

ROCHESTER EFFECTIVENESS PARTNERSHIP
FINAL EVALUATION REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Submitted By: REP Evaluation Partners

Submitted To: REP Governance Team, REP Partners

1996 - 2003

Foreword

As you will see from this executive summary, during its 7-year history, the Rochester Effectiveness Partnership (REP) involved hundreds of people in Rochester, New York. The project was a creative and evolving collaboration seeking to learn and use participatory evaluation skills to improve programs for clients and to increase effectiveness of organizations.

The project was managed by a governance team which met 6-8 times a year and was comprised of one representative from each partner organization. In recognition of the need for stability and continuity, an additional executive team was established early on by those most involved in the day-to-day work of the partnership. This team included the administrative partner (Rochester Grantmakers Forum, Liz Wilder, executive director), the evaluation partners (Anita Baker Consulting and InnoNet/Kim Sabo Consulting) and Beth Bruner, representing the lead funder (Bruner Foundation).

With the ending of REP special thanks go to: provider partner organization staff and CEOs who invested many hours learning about, mastering and putting into practice participatory evaluation and evaluative thinking skills; funding partner organizations who invested resources and time in a collaborative approach focused on building organizational and community evaluation capacity; the Advertising Council of Rochester, our assisting partner who provided critical in-kind support; former executive director of the Rochester Grantmakers Forum, Jane Ellen Bleeg, who provided creativity and able management of the project from its inception to 2000; Michael Quinn Patton who provided support and assistance in the first two phases of the project; and the Knight Foundation for its recognition of REP as a notable project in evaluation capacity-building, in its study done by the Human Interaction Research Institute.

REP has been referred to as a "Russian doll within a doll" both because of its many facets and its willingness to peel away easy answers to understand and tackle the complexities involved in systematically building evaluation capacity. The partnership is to be credited for its willingness to define outcomes, measure progress toward those outcomes, report on that progress and alter the initiative based on that data.

The impact and lessons learned from REP make a significant contribution to our community and to the fields of evaluation capacity building and organizational effectiveness.

We are proud to have been part of such a dynamic, evolving partnership.

Beth Bruner, Anita Baker, Kim Sabo, and Liz Wilder

INTRODUCTION

The Rochester Effectiveness Partnership (REP) began in 1996 as a two-year pilot, participatory evaluation project that brought together funders, evaluators, non-profit human service organizations, and other organizations seeking to determine and improve the effectiveness of their work. REP continued for two more phases over a seven-year period with many funders, providers, and evaluators involved. This executive summary presents the findings from the final evaluation of this capacity-building project.

History of REP

In 1996 REP was initiated by a group of collaborators (including 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) who believed that helping non-profit and funding organizations learn and use a set of participatory evaluation skills was an important capacity-building strategy. The initial project design identified five types of partners:

- **provider partners** -- staff (at least two from each organization) and CEOs of the non-profit partner organizations;
- **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;
- **an administrative partner** to oversee project operations; and
- **evaluation partners** to provide training on evaluation planning and methodology.

The design called for: 18 months of comprehensive evaluation training for non-profit provider staff; 6 hours of training for the CEO/Executive Director; a specialized but much more limited version of evaluation training for funding partners; 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 2 September 1998 through December 2000). In Phase 2, 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”¹ their learning beyond the individuals and programs involved in the REP training classes. During Phase 2, the REP Governance Team also commissioned an external evaluation to help assess accomplishments and challenges and inform a process to structure future project development. At the conclusion of Phase 2, all partners agreed that REP should be continued for another project cycle (Phase 3 – January 2001 through December 2003), again with modifications based on evaluation findings. All prior evaluation reports including that developed by Innonet in December 2000, are available on the Bruner Foundation and Rochester Grantmakers Forum websites.

¹ “Ripple” was a term coined by REP partners. It refers to the process of extending or spreading evaluation learning throughout an agency.

EVALUATION OF REP

Since the inception of the project, the REP Governance Team has commissioned annual evaluations of service delivery and project outcomes. In addition, the partnership developed a logic model, specified clear objectives and outcomes, developed numerous data collection strategies and reported evaluation findings in writing. For the final evaluation, an evaluation subcommittee was formed to help structure the design, to conduct some data collection, and to review all instruments, proposed strategies and findings. The following details the evaluation questions and data collection strategies for the final evaluation.

Final Evaluation Questions

The final evaluation was guided by the following five overarching evaluation questions that were developed by the evaluation subcommittee and, as in the past, presented to and approved by the REP Governance Team.

1. How much did partners participate in REP? What did partners learn about evaluation? How important were the key components of REP to partners? Was REP worth the cost? Were there any unintended outcomes?
2. How and to what extent has REP impacted service delivery within provider organizations?
 - a. How did the selected projects change since evaluation data were available?
 - b. Have evaluation findings informed other service delivery strategies?
3. How and to what extent have REP learnings increased the participating organizations' internal capacity to do evaluation? How and how much have partners, especially provider partners, used what they learned about evaluation?
4. How and to what extent have partners, especially providers, been able to sustain and “ripple” what they have learned through REP? How will they sustain it after the end of Phase 3?
5. What was the value of REP as a collaboration and did it result in any changes in communication among partners?

Methods

A multiple method design was used to address the evaluation questions. The four key data collection strategies included record review, partner surveys, partner focus groups, and interviews.

- **Review** of provider and funder participation data and budgets. In addition, a selection of trainee evaluation products were assessed using a standardized scale.
- Comprehensive **survey** of funders, and trainees and CEOs of provider partner organizations, including individuals who were former REP participants but have since moved. A total of 84 partners (78% of all those who received it) answered the survey.
- **Focus Groups** with a subset of nine provider partner organizations specifically to discuss the value of the coached evaluation project experience and to clarify how “ripple” had occurred in organizations, and how REP had contributed to other organizational changes.

- A total of 13 **interviews** with evaluation partners, other partners and former partners who served as community spokespersons to provide additional details about the history and importance of REP.

All members of the partnership participated in the design, data collection, analysis and review of findings for this evaluation (for additional details on methodology, please see the full report on the Bruner Foundation and Rochester Grantmakers Forum websites).

FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

Key Partner Status

The key partners included 166 individuals from 32 social service provider organizations, 12 funder organizations, 2 associate funder groups, 1 assisting partner, 1 administrative partner (the former and current executive directors of the Rochester Grantmakers Forum) and 2 evaluation partners.

Attendance, Attrition and Participation

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

- During Phases 1 and 2, all 16 *provider partner organizations* were retained in the basic training; During Phase 3, most, but not all (14 of the 20), *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.
- Many *provider partner organizations* (twenty-two of the twenty-six who were eligible) took advantage of opportunities for continued study and introduction of new trainees via the *alumni study group*. Attendance and participation fluctuated with an average of 15 participants per session.
- Most (two thirds) of the *executive directors of the REP provider organizations* attended the REP CEO training.
- A total of 13 *funding partners*, representing many of the key funding organizations in Rochester supported REP. They contributed varying amounts to the partnership, and joined at different phases. All but two (one whose funding priorities changed, and one who participated in Phase 1 and then came back again in Phase 3) maintained their support throughout the duration of the project once they joined. The involvement of funder partners in training and governance, 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 3.
- 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 “community training” workshops. More than 200 individuals attended REP-sponsored conferences.

The Importance of Core REP Training Activities

The final REP survey asked participants very directly about what REP opportunities were important. In alignment with their attendance, survey responses indicated that almost all partners (95% of providers and 100% of funders) thought it was important to continue *learning new information about evaluation*, 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.

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 ² and travel and other direct costs accounted for 60 percent 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.

- 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 between 20 and 40 additional hours with 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 and ongoing group facilitation (with funder-specific materials). In addition, most of those funders had an additional 18 hours of facilitated meetings each year.
- 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.

² 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.

- 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 Innonet), 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.

FINDINGS: PROJECT 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.

Learning About Evaluation

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 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 reviews, survey, interview, and observation data. Specifically, 65 percent said they learned *a lot* about analysis of record review data, 70 percent had learned *a lot* about survey data analysis, 68 percent had learned *a lot* about interview data analysis, and 58 percent 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 3, 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 percent of the providers and 70 percent of the funders confirmed that they had learned to use 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 a report, funders did not undertake these tasks. Almost two-thirds of providers (62%) reported that had learned a lot about writing reports (another 36% said they learned at least a *little*). A total of 75 percent 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, which strengthened their programs, 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, incorporate evaluation into their daily practice, and share REP training with other staff members. Thirty percent said they learned *a lot* about how to run a stakeholder meeting (an additional 66% stated they learned *a little*), 71 percent stated they learned *a lot* about how to incorporate evaluation practices into daily practice (an additional 26% stated they learned *a little*), and 50 percent said they have 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. Fifty-five percent indicated they had learned *a lot* and an additional 36 percent reported they had learned a least *a little* about how to incorporate what they were learning through REP.

Extending REP

Beyond learning about evaluation practice and methodology, REP participants, especially 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 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 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.

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 work 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. During focus groups, all eleven providers 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 final REP evaluation made abundantly clear that 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 also 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 build evaluation into their program planning and 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. Some issues to consider include:

- **Project duration and intensity:** REP was initially planned to be a two-year pilot, with continuation dependent on initial outcomes. The specifics of how to expand REP (i.e., how many provider and funder partners could be meaningfully involved and who they should be), and how long to operate it could not easily be decided in advance. As the project proceeded, some partners (providers and funders) indicated that involvement should have been even more wide-spread especially in the non-profit community (i.e., that REP would have been good for a lot more organizations), and there was a sense that REP should go on indefinitely. The partners ultimately decided, however, that maintaining project quality required REP to stay small enough to be manageable.
- **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. Ultimately, the partnership chose not to test the training fee issue (i.e, charging for services). However, data show that without fees, participation was high, training valued, and skills used and passed on to others in the organization
- **Evaluation partners:** While REP successfully integrated many partners, it's connection with local evaluators proved more elusive. The main requirement for the REP evaluation partner(s) was participatory evaluation expertise and interest. The original evaluation partner selected and the evaluation partner later added to the project, both came from locations outside of Rochester, but they both brought the needed participatory evaluation expertise and commitment. Meaningful **roles for other evaluators**, including some locally-based evaluation consultants were not developed.
- **Alliances between REP and the higher education community** in Rochester were not made. While a few REP partners thought about whether the universities might have made a valuable contribution, or how best to engage them, 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 and building evaluation capacity rather than evaluator dependence, the partnership ultimately decided to use more internal strategies. For the first and third phases the REP funder and provider partners worked together with the REP evaluation partner(s) to get the evaluation done. In the second phase, the REP funder and provider partners worked together to hire an external organization (InnoNet) with participatory evaluation expertise to conduct the evaluation. The partners were satisfied with the accuracy and utility of the findings for each evaluation.

What REP partners have to say:

“As a result of REP, funders and providers had an opportunity to meet and network with one another. Funders had the opportunity to become more knowledgeable about the services, dynamics and constraints that provider organizations face and providers had an opportunity to become more familiar with the funder priorities. Providers also got a rare sense of other organization services. Too often we don’t have a forum to understand the breadth and extent of organizations and services provided in the community. REP brought many of us together and the informal dialogue resulted in better understandings of what is out there in the community.”

“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.”

“[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] has contributed to community understanding. Rochester is in a different place now than seven years ago. REP participated in that process.”

For additional information, visit Rochester Grantmakers Forum at <http://www.grantmakers.org> and the Bruner Foundation at <http://www.brunerfoundation.org>