategies. For the first and third phases the REP funder and service provider partners worked together with the REP evaluation partner(s) to get the evaluation done. In the second phase, the REP partners worked hired an external organization (Innovation Network, Inc.) with participatory evaluation expertise to conduct the evaluation. The partners were satisfied with the accuracy and utility of the findings for each evaluation.

*Part 2*



From REP to ETHOS:  
Studying Evaluative Thinking In Organizations



# From REP to ETHOS: Studying Evaluative Thinking In Organizations

## CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

**F**rom the outset, REP was committed to building individual evaluation capacity in all of its participants. Specific skills were taught, used and refined. As the partnership evolved, so did the understanding that in order for individual participants to sustain these new skills, organizations needed to understand the value and utility of evaluation as a core component of organizational and program management. Implicit in this theory of change was the belief that organizations which valued and used evaluation would be more effective.

As can be seen in the previous section of this report, the accomplishments of REP are well documented. Formal evaluations were conducted during each phase, and evaluation reports are available for review on the Bruner Foundation website ([www.brunerfoundation.org](http://www.brunerfoundation.org)). In sum, evaluation capacity was increased in staff and organizations, programs within organizations were altered based on findings, and evaluation learning was shared beyond the original trainees. Still, at the end of REP, questions remained regarding the relationship

between increased evaluation capacity, changes in organizational practice, and organizational effectiveness.<sup>9</sup>

To better understand these issues, the Bruner Foundation and its evaluation partners undertook a review of relevant literature about capacity building, evaluation use and the relationships between these and organizational effectiveness. In their report of 2001, Campobasso and Davis helped frame our thinking with their definition of capacity building as “The development of an organization’s core skills and capabilities, such as leadership, management, finance and fundraising, programs and evaluation, in order to build the organization’s effectiveness and sustainability.” Further, they describe capacity building as “...the process of assisting an individual or group to identify and address issues and gain insights, knowledge and experience needed to solve problems and implement change.” **In other words, capacity building was not necessarily discrete technical assistance for specific tasks such as strategic planning or board training, but potentially much broader – the increased capability to solve problems and implement changes which would lead to increased effectiveness and long term sustainability.**

With this context, we looked back to the field of evaluation where, over the past decade, some have highlighted the connections between the everyday use of evaluation practices and measurement systems

and increased organizational effectiveness. In particular, use of participatory strategies has been linked with an increase in the likelihood that evaluation would be used and incorporated more deeply into everyday organizational practice.

Participatory strategies are seen as valuable, in part, because they engage a variety of stakeholders<sup>10</sup> which in turn leads to an increase in knowledge and use of evaluation within organizations (Duignan 2003; Fetterman, Kaftarian and Wandersman 1996; Patton 1997). This increased use of evaluation, combined with improved programs, can lead to positive impacts on organizations (Campobasso and Davis 2001; Compton, Baizerman, Stockdill 2003; Hernandez and Visser 2001; Patton 2004; Sanders 2003).

*Participatory strategies include empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, Kaftarian and Wandersman, 1996), utilization focused evaluation (Patton, 1997), democratic evaluation (McDonald, 1976; McTaggart, 1991), transformative participatory evaluation (Tandon and Fernandes 1982, 1984; Fals-Borda, 1980; Gaventa, 1993), developmental evaluation (Patton, 1994), and practical participatory evaluation (Cousins and Earl, 1992, 1995; Ayers 1987).*

<sup>9</sup> The Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) recently defined organizational effectiveness as the ability of an organization to fulfill its mission by measurably achieving its objectives through a blend of sound management, strong governance, and a persistent re-dedication to achieving results. [www.geofunders.org](http://www.geofunders.org).

<sup>10</sup> Stakeholders are all those with a vested interest in the program including, where appropriate, management, staff members, clients, board members and funders.

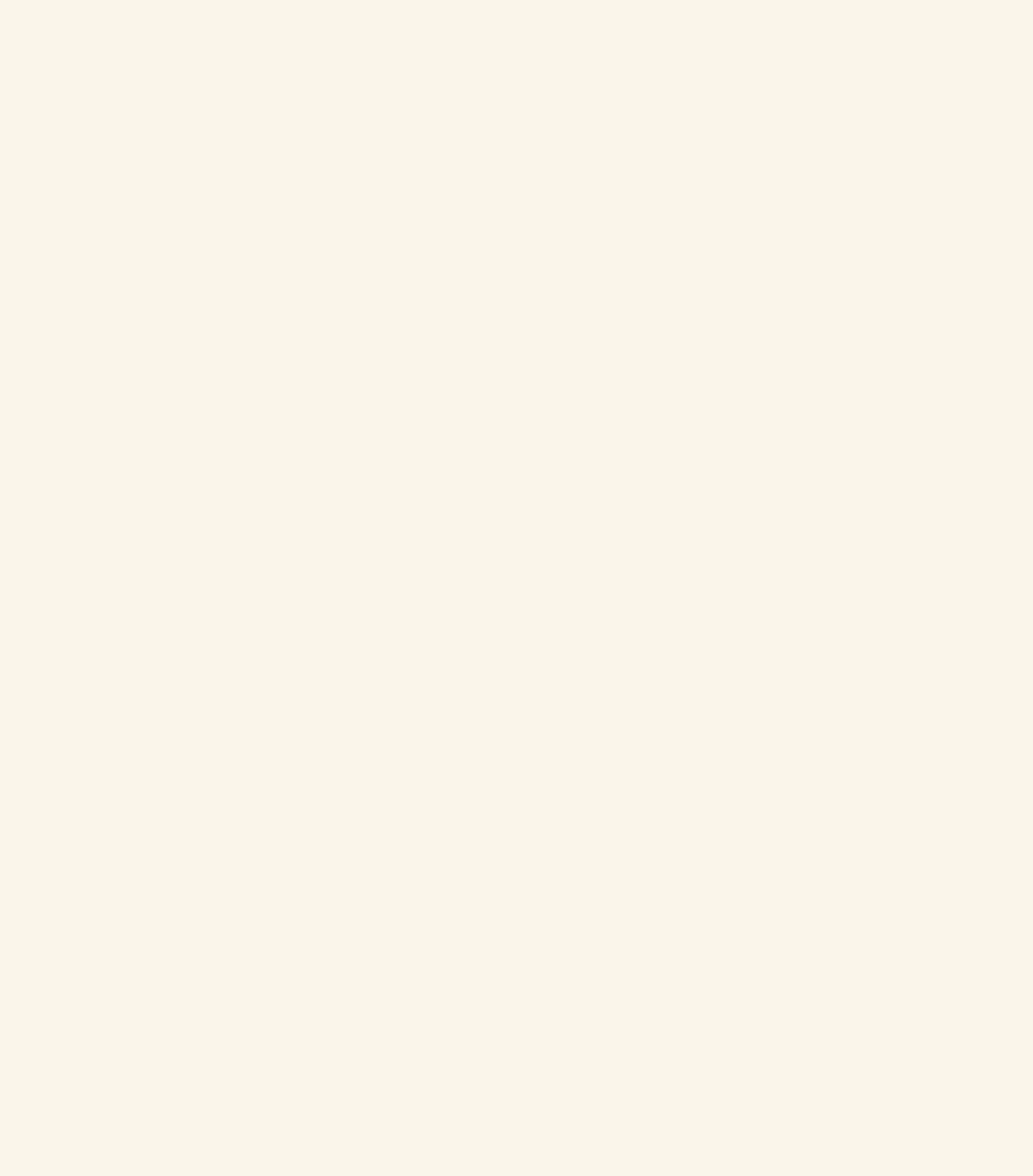
In addition to studies about evaluation use and organizational capacity building, some researchers have begun to explore how the process of engaging in evaluation activities may change thinking and behavior. In a recent work, Patton distinguished *process use* (“the impact evaluation can have in helping people in programs learn to think and engage each other evaluatively”) from *findings use* (“the impact of using evaluation results.”) *Process use* includes the changes in “thinking, behavior, procedures and culture stemming from the learning that occurs during the process of conducting an evaluation” (Patton, 2004, p.4). Patton also summarized evaluation process use as a “kind of evaluative thinking that can have enduring impact on both individuals and organizations. Program stakeholders learn to define key questions, interpret evidence, draw conclusions, examine assumptions and make judgments.”

Others, too, have added to this discussion, clarifying that evaluation can have more than an instrumental or “core management function,” and is more than a “capacity to be built.” They describe *integrated evaluation practices* as organizationally transformative and evaluation as an approach that supports ongoing organizational development, therefore impacting a multitude of other capacities (Campobasso and Davis, 2001; Compton, Baizerman, Stockdill, 2003; Hernandez and Visher, 2001; Light, 2002).

Specific reports from the California Wellness Foundation’s *Reflections on Capacity Building* (Campobasso and Davis, 2001) and the James Irvine Foundation’s *Working on Workforce Development* (Hernandez and Visher, 2001) documented that participatory approaches to evaluation not only built organizational evaluation capacity, but had the unintended outcome of shifting organizational mindsets, norms and practices.

Finally, the literature review added clarity regarding the importance of far-reaching and systematic participation in evaluation. In a recent study, Duignan concluded that “in order for evaluation to support more effective organizations, people at all levels of organizations need to become more evaluative about what they are doing” (Duignan 2004, p. 12). They must have “appropriate evaluation skills, systems, structures and resources to support them in taking a more evaluative approach to their work.”

The key finding from this literature review suggested that there was ongoing value in studying relationships among participatory evaluation capacity, evaluative thinking and ultimately organizational effectiveness.





## Implementation of Ethos

The Evaluative Thinking in Organizations (ETHOS) project was conceived during the last months of the Rochester Effectiveness Partnership project, and conducted throughout 2004. Former REP service provider partners were invited to join this short-term, interactive study to continue thinking about relationships between evaluation capacity, evaluative thinking and organizational effectiveness. The seven-year experience with REP and the most current thinking about evaluation capacity building and the role of evaluation capacity in overall organizational effectiveness informed development of an initial hypothesis and the ETHOS study design.

### PROJECT DESIGN

At the conclusion of REP, all active service provider partners were invited by the Bruner Foundation to participate in ETHOS, a project that would include six 2-hour sessions and would require participation in data collection and analysis, and the commitment of the executive director and board chair. Each participating organization was also informed that participation benefits would include involvement in the development of a specifically designed assessment tool to facilitate learning more about evaluative thinking in organizations; assistance developing

action plans for increasing evaluation capacity and evaluative thinking in their organizations; ongoing access to evaluation consultation from evaluation partners; and an opportunity to help build and strengthen the fields of evaluation, non-profit management, and grant-making.

The project was launched in January 2004 with the following initial hypothesis:

*If you go through an evaluation capacity-building process that is long-term, hands-on, uses a curriculum and includes coaching, like the REP project, then the use of evaluative thinking in multiple organizational capacity areas (which the literature shows is linked with organizational effectiveness) should be evident, and challenge areas should be identifiable.*

The work was guided by the following questions.

- 1) What does evaluative thinking look like within various organizational capacity areas?
- 2) How are evaluative thinking and organizational effectiveness related?
- 3) What is needed to enhance and broaden evaluative thinking?

The following sections provide extensive details regarding how ETHOS was conducted; development of an evaluative thinking assessment instrument, site visit guide and scoring strategy; and outcomes of the ETHOS project.

## ETHOS PROCESS AND PARTNERS

A total of 11 of 21 active<sup>11</sup> REP partners elected to fully participate in the ETHOS project.<sup>12</sup> This included Action for a Better Community (ABC), Catholic Family Center (CFC), the Genesee/Orleans Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, (GCASA), the Learning Disabilities Association (LDA), Lifespan Of Greater Rochester, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Upstate New York Chapter (MS Society), the Norman Howard School, Planned Parenthood – Rochester/Syracuse region, Sojourner House, Roosevelt Childrens Center of Wayne ARC, and the YWCA of Rochester and Monroe County (see Table A and the Bruner Foundation website for additional details about these organizations).

Senior management staff members or CEOs from each of these organizations met together six times to further define evaluative thinking, to develop the ETHOS evaluative thinking assessment tool, to discuss cross-site findings, and to further reflect on the process of assessing, sustaining and extending evaluative thinking in organizations. In addition, the ETHOS partners arranged for, oversaw and participated in the ETHOS site visits to their organizations, reviewed their organization's assessment findings, and helped develop initial action plans to promote evaluative thinking.

<sup>11</sup> Active partners were those who had continued to participate in training sessions and attend governance meetings.

<sup>12</sup> Note that a twelfth former REP partner wanted to participate but was undergoing significant organizational changes at the time of the project. Representatives from that organization attended all of the ETHOS partner meetings, but did not host a site visit or complete the assessment instrument.

<b>IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS: ETHOS</b>	
<p><b>SESSION 1 January 2004</b></p> <p>ETHOS Orientation, initial discussion about the research on evaluation and organizational capacity building. Summarization of organizational profiles, for participating organizations.</p> <p><b>SESSION 2 February 2004</b></p> <p>Discussion of key organizational capacity areas and indicators of organizational effectiveness. Development of the draft evaluative thinking assessment tool and discussion of site visit strategies.</p> <p><b>SESSION 3 Site Visits March, April, May 2004</b></p> <p>Evaluators visited each participating ETHOS organization to collect/review evaluative thinking assessment data. Organizations hosted the site visits and convened staff needed for assessment. (See additional details about the site visits in the following section.)</p>	<p><b>SESSION 4 October 2004</b></p> <p>Cross-site evaluative thinking assessment results reviewed and key findings summarized. Action plans initiated and feedback regarding the ETHOS process and findings collected via partner surveys.</p> <p><b>SESSION 5 November 2004</b></p> <p>Partners discussed ETHOS study conclusions and contributions of REP to evaluative thinking, and made final revisions to the tool.</p> <p><b>SESSION 6 December 2004</b></p> <p>Partners conducted final reviews of ETHOS findings and evaluation partners conducted training in use and scoring of the ETHOS tool.</p>
<p>In addition, evaluation partners compiled individual organization draft reports for each partner organization (early June 2004), held individual meetings with each partner site via telephone to discuss the accuracy of their reports and begin identifying priorities and action plans (late June 2004), and produced final reports by mid-summer 2004 (July). The evaluation partners also combined data from all 11 participating sites and produced draft and final cross-site reports (August 2004).</p>	

The ETHOS partner organizations were diverse in terms of staff size, annual budget, type of clients served, relationship to national/oversight agencies, and leadership and reporting structures (see Table A).

- Five of the partners were self-described as large organizations with multiple divisions serving multiple sites (including two that were affiliates of large national organizations).
- Two sites were schools (one of which was independent, the other a program of a large non-profit service provider organization).
- Two partners were medium-sized organizations with very specific target groups (the elderly and learning disabled youth and young adults), one was a small chapter of a large, national affinity group with multiple sites, and one was a small independent organization serving a very specific target group (female custodial parents with addiction challenges).

The term *organization*<sup>13</sup> was used to describe all of the ETHOS partners but each individual partner group had a unique configuration as they worked through the assessment. For example, the Upstate New York Chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis society serves members from several upstate sites, and Planned Parenthood similarly has multiple sites throughout the region. The MS Society chose to focus mostly on its Rochester-based group, while

Planned Parenthood incorporated assessments from each of their sites in the Rochester/Syracuse region.

*Evaluative Thinking* was defined as a type of reflective practice that incorporated use of systematically collected data to inform organizational decisions and other actions. ETHOS Partners agreed that key components of evaluative thinking included:

- asking questions of substance,
- determining what data are needed to address the questions,
- gathering appropriate data in systematic ways,
- analyzing data and sharing results, and
- developing strategies to act on evaluation findings.

The partners also clarified that evaluative thinking could be applied to many organizational functions (e.g., mission development/revision, human resources decision-making) in addition to program development and service delivery.

## DEVELOPING AND USING THE EVALUATIVE THINKING ASSESSMENT TOOL

The evaluation and organizational partners of ETHOS decided that they were interested in and committed to taking a systematic look at the extent of evaluative thinking in their organizations so that

<sup>13</sup> The partners collectively defined organization as a company, enterprise or institution (or part or combination thereof) that has a shared mission, is an identifiable unit with particular responsibilities, and which works to achieve multiple goals by coordinated activities.

they could determine more about how to sustain and enhance it as needed. To accomplish this, they agreed to develop a tool focused specifically on evaluative thinking. This new tool would be informed by other related tools, such as the McKinsey Capacity Assessment Grid,<sup>14</sup> that assess organizational capacity, but it would be developed to fit their particular data needs. They also agreed that the process of tool development would be informative for the partners and would increase the usefulness of their product, and the tool would be simple enough to pilot quickly and would include a strategy to summarize results. The tool was not developed for general marketing purposes. The partners were committed to making it useful for their own purposes and later sharing it for consideration by others who might have similar interests in assessing evaluative thinking in their own organizations.

To create the tool, the evaluation and organizational partners reviewed multiple organizational assessment tools and developed/modified items to reflect evaluative thinking practices within key organizational areas. The resulting ETHOS assessment tool included multiple indicators for a critical subset of organizational capacity areas. The fifteen organizational capacity areas include Mission, Strategic Planning, Executive Leadership, Management Leadership, Governance, Fund Development/Fund Raising, Evaluation, Program Development, Client Relationships, Communication and Marketing, Technology Acquisition and Training,

Staff Development, Human Resources, Business Venture Development and Alliances and Collaborations.

In order to gain multiple perspectives and data about evaluative thinking from as many key staff as possible, participants also developed an ETHOS site visit strategy. The partners determined that respondents should involve key decision makers from each organization including, the executive director, representatives from upper and mid level management, line staff, representatives from the board of directors, and others as appropriate.

### ETHOS SITE VISITS

In the early spring of 2004, ETHOS partners initiated site visits so that evaluative thinking assessments could be conducted. In preparation for the visits, ETHOS partners did the following:

- Identified who would be involved in the assessment and how best to ensure their commitment and buy-in to the process.
- Distributed the tool to those who were to be involved (the assessment team) and had them complete the tool<sup>15</sup> before the site visit.
- Scheduled and prepared the assessment team for the meeting.
- Collected completed assessment forms from any team members who could not be at the meeting, but wanted their assessments included.

<sup>14</sup> The McKinsey scale is available for review in *Effective Capacity Building in Nonprofit Organizations, 2001*, a report developed by McKinsey & Company for Venture Philanthropy Partners.

<sup>15</sup> The ETHOS partners agreed upon a simple response strategy. To complete the instrument, respondents would be asked to assign a code denoting their perception of the presence or absence of each indicator. Since all respondents were not expected to know the status for each of the indicators, the partners included an "unknown to respondent" response choice. In addition to status, respondents would be asked to use a code to denote a priority ranking for each item they identified as not present. Ratings for status and priority were equally important.

Between March and May 2004, the evaluation partners visited each of the ETHOS sites and evaluative thinking assessments were conducted. During the site visits, data from the completed assessment forms were discussed and analyzed. The evaluation partners summarized findings in each organizational capacity area and facilitated discussions about why some assessment team members thought particular indicators of evaluative thinking were present in an organization while others thought they were not. The evaluation partners also facilitated discussions about priorities for addressing areas where more evaluative thinking was needed, and the groups talked about what *unknown to respondent* answers signified and how that could be addressed.

The site visits presented an opportunity for participating organizations to do the following:

- Bring staff together to think about the role of evaluative thinking in the organization's work and organizational effectiveness overall.
- Systematically collect assessment data about evaluative thinking in the organization.
- Discuss changes in, and set priorities regarding incorporation of evaluative thinking in organizational practice.

## EVALUATIVE THINKING DATA

The Evaluative Thinking Assessment tool included multiple questions in 15 different organizational capacity areas (see appendix for copy of the tool). As described above, each site collected and clarified response to the assessment tool during site visits. For each item on the assessment tool, sites recorded how many assessment team members reported an indicator of evaluative thinking was present (i.e., answered yes), how many indicated it was not present, and how many were uncertain (i.e., the presence or absence of the indicator was unknown to respondent). Response data were summarized to help the participating ETHOS organizations recognize whether and to what extent they were incorporating specific evaluative thinking strategies into their work, and in which organizational areas. Numeric scores ranging from 0 to 100 were then calculated for each organizational area. ETHOS partners were cautioned not to see these scores as grades, rather as a tool to help identify aspects of the organization's work where evaluative thinking was clearly used and aspects where evaluative thinking was not as evident.

## EVALUATIVE THINKING ASSESSMENT SCORES

The scores are valid percents for each organizational capacity area (mission, strategic planning, executive leadership, etc.) They clarified the number of affirmative answers for all items within a capacity area.

$$\frac{\# \text{ answering yes for all items}}{\# \text{ answering yes or no for all items}} \times 100$$

When a score is high it signifies that most respondents agreed most evaluative thinking practices are present. Lower scores suggested that some to many respondents thought evaluative thinking practices are not present for some or many indicators.

*\* Participants were reminded that scores would fluctuate depending on who was asked to complete the assessment and when the assessment was conducted. For this ETHOS pilot, unknown to respondent answers were not incorporated into the scores.*

### SITE REPORTS

Following the site visits, the evaluation partners developed a database for ETHOS responses and comprehensive site reports.<sup>16</sup> These reports provided an opportunity for each ETHOS partner organization to identify capacity areas where there appeared to be insufficient communication in the organization

(i.e., where there were a lot of unknown to respondent responses), capacity areas that needed more strategic attention (i.e., where scores were lower), and probable action steps to enhance evaluative thinking in the organization. Partners were encouraged to distribute the reports to their whole assessment teams and to other key stakeholders as they saw fit.

<sup>16</sup> The reports included a score summary graph, background information about ETHOS, and detailed tables showing responses for each indicator in each capacity area.

## CROSS-SITE DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

During the summer of 2004, the evaluation partners combined all the individual ETHOS site data into a cross-site database. This allowed us to take a closer look at specific indicators of evaluative thinking and to generate a cross-site report. The findings from the cross-site analysis are discussed in the next section.

The full group of ETHOS partners came together again in the fall of 2004 to discuss the cross-site results of the ETHOS data collection. During this meeting, a detailed summary of cross-site findings was presented and partners had the opportunity to discuss the overall results, individual site findings, interesting comparisons between cross-site and individual site results, and strategies for progress in each capacity area. Additionally, data was collected from participants about how ETHOS assessments were collected and used at each site (e.g., who was involved in the assessment team, what action plans had been developed, how results had been shared) and what impact the ETHOS site visits, analysis and reporting processes had on partner organizations.



## Ethos Study Results

The purpose of the ETHOS study was to assess the extent to which partner organizations had incorporated evaluative thinking into key organizational capacity areas. The assessments helped identify areas where our partner organizations, and ultimately those outside our partner group, should/could focus attention to enhance and sustain evaluative thinking. Key findings from our partners about evaluative thinking and organizational Mission, Strategic Planning, Executive Leadership, Management Leadership, Governance, Fund Development/Fund Raising, Evaluation, Program Development, Client Relationships, Communication and Marketing, Technology Acquisition and Training, Staff Development, Human Resources, Business Venture Development and Alliances and Collaborations are described here.

### A SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS ABOUT EVALUATIVE THINKING AMONG OUR PARTNERS

As stated previously, each individual organization had a unique set of scores<sup>17</sup> for each organizational capacity area. Additionally, these scores were combined to study the ETHOS partner organizations as a group. The average score across all 15 organizational capacity areas, for all 11 partner organizations combined, was 87 (out of 100). That means that, for the most part, the individuals involved in these

<sup>17</sup> Scores ranged from 0 to 100 and were calculated for each capacity area. Higher scores indicated assessment team members thought evaluative thinking was present in multiple organizational practices in an organizational capacity area.

assessments agreed that the specific indicators of evaluative thinking existed in their organizations. Further review of cross-site evaluative thinking findings showed that the partners' combined scores for each capacity area were relatively high.<sup>18</sup> Respondents confirmed the presence of many indicators of evaluative thinking in their regular practices. There were some differences, however, in the scores. For example, the lowest combined score was 78 for Management Leadership and the highest combined score was 94 for Strategic Planning. This tells us that respondents saw more evidence of evaluative thinking in the way their organizations planned their actions than in the way they administered them.

As stated below, the scores in all capacity areas were relatively high.<sup>19</sup> This signifies that there was agreement about the presence of evaluative thinking in different aspects of the partners' work. Specific findings about key evaluative thinking indicators combined with other comments by site visit participants (*in italics*) are presented below.

- **Management Leadership** scores were the lowest for all the capacity areas (combined score was 78). Most of the ETHOS organizations did not have a management leadership succession plan that included evaluation (i.e., job descriptions for senior managers did not include requirements about evaluation knowledge or evaluation duties). *Scores were also lower in this capacity area because fewer respondents agreed that*

#### ETHOS EVALUATIVE THINKING SCORES BY ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AREA

The Lowest Scores		Mid-range Scores		The Highest Scores	
Management Leadership	78	Evaluation	86	Governance	90
Communication/Marketing	79	Client Relationships	88	Executive Leadership	91
Human Resources	81	Business Venture Dev.	88	Program Development	91
Technology Acquisition	82	Fund Development	88	Mission	92
Staff Development	82			Alliances/Collaborations	93
				Strategic Planning	94

<sup>18</sup> We attribute the similarity in average scores, at least in part, to homogeneity and existing capacity among the selected organizations in terms of previous REP participation, leadership, and organizational culture regarding evaluation. All 11 organizations are widely recognized as effective based on their longevity, fund development and positive program evaluations.

<sup>19</sup> There were also relatively large numbers of respondents who were unfamiliar with certain indicators of organizational capacities. This information was not part of the score, but it was tracked for every indicator and informed important discussions regarding communication of information within organizations.

*information from evaluation was used for staffing decisions, to set staff goals, and to look at cross-departmental work.*

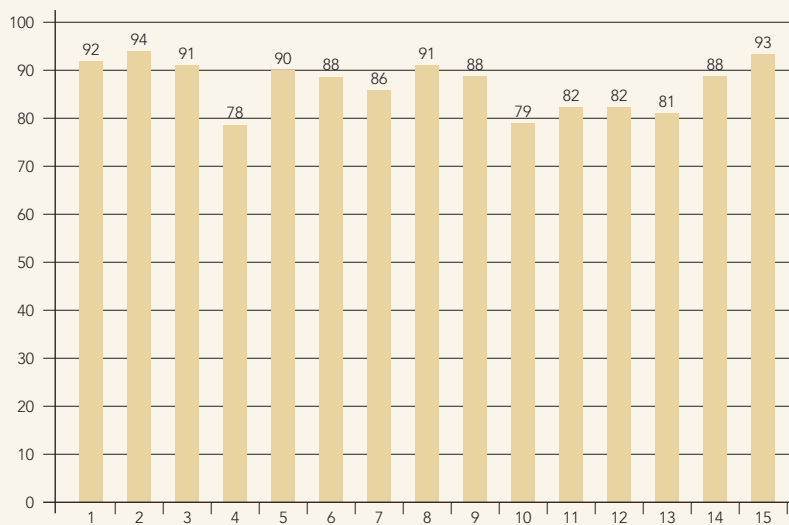
- **Communication** and Marketing scores were also relatively low (combined score was 79). Many respondents did not know whether there were communication plans for their organizations and many disagreed that planning was taking place or involving staff or board members. Additionally, respondents either disagreed that there was assessment of marketing plan effectiveness, or they were unfamiliar with it happening. *Of all the organizational capacity areas, Communication and Marketing were identified as least familiar to ETHOS team members and participants at the site visits* (as indicated by large numbers of unknown to respondent answers).
- The combined score for **Human Resources** was also among the lowest (81) for the ETHOS group. Assessment team members did not report collecting or using information about staff credentials, training and cultural competencies (for recruitment, job assignment, succession planning, etc.), nor did assessment team members agree that collected staff satisfaction information was used.
- The overall **Technology** Acquisition and Training score was 82. Inspection of the individual site reports showed great variability in this area. Some organizations agreed that most indicators in this area existed in their organizations, while others reported that many did not. There were also relatively large numbers of respondents who were unsure about how technology could best be used to support evaluation and evaluative thinking.
- The overall **Staff Development** score was also 82. Respondents indicated that there was a lot of staff development activity, but they disagreed that planning for and assessment of staff development were included in the delivery of staff development.
- The combined **Evaluation** score<sup>20</sup> of 86 was somewhat higher than the scores described above. *Participants at the site visits and ETHOS partners indicated that they had de-centralized evaluation functions.* ETHOS partner organizations had staff members whose jobs or components of their jobs were dedicated to evaluation, and these key people had evaluation expertise. *Areas identified as challenging included selection and use of evaluation consultants, providing training in evaluation (other than REP) and dedicating organizational funds to evaluation.*
- The combined **Client Relationships** score was 88. While most indicators of evaluative thinking in this organizational capacity area were present, there was disagreement regarding the role of clients in program development and assessment. *Many participants at the site visits, and ETHOS partners, indicated that clients should not or could not have roles in program development or assessment/evaluation other than as respondents.*

<sup>20</sup> Note that four original indicators that addressed the roles of stakeholders other than staff had to be removed from the score due to ambiguity and disagreement about appropriate and possible roles for stakeholders.

- **Business Venture Development** received a mid-range score overall, but there were substantial numbers of respondents who were completely unfamiliar with any of these efforts (combined score was 88).
- The combined score for **Fund Development/Fund Raising** was also an 88. Those who knew reported that there were definite links between Fund development/Fund Raising and evaluative thinking (e.g., results of evaluations were included in new proposals), but the relationship for many other respondents was unclear (i.e., there were a lot of *unknown to respondent* answers).
- **Governance** scores were relatively high across sites (combined score was 90). As with Fund Development/Fund Raising, those who knew were sure that evaluative thinking informed organizational governance. But there were consistently large numbers of respondents who were uninformed about many aspects of board involvement in the organization.
- **Executive Leadership** scores were consistently high (combined score was 91), but as with management leadership, plans for executive leadership succession were conspicuously absent. Most of the ETHOS organizations did not have a written executive leadership succession plan that included evaluation (i.e., the job description for the executive leader did not include requirements about evaluation knowledge or evaluation duties). Additionally, while most respondents agreed that their organizations' executive leaders supported and valued evaluation, many fewer respondents indicated that evaluation findings were consistently used in decision making for the organization. *Participants at the site visits and ETHOS team members also indicated that executive directors' roles in evaluation were mostly advisory.*
- Scores for **Program Development** were relatively high (combined score was 91). Most respondents agreed that findings from program evaluations were incorporated into the program planning process. However, they were less sure if there were correction strategies in place if program plans were not followed (i.e., if implementation assessment showed that programs were not correctly delivering their services). The other two areas where there was dissent or uncertainty involved the role of fund development personnel in program planning, and the use of logic models (or logical formulations). *Participants at the site visits and ETHOS team members indicated that fund development personnel should not have roles in program development. Rather, program development efforts should come first with fund development following to address program needs, rather than programs being developed when funds were identified as available. Groups also indicated that while many programs were using logic models (or something like them), there were still programs operating without a written logical formulation.*

- The combined **Mission** score was 92. Most respondents agreed that most mission-related indicators of evaluative thinking were present with one exception. Only at some organizations was the Mission Statement assessed annually and revised as necessary.
- **Alliance and Collaboration** scores were relatively high overall (combined score was 93). Again, those who knew agreed evaluative thinking was part of Alliance and Collaboration formation, but relatively few respondents knew about or had been involved in identification of alliance/collaborative needs or partnership formation at their organizations.

FIGURE 2: ETHOS CROSS-SITE SCORES



- |                          |                                  |                                     |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Mission               | 6. Fund Development/Fund Raising | 11. Technology Acquisition/Training |
| 2. Strategic Planning    | 7. Evaluation                    | 12. Staff Development               |
| 3. Executive Leadership  | 8. Program Development           | 13. Human Resources                 |
| 4. Management Leadership | 9. Client Relationships          | 14. Business Venture Dev.           |
| 5. Governance            | 10. Communication/Marketing      | 15. Alliances & Collaboration       |

- **Strategic Planning** scores were the highest of all the areas (combined score was 94). Most respondents indicated they had written strategic plans, that there was a formal process for developing the plan, and that input was obtained from multiple stakeholders. In addition, most respondents to the assessments indicated that their strategic plans were regularly assessed and used as road maps for decision making.

The full ETHOS cross-site report is available on the Bruner Foundation website. Where applicable, these scores can be used as benchmarks for other organizations seeking to assess evaluative thinking using the ETHOS process.

## ETHOS OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Both the process and the findings from ETHOS were instructive. The original hypothesis driving ETHOS was the following: *If you go through an evaluation capacity-building process that is long-term, hands-on, uses a curriculum and includes coaching, like the REP project, then the use of evaluative thinking in multiple organizational capacity areas (which the literature shows is linked with organizational effectiveness) should be evident, and challenge areas should be identifiable.* **The scores calculated from the ETHOS instruments suggest that this hypothesis was correct.** However, after the cross-site analysis

was completed, the extent to which ETHOS scores were related to participation in REP remained unclear. In order for us to better understand this relationship, we conducted a survey (available on the Bruner Foundation website) and a group interview with our ETHOS partners during the final two ETHOS meetings.

ETHOS partners clarified key outcomes through the survey and subsequent group discussion. Overall, the partners agreed that their organization's scores matched their perceptions of evaluative thinking in each of the capacity areas in their organizations. They also reported that prior to participation in REP, the quality of evaluations at their organizations was mostly *poor* or *fair*. After the REP training, evaluations conducted within the ETHOS organizations were considered either *good* or *excellent*. Most ETHOS participants (8) indicated that their organizations had increased the quality of their evaluations due to REP. Some ETHOS partners (4) also agreed that their organizations increased their use of evaluative thinking in the areas of program development, management leadership, and client relations due to their participation in REP. However, very few thought that participation in REP impacted their use of evaluative thinking in any of the other organizational capacity areas. ETHOS partners agreed that REP definitely built evaluation capacity, but they did not attribute their high levels of evaluative thinking solely to participation in REP.

Our ETHOS partners helped us to better understand the links between evaluation capacity building and evaluative thinking. First they clarified that the prevalence of evaluative thinking in their organizations was what brought them to REP in the first place (not the other way around). **This has far-reaching significance because it suggests that conducting an initial assessment of evaluative thinking in organizations applying to participate in REP-like training might help funders make informed decisions about which organizations to support.** Secondly, when asked why organizations that have already incorporated evaluative thinking into their work would also participate in a comprehensive evaluation capacity building program like REP, the partners were clear on the value. REP gave organizations the specific skills they needed to do good evaluation work. This had an instrumental value (i.e., it helped the partners respond to their external stakeholders and funders and to improve their programs) and it was a process in alignment with other efforts to be evaluative. REP helped the partners to set aside time to really study programs, to pursue the questions that were most relevant internally, and to practice collecting and using data.

When we asked the ETHOS partners whether they would use the tool and assess evaluative thinking again, most (8) agreed they would.<sup>21</sup> They also indicated they would advise other organizations to use it. They clarified that conducting the assessment

provided an opportunity to check on and confirm practices that are indicative of evaluative thinking. These practices should be gauged regularly. Additionally, a few of the organizations had experienced leadership or personnel changes, so the ETHOS assessment was a way of making sure that desired practices were still in place after a shift. Finally, the assessment helped organizations to see where there were unmet internal communication needs within their organizations. All of the representatives from the ETHOS partner organizations reported that evaluative thinking was valued in their organizations – i.e., all indicated their organizations strived to involve multiple staff and other stakeholders in decision-making that is based on systematically collected data, incorporating assessment and evaluation into all areas of their work, and remaining open to the findings of assessment and evaluation. Having better evaluation skills helped to justify that value.

### NEXT STEPS

At the conclusion of the project, the ETHOS partners were still sharing their site findings with others in their organizations. They were also continuing to develop action plans to address those strategic challenges revealed through the analysis (e.g., not having a leadership succession plan that included attention to evaluation), and they were continuing to think about how they would sustain and expand evaluative thinking in their organizations now that

<sup>21</sup> The dissenting partners indicated they would not use the Evaluative Thinking Assessment tool again due to other organizational challenges (e.g., mergers, major staff changes) that would prevent their doing so anytime soon.

they had clarified specific indicators in multiple organizational capacity areas. They encouraged the evaluation and funding partners to continue exploring the links between evaluation capacity and evaluative thinking and they asked for continued technical assistance in evaluation. Specifically, they requested more basic evaluation training for additional staff persons, help developing plans to involve line staff in evaluation, and help clarifying how evaluations are currently being conducted and used in their organizations. In addition, they wanted assistance with data collection from staff (about their staff development needs and experiences, about their satisfaction, and about their credentials and capacities).

### IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN ETHOS

The participating organizations reported that the ETHOS process was very productive. They believed their site reports confirmed their understanding of their organizations and helped indicate new directions. Partners confirmed that participation in ETHOS had definitely provided an opportunity for them to bring staff together to think about the role of evaluative thinking in their work, to obtain multiple perspectives about issues of importance to the organization's effectiveness, to collect and analyze assessment data about evaluative thinking in their organization, and to identify priorities about organizational practice as it relates to evaluative thinking.

Additionally, each partner organization was grateful for the opportunity to add to collective knowledge about evaluation capacity building.

ETHOS partners indicated that involvement in the project helped their organizations identify areas where they could do more to apply their evaluative thinking and to identify ways that evaluative thinking could be an integral part of organizational operations. In response to the project, partners

- shared their results with multiple stakeholders in their organizations.
- developed organizational responses or work plans based on sustaining evaluative thinking skills and broadening their use in the 15 key organizational capacity areas.
- took action on either communication issues or strategic issues (or both).

At the conclusion of the project, the ETHOS partners stated that as a result of their participation, they more fully understood the importance of evaluative thinking to their organizations. Most would recommend the process to other organizations that want to know more about the relationships between evaluative thinking and organizational effectiveness. More importantly, they recognized elements of evaluative thinking in multiple organizational capacity areas, and they indicated they would be able to sustain and/or improve evaluative thinking in their organizations.



*Part 3*



An Organization's Experience  
and Perspective on Evaluative Thinking



## An Organization's Experience and Perspective on Evaluative Thinking

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Lifespan is a non-profit service provider in Rochester, New York, and is the area's only comprehensive agency solely dedicated to serving older adults and their caregivers. Lifespan's mission is to enhance the quality of life for those in the *second half of life* by providing education, training, advocacy and a continuum of non-medical direct services that mirror the aging process. The agency responds to the needs of both frail and healthy older adults, as well as caregivers of any age.

Lifespan began in 1971 by a group of nursing home operators and the United Way of Greater Rochester. The founders recognized the need for community-based services to help elders remain independent for as long as possible. The agency has grown from two programs to over 20 today. The current operating budget is over \$5 million.

## WHAT INFLUENCED PARTICIPATION BY LIFESPAN?

Four primary factors led the agency to embrace the concept of participatory evaluation methods and join REP (in Class 5, January 2001). In isolation each factor seems inconsequential, but the culmination of the factors moved the leadership to focus on excellence and a new way to evaluate results.

- 1. Age Wave.** There is a national demographic shift that has a significant impact on public policy, demand for current services, and funding priorities. Every level of government and service providers are struggling to make sure the growing and changing needs of an older society are addressed.

Rochester, New York mirrors the rest of the nation. In 1997, Lifespan served 7,500 older adults/care-givers. In 2003, Lifespan served 17,954. There has been a tremendous demand for services, and the organization constantly watches the trends and shifts in the population.

- 2. Cuts in Funding.** Despite the age wave, government funding was (is) being cut. The President of the local United Way called this, “the Perfect Storm.” Because of the government cutting funding, the United Way was having a difficult if not impossible time making their annual fundraising goal. Foundations were feeling the

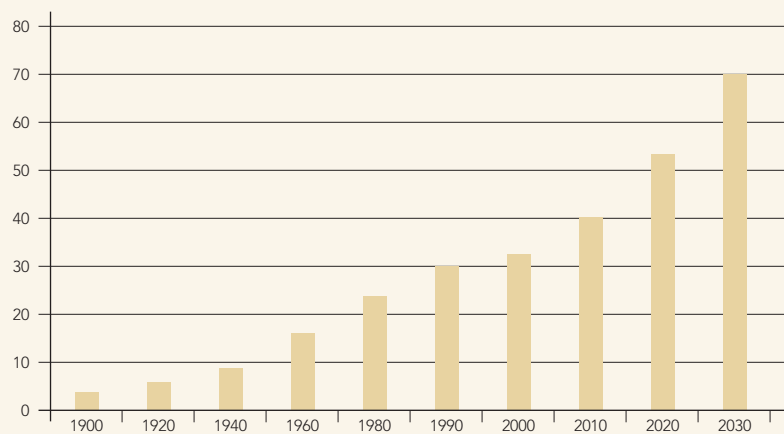
negative effect of poor market conditions.

The New York economy, and in particular that of upstate New York, was in the midst of a recession, with Rochester’s largest employer, Kodak, laying people off at unprecedented rates. There was more need and less money – a recipe for disaster.

Lifespan has multiple funding sources that include all levels of government. However, these funding sources are becoming inadequate. For example, the United Way of Greater Rochester (one of Lifespan’s funders) allocates only 9% of its total funding portfolio to senior programs and that appears unlikely to change. While the older adult population continues to increase, the funding for that population is decreasing.

Because of decreases in funding, Lifespan embarked in April 2000 on a Bridge to the Future Campaign. The organization launched a \$3.2 million fundraising campaign that had four purposes – to allow the agency to physically change locations, to upgrade technology, to provide support for innovative services like elder abuse prevention and care management that lacked ongoing, stable funding and most importantly, to provide philanthropic capital for the agency’s strategic move toward social entrepreneurship (defined by Lifespan as *matching organizational competencies with market opportunities to generate more net*

**FIGURE 3: NUMBER OF PERSONS 65 YEARS AND OLDER NATIONWIDE 1900 TO 2030 (PROJECTED) IN MILLIONS**



*revenue in order to achieve more mission-related goals*). In July of 2000, Lifespan moved to two new locations. The Bridge to the Future Campaign successfully concluded in March 2001 after raising \$3.4 million.

**3. Competition** – While the age wave appears on the surface to be a huge boom for Lifespan – everyone wants their market increasing – the competition from non-traditional businesses became fierce. Accountants, attorneys, and care managers that specialized in geriatrics sprung up everywhere. For the first time ever, the competition

was not just other non-profit aging service providers, but other professionals as well. Everyone was hoping to ride the age wave.

**4. Social Entrepreneurship** – The Bridge to the Future Campaign was for fundraising purposes, to help transform the agency into a non-profit that was forward thinking and more assertive in its approach. After researching information from The National Center for Social Entrepreneurs,<sup>22</sup> Lifespan developed social entrepreneurship values.

<sup>22</sup> [www.socialentrepreneurs.org](http://www.socialentrepreneurs.org)

Lifespan would:

- respond to customer needs – not government contracts.
- meet or exceed what the customer wants.
- know the competition.
- be sure that customers have choice and that competition exists.
- be experts in the field.
- have a double bottom line – a financial return on investment and a social return on investment.

The organization created business plans for new programs and services. Fee schedules for existing services were developed and annual goals were set to reduce reliance on traditional funding sources. The spirit of social entrepreneurship forced Lifespan to examine quality assurance practices. It also forced an examination of service delivery strategies, measurement tools, and outcome results, and it stimulated analysis of all data collected. Lifespan had to transform into an agency that older adults would choose.

### REP: A NEW WAY TO EVALUATE EFFECTIVENESS

With the convergence of issues Lifespan faced, the need to ensure quality increased. All programs and services had to be top-notch. Lifespan had to strive for excellence, and not in the way that most

corporations, organizations and agencies talk about it or have it written in a vision or mission statement. The organization truly had to be the best. It was the only way to move forward.

### AN EVALUATION PROJECT AT LIFESPAN

Lifespan applied to participate in Class 5 of the Rochester Effectiveness Partnership in January of 2001. The organization had received the brochure for previous sessions but had dismissed it because it appeared to be one more requirement, one more set of meetings and more paperwork in an already highly regulated, paper driven system.

Once the strategic decision was made to sharpen organizational focus and employ an entrepreneurial approach to management, REP made perfect sense. It allowed Lifespan to examine programs and services for internal purposes. Lifespan had never evaluated for the sole purpose of continuous program improvement before. All previous evaluation methods, outcome measurement techniques, and satisfaction surveys were funder driven and the information had to be reported to those funders. Nothing remained an internal process and, therefore, Lifespan continued to create outcome measurements whose primary purpose was to satisfy funders, not to improve services to customers.

## LIFESPAN'S EVALUATION OF THE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

### WHAT LIFESPAN WANTED TO KNOW

Since volunteers are the backbone of the program, Lifespan wanted to finally hear from them. Evaluation questions included the following:

- How effective is our training to volunteers?
- What do volunteers believe is the most crucial skill needed to serve this population?
- What do clients think is the most important service they received from our program?

### HOW THE EVALUATION WAS CONDUCTED

- Face-to-face interviews with volunteers
- Telephone interviews with clients
- Review of client records to determine how long they use services, and whether their incoming needs had been met.

### KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

- In terms of training, almost all of our volunteers had a financial background. That is what attracted them to the volunteer position. Therefore, they did not need our intensive financial management training. What they did need was an understanding of the aging process: What is the difference between an older adult being forgetful vs. dementia? What are physical signs that an individual may need additional help? What do they do in those instances? In essence we learned that we did not have an effective training program at all.
- Volunteers indicated that communication, compassion and patience were the most important skills to possess to help clients. (We assumed before the interviews that a strong knowledge about financial matters was the most important skill.)
- For clients, aside from helping pay their bills, companionship was seen as one of the most important services our volunteers provided.

Lifespan's first REP project was an evaluation of the Financial Management Program. This program was developed to assist older adults with in-home daily financial management, budgeting, bill paying, and accessing benefits. For this program, Lifespan utilizes a pool of trained volunteers to serve approximately 450 older adults in the Rochester area each year. For program funders, the financial stability of clients was annually measured before and after the intervention and client satisfaction was assessed. For the REP project, plans were different. The focus of the evaluation shifted to training and use of volunteers. Data collection still included telephone interviews with clients and a review of client records, but to address the new focus, face-to-face interviews with volunteers were conducted.

The results of the evaluation informed major program changes. Specifically, Lifespan revamped the training program for volunteers, changed the interview process that is conducted with potential volunteers, and changed the intake process with potential clients to sell the role of the volunteer – part of the benefit of the service is a *friendly visitor* each month. The REP process allowed Lifespan to learn about the program to improve service delivery and to ultimately increase the positive impact that the program has on the client.

## RIPPLE

If Lifespan had stopped there, it would have been a positive short-term outcome to that particular program and to the three staff people who participated in REP. However, because of the success of the evaluation, the organization actually made a key decision as an agency regarding the importance of evaluation. Lifespan decided to fully embrace the concepts learned through the REP process **and ripple the information throughout the agency.** For Lifespan:

- An Associate Vice President for Evaluation position was created. One of the primary goals of this new position is to teach the staff the participatory evaluation techniques learned at REP. The use of an official senior management position devoted in large part to evaluation, underscores for staff the seriousness of participatory evaluation in the agency.
- A staff manual with participatory evaluation methods was developed from REP materials and distributed to all staff. Staff could follow the steps original REP trainees learned and apply the information to their own programs.
- Lifespan challenged managers to develop evaluation projects of their own, based on the information they learned through staff trainings. The findings are for internal use only, for the



purpose of program improvement ideas. At any given time, there are a minimum of two evaluation projects in progress.

- Incentive-based salary increases were instituted. For a manager, one of the criteria they are measured on (and receive a raise for) is their ability to design, implement and execute an evaluation project that advances the work of their department.

### CONTINUED FOCUS ON EVALUATIVE THINKING: THE ETHOS PROJECT

When Lifespan was invited to participate in the ETHOS project, they readily accepted. It was understood that the ETHOS project had been developed to help former REP organizations study how they used and sustained evaluative thinking in their regular work. It was the next logical step in the journey to advance Lifespan's effectiveness through mission-driven programs and services. It was appropriate to analyze how and to what extent evaluative thinking was incorporated into everyday practice and in which areas there were strengths and weaknesses. Lifespan reported the following about its experience.

As an ETHOS participant, Lifespan helped to better define the term evaluative thinking and to clarify through our own experiences what it meant to be an organization that incorporated evaluative thinking –

*i.e., an organization that routinely involves multiple staff and other stakeholders in decision-making that is based on valid data, that incorporates assessment and evaluation into all areas of organization work, and that is open to the findings of assessment and evaluation because refinements are important to efforts to work toward continual improvement.* Once again, Lifespan gained incredible knowledge to advance the organization.

- Lifespan learned that middle management who participated in the group discussion didn't know the breadth of the agency's work in evaluation. It became clear that there was a need to develop a better communication strategy to inform staff.
- A full participatory evaluation method may or may not always be appropriate for our clients. Many of our clients have dementia or other debilitating diseases that make full participation impossible, but participatory principles can be embraced by involving multiple staff, volunteers, and able clients in evaluation, and informing multiple stakeholders about our intentions, what we find out and how we use our findings.
- It takes great leadership and focus to make evaluative thinking a daily practice and to spread it as a value throughout the organization.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL ISSUES

There were definitely barriers to participating in REP and to continuing to do participatory evaluation. Lifespan identified the most challenging as:

1. **Time.** There has to be an agency commitment to devote the staff time (in-class and out-of-class) to an already stretched and over worked staff.
2. **Acceptance.** Some staff members are going to embrace the concepts and others have to be pushed along the path. For example, there are still some staff at Lifespan that believe that any evaluation of their work is unnecessary. "Of course they are doing good work. They are social workers and they care about the clients."

Lifespan has developed a strategy for sustaining evaluative thinking in the organization and continuing the regular practice of participatory evaluation. This includes:

1. Committed leadership.
2. Dedicated, committed staff (it started with just a few in the beginning).
3. Taking the time to analyze, talk, discuss, and argue about the information learned (i.e, the findings of carefully conducted evaluation of selected programs).
4. Sharing the findings with the entire team of people who are involved in the evaluation and the program (as appropriate).

As a result of REP and ETHOS, Lifespan revamped its quality assurance system. The organization instituted participatory evaluation techniques and developed intensive evaluation projects for the sole purpose of continuous program improvement. Lifespan has hired evaluation consultants to assist with the participatory evaluation of start-up programs and services, and the organization has listened to its clients through focus groups and surveys. The organization continues to strengthen its belief that high quality systems are the result of deliberate intention, effort and skill. Evaluation and evaluative thinking have a firm position at Lifespan.

*Lifespan is grateful to Beth Bruner and the Bruner Foundation for funding REP and believing that non-profits can use participatory evaluation methods to excel in what they do. We would also especially like to thank Anita Baker and Kim Sabo who taught us, guided us and led us through the process. It was a great experience for Lifespan.*

## LIFESPAN'S VISION

### LIFESPAN'S Vision

Lifespan celebrates aging well by encouraging dignity, choice and independence. We are a recognized leader and focal point for age-related needs by providing valued, quality services. When our community thinks of the second half of life, it thinks LIFESPAN.

### LIFESPAN'S Mission

Lifespan is the only comprehensive agency in the community whose sole mission is to enhance the quality of life for those in the second half of life. We achieve this by providing a continuum of direct non-medical intervention and life course planning services, and through advocacy, professional training, and community education.

### LIFESPAN'S Organizational Values

- We respect older adults and treat them with dignity.
- We provide services in a culturally sensitive manner and strive for diversity among staff and boards.
- We collaborate which enables us to better serve our customers.
- We continuously seek opportunities to increase and improve services for older adults and caregivers.

### LIFESPAN'S Customer Outcomes

Our services improve the quality of life for persons in the second half of life by . . .

- Increasing financial security
- Reducing the risk of elder abuse
- Improving caregiving
- Maintaining and increasing independence
- Increasing fulfillment
- Increasing options and knowledge

### LIFESPAN'S Social Entrepreneurism Outcomes

1. We will eliminate the need for annual fundraising/grantwriting to support program deficits.
2. We will increase earned income revenue. We will increase government and United Way funding.
3. While maintaining our current low-income client base, we will successfully market services to those who can afford to pay a fee.
4. We will bring new services/products to the market.

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