

OFF THE SHELF

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A Funder's Guide to Evaluation: Leveraging Evaluation to Improve Nonprofit Effectiveness

Peter York. St. Paul, MN : Fieldstone Alliance, 2005

Author Peter York is vice president and director of evaluation at TCC Group, a New York-based management consulting/strategic planning firm serving foundations and other nonprofits. The book is billed as a funder's guide from Fieldstone Alliance, formerly a department of the Amherst Wilder Foundation, in collaboration with the affinity group, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO).

Related Readings

Bartczak, Lori (ed.) *A Funder's Guide to Organizational Assessment: Tools, Processes, and Their Use in Building Capacity*. Fieldstone Alliance, 2005.

Braverman, Marc T.; Constantine, Norman A; and Slater, Jana Kay (eds.) *Foundations and Evaluation: Contexts and Practices for Effective Philanthropy*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2004.

Penna, Robert M. and Phillips, William J. *Outcome Frameworks: An Overview for Practitioners*. Rensselaerville Institute, 2004.

For more on this topic refer to the [Catalog of Nonprofit Literature](#).

The topic of evaluation for capacity building is of growing interest to foundations, and hence should be prominent on the radar screen of today's savvy nonprofit manager. While, as the title suggests, this guide is clearly directed to a grantmaker audience, much of the text is highly relevant to those seeking to secure funding from the more enlightened foundations and ultimately desirous of running more effective nonprofit organizations. Throughout the 139-page guide York employs concrete real-life examples that are applied to the various approaches he recommends, making it highly readable and digestible, even by someone entirely new to the subject matter.

This is an important contribution to the literature of nonprofit evaluation. What makes it unique is its truly practical approach. Early chapters make the case for evaluative learning and provide user-friendly definitions and charts. Evaluative learning is described here as "an ongoing, collaboratively designed, stakeholder-led evaluation process that has the primary purpose of serving organizational learning by evaluating the whole logic model." York's excellent diagram of a "logic model" stresses the value of the relationships between inputs, strategies, and outcomes to help determine the effectiveness of various projects and programs, and incorporates a brief case study to show how such a tool is used in evaluative decision-making. Evaluation as a capacity-

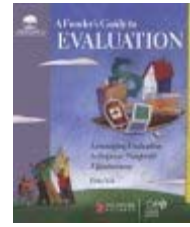
building tool for any nonprofit is depicted here in four different modes, as a tool to improve leadership, adaptive capacity, management, and technical capacity. What nonprofit could fail to benefit from help in one or all of these areas? And according to York, those who manage today's foundations can and should be interested in any or all such capacity-building efforts initiated by the organizations they support.

York details how funders and their grantees can work collaboratively on goals. He points out that until now most nonprofits have viewed evaluation as a necessary, annoying add-on to a grant project in order to reassure the funder that promised objectives will be achieved. And typically funders have required their grantees to engage in various evaluation efforts for the primary purpose of ensuring that they remain accountable for how grant monies were spent. York makes the case for going beyond accountability. His point is that funders should be asking and grantees responding not just to the question, "Did you achieve your outcomes?" but rather to the question, "What resources and programmatic qualities were most critical in achieving success?"

In the final chapter of this guide, York provides step-by-step strategies for grantmakers to help their grantees use evaluation as a capacity-building tool. He provides a detailed chart to help determine the capacity-building potential of various types of evaluation methods, based on funder size, dollars, and time, and the likely burden on both grantmaker and grantee. Four comprehensive appendices include a Funder Readiness Tool, a Logic Model Development Tool, Assessing Grantees' Readiness for Evaluative Learning (a tool to help funders determine if their prospective grantees are ready to take the plunge) and Select an Evaluative Learning Support Strategy. There is also a targeted reading list and a brief index.

In short, while this guide is intended for funders, it will be relevant and useful for anyone seeking a better understanding of a key 21st century trend in best practices of nonprofit management - evaluating for capacity building.

Judith Margolin



[A Funder's Guide to Evaluation](#)

Peter York

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