



## **LESSONS LEARNED FROM EVALUATIONS OF PCBR PROGRAMS: PILOT STUDY**

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### **Introduction**

The idea for the *Lessons Learned From Evaluations of PCBR Programs Project* came from a study completed in 2006 for the Carnegie Corporation (Backer, Bleeg & Groves, 2006). The study indicated, among other findings, that about 2/3 of all foundation programs for capacity building have conducted or are conducting some sort of evaluation, and increasingly report that they have some results available.

This finding suggests that a new feature could be added to the online Philanthropic Capacity Building Resources database, providing summaries of "lessons learned" from these evaluations as part of PCBR's program profiles. Funders seeking to improve their current work or to create new capacity-building initiatives may find this added information valuable. Also, the lessons learned for individual programs can be synthesized into an overview of capacity-building evaluation, a topic which to date has been addressed by only one major study (Linnell, 2003). Such a synthesis could be used in a number of ways to stimulate dialogue and improve philanthropic strategy and practice in the capacity-building field.

Bruner Foundation awarded a 2007 grant supplement for a small pilot study to begin exploring how this Project might best be undertaken. In this brief report, methods used to gather and analyze an initial set of data on evaluation lessons learned for the PCBR programs are presented, along with results obtained. The report ends with a set of suggested next steps to implement the full Project - expanding and refining these data, and thereby making them more valuable to the nonprofit sector and to grantmakers investing in capacity building.

### **Study Method**

The PCBR database was analyzed to provide summary data on four items of information routinely collected for all PCBR programs in the system as of Spring 2006 (the most recent system update): (1) whether evaluation of the program is conducted; (2) whether results from evaluation are available; (3) how often evaluation is conducted; and (4) what evaluation methods are used. New data were gathered via a brief e-mail survey in January 2007, asking funders of programs that reported doing some type of evaluation (either "completed" or "in process") whether they could provide a copy of an evaluation report, and for slightly more detailed information on evaluation methods used, as well as input about the impact of completed evaluations.

Follow-up phone calls were made to those receiving the e-mail survey who did not respond initially, increasing the response rate. The last survey responses were received in March 2007. Physical files for evaluation reports were set up, and an electronic file was established for electronic reports.

## **Results**

**PCBR Database Analysis** PCBR currently contains 368 programs. Of these, 223 program profiles indicate that some type of evaluation is in process (86) or has been completed (137). For these 223 programs, respondents report they do the following (none of these responses have been independently verified):

115 provide evaluation results on request  
108 do not provide evaluation results

70 conduct “ongoing” evaluation of the program  
43 evaluate annually  
63 evaluate “periodically” (on a varying schedule)  
47 do not state what is the frequency of evaluation

63 conduct an external evaluation  
75 conduct an internal evaluation  
24 combine both internal and external approaches  
61 do not state whether evaluation is internal or external

20 use surveys as a primary evaluation method  
12 use interviews  
3 use records/materials review  
3 use a participatory evaluation approach  
2 collect reports from grantees  
111 use multiple/mixed datagathering methods for evaluation  
20 use some other method not fitting any of the above categories  
52 do not state what method is used

138 of the foundations whose programs are evaluated list only one such program  
21 list two programs that are evaluated  
11 list three programs that are evaluated  
2 list five programs that are evaluated

PCBR contains profiles both of active programs and programs that have completed their period of grantmaking or direct service. For the 47 completed programs that did an evaluation (foundations supporting these programs had indicated they would no longer be active as of the first quarter of 2007), 27 had already completed the evaluation, while evaluation was still in process for the other 20.

**E-Mail Survey Analysis** Sponsoring foundations provided responses to the January 2007 e-mail survey for a total of 99 programs (sent to foundations operating the 223 programs reporting an evaluation activity). Of those respondents:

- 28 programs provided an electronic copy of an evaluation report
- 1 program provided a printed copy
- 26 respondents indicated they compile only internal reports, and did not provide further information
- 44 respondents indicated they did not create an evaluation report as such

Aside from those providing substantive input, 44 respondents replied to the survey but indicated that they do not have any information available on their evaluation activities, while 80 did not respond at all. Thus the total response rate to the e-mail survey was 64.1%.

Of the 29 programs that sent copies of evaluation reports:

- 8 came from independent foundations
- 7 from community foundations
- 6 from funder collaboratives
- 5 from family foundations
- 3 from public foundations

The PCBR database currently contains 86 community foundation programs, 64 independent, 40 family, 27 funder collaboratives, 28 public, 6 corporate, and 12 other. Seven of the 29 reports were from completed programs; the rest were for programs still active as of the beginning of 2007.

While no formal content analysis was conducted of the 29 evaluation reports, it is apparent that the programs evaluated in these reports had some common themes. Many of these programs included some sort of leadership development activity as a part of nonprofit capacity building, and a number of others featured opportunities for strengthening nonprofits' use of technology.

Several of the programs for which evaluation reports were received emphasized community development and community building as a major aspect. Other common areas of focus were enhancing nonprofit communications abilities, or increasing the capacity of nonprofits to network with each other. These programs included both very large, well-funded multi-year foundation initiatives and smaller, more targeted efforts.

Among the respondents to the e-mail survey, use of grantee reports as an evaluation method was more common than in the larger sample of all PCBR programs having evaluations. Use of other evaluation methods was similar to those reported in the larger sample.

A total of 47 respondents to the e-mail survey provided input about the impact of evaluation activities for their capacity-building program. Responses clustered in three major categories: (1) evaluation led to adjustments in the structure and operation of the capacity-building program itself; (2) changes were made in administrative procedures around application for funding, level of funding available, use of needs assessments, etc.; and (3) evaluation results were used to justify investment in a program with trustees or other stakeholders, and to reinforce for foundation staff that they are moving in the right direction. In several cases, evaluation revealed that a program had been replicated elsewhere. Further efforts to gather evidence about impact of evaluations may be helpful in increasing the utility of these data.

## Next Steps - Implementing the Lessons Learned Project

Pilot study results show that there is a large body of evaluative evidence available for capacity-building grantmaking and direct service programs of American foundations, both for active programs and for those whose work has been completed. The pilot study also makes clear that most of these findings are not easily accessible, and that they have not been analyzed comparatively or synthesized. Moreover, there is a fair amount of input about what impact these evaluative activities have had on philanthropic strategy and practice, but this too has not been analyzed or synthesized.

Thus, full implementation of the Lessons Learned Project design described at the beginning of this report appears to have potential value. It is estimated that about six months will be required to complete the following activities, once funding has been secured:

**1 - New PCBR Evaluation Section Format** First, a new format for the PCBR program profiles will be created for review by PCBR's advisors and the funder(s) of the Lessons Learned project. Based upon pilot study results, the revised profile may include an evaluation section like the following (starred items are additions or changes in current components):

Program Evaluated: Yes, No, Underway

Evaluation Results Available: Yes, No

\* Frequency of Program Evaluation: Ongoing, Annually (Calendar or Fiscal Year), Periodically, No Information

\* Type of Program Evaluation: External Evaluation, Internal Evaluation, No Information

\* Evaluation Methods Used: Surveys, Focus Groups, Interviews, Document Reviews, Site Visits, Grantee Self-Reports, Participatory Evaluation, Other, No Information (check as many as apply)

\* Summary of Evaluation Lessons Learned and Impact on Foundation Capacity-Building Work: (brief narrative for both topics - a preliminary draft sample is attached)

Edited evaluation sections will be prepared for each program in PCBR as of the time this work begins, using the new format. These will be e-mailed for editorial review to the foundation staff who submitted the raw material. In many cases, the program profile already contains all information needed except for every item except the summary at the end.

Following review of the draft revised profiles, they will be finalized and uploaded into the PCBR database. The PCBR data-gathering procedure also will be revised so that new programs added to the system will have this information requested from the beginning.

**2 - Synthesis Report** Next, the collection of lessons learned and impact statements from all PCBR programs will be analyzed to yield a synthesis in the form of a short report, which when finalized will be published electronically on the PCBR website. The report will be sent to the Lessons Learned funders, PCBR's advisors, and to all those whose programs are in the system.

Once completed, PCBR will publicize availability of both the synthesis report and the updated database via press releases to some 20 media outlets in the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors, and send an e-mail announcement of it to all those whose programs are listed in the PCBR database. These results then will be used to address the larger issues outlined in the next section.

## **Addressing Larger Issues**

Results from this pilot study also indicate that the larger Lessons Learned Project could address a number of important larger issues about nonprofit capacity building, both from the nonprofit and philanthropic perspectives:

- \* How to address the limits of evaluation where capacity building is concerned - resources are rarely available to undertake evaluation designs involving control groups, gathering longitudinal data, or gathering data from large populations (Linnell, 2003).
- \* How to identify and include innovations in evaluation, such as the “evaluation dashboard” concept (Backer, Bleeg & Groves, 2004).
- \* How to package results from evaluations of capacity-building practitioners and decision-makers (including funders), and how methods for evaluation can be tailored to the practical needs of small, community-based programs where the resources for doing evaluation and paying for it are likely to be especially limited (Backer & Barbell, 2004).
- \* How to translate lessons learned from evaluations of programs supported by large foundations or funder collaboratives (of which there were quite a few in this research) to individual foundations, many of which are small.
- \* What can be learned collectively from evaluations about how to design a capacity-building grantmaking or direct service program - setting objectives, undertaking due diligence, assessment of capacity-building needs by nonprofits and by funders, use of intermediaries for funding and/or providing capacity-building services, use of funder collaboratives, design of evaluation and use of evaluation results, and philanthropic strategy regarding capacity building.
- \* How capacity building complements alternative philanthropic strategies - e.g., use of loan guarantees, partnerships with businesses for supporting capacity building through discounts or free merchandise, efforts to promote sustainability beyond the initial investing foundations (Backer & Barbell, 2006).
- \* How nonprofit organizational capacity building fits with community capacity building (which is how the term is more likely used in the international domain).
- \* How to conduct overall assessments of the field and its impact, which hasn’t yet been done (Backer, Bleeg & Groves, 2006 found that while a large number of foundations evaluated their programs, most invest only modestly in this activity, with a median cost of \$15,000 and about 1% of total philanthropic investment).
- \* What roles national associations like Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and Alliance for Nonprofit Management might take in further development of evaluation strategies for foundation capacity-building programs, and in responding to the challenges raised here (e.g., through conference presentations or sharing of materials on their websites)
- \* What roles might be taken in regard to the same issues by large intermediaries, major management support organizations, regional initiatives for capacity building, and other parts of the national capacity-building infrastructure (Backer & Barbell, 2004).



\* How input from the evaluations of lessons learned may bear on the content and format of PCBR itself - and on the future of this program, now in its sixth year of operation.

Initial discussion of these issues can be part of the synthesis document described above. Additional progress on these and other topics of importance in evaluation of foundation capacity-building grantmaking and direct service programs might be made through three follow-up activities, each of which would require additional resources:

- (1) a small convening of foundations with an interest in funding capacity building and its relationship to the nonprofit sector (such as the Kellogg, Kresge and Mott Foundations);
- (2) publication of the synthesis as a learning guide through Fieldstone, one of the most important publishers in the capacity-building field - this would require additional resources both for editorial preparation and for a publication subsidy; and
- (3) presentations about these issues at conferences of GEO, ANM and other national organizations.

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## EVALUATION LESSONS LEARNED SAMPLE NARRATIVE - DRAFT

### Castle Colleagues Program - Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation

The Castle Colleagues program, funded by the Castle Foundation, provides leadership and management development training for directors of early childhood education programs in Hawaii, thus increasing their capacity as educational institutions. To plan next steps effectively, Castle wanted data about impact of the program. Working with one of the first Castle Colleagues, as part of the Colleague's research study for a graduate degree, an expanded assessment was conducted of Castle Colleagues Program's capacity-building impact. The Colleagues were surveyed by written questionnaire, both to provide five-year follow-up data to an earlier (2000) program evaluation, and to query how they perceive current needs regarding leadership development and professional support. Results from the evaluation are being used for program enhancement, and to support possible replication of the program in other regions.

**Lessons Learned** Before becoming Castle Colleagues, half the respondents had had no prior leadership, management or administrative training in their roles as early childhood education center directors. Since they became Castle Colleagues, survey respondents reported:

- 60% have gone back to school or taken college courses
- 75% have attended workshops, community-based training and/or conferences
- 75% have given professional presentations
- 85% say they are more likely to call a peer for advice, support or resources
- 85% say they are more likely to call other resource people
- 70% say they are more likely to take on a leadership role
- 65% say they are more likely to speak up at a meeting
- 65% say they are more likely to write a grant proposal.

The resulting impact on the early childhood education centers these individuals run is clear:

- 75% now have more programs for children
- 75% have more activities for parent involvement
- 70% have increased staff salaries
- 65% report the quality of their facilities is better
- 60% have more community partners
- 55% have reduced staff turnover
- 50% have submitted more grant proposals than they had before the program
- 45% had received more grants than before
- 40% report an increase in appropriate Board involvement.

**Impact on Foundation** The evaluation results (both from the first study in 2000 and the more recent one) deepened the Castle Foundation's interest in leadership development for executive directors of early childhood education centers - the latter a principal focus of Castle's philanthropic efforts. Moreover, the foundation has encouraged program recipients to submit a joint proposal to local funders, for support that can ease the path to continuing education for early childhood site directors and staff.

Evaluation findings also enabled the Castle Foundation to make "mid-course corrections" in its capacity-building intervention after every session. This has helped to increase the overall impact of the program.