



Should you be scared of low performance?

- Considerations for course correction
- Emphasis on qualitative research
- Geared towards nonprofits



WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?

If you are on the fence about developing program evaluations because you are scared of scoring 'low' in performance, consider the following:

- You may be pouring valuable resources (time, money, relationships, etc.) into failing programs that will never demonstrate the change you hope to see.
- Foundations and high-end donors will increasingly ask for these evaluations, and if you cannot demonstrate impact (beyond anecdotes and testimonials), you will lose funding.

If you have programs that are scoring 'low' in performance, it means:

- You have taken the important step of introducing program evaluations—you are further along than many others!
- You have set up outcome metrics that can help you get back on track.
- There are 'lessons learned' available in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors that can help you make better programming decisions.
- You will have the support of foundations and high-end donors in getting your program redirected or closed.

FOUNDATIONS AND HIGH-END DONORS

Foundations and high-end donors believe in the work you do and want to see you and your mission succeed. But they have limited resources to apply towards funding and want to be sure that they are investing their funds appropriately. High-end donors especially want to see their *hard-earned* money used well. Most of these high-end donors are business men and women who value the use of metrics and evaluation in their own businesses. They are successful because they evaluate, make hard decisions, and course correct (cut products or programs, redesign, innovate, reallocate resources, etc.). They value the business pillars of [transparency](#), [comparability](#), and [accountability](#)—all of which you can easily introduce into your programs.

Unless they have ties to the programs you are running, few donors will stick around if you aren't asking the right questions and growing your nonprofit. Even if they choose to stay, they may begin questioning your effectiveness. If it were your money, wouldn't you do the same? So, why not build their trust and your credibility?

Why not ask the hard questions and course correct?

“ Without proper self-evaluation, failure is inevitable.

”
John Wooden

“ I'd say the writing is on the wall. My prediction is that as impact measurement gets better, faster, and cheaper, **donors will more often demand proof of outcomes.** In turn, nonprofits that aren't the very best because they try to be all things to all people will suffer. Why wait for that to happen to your organization?

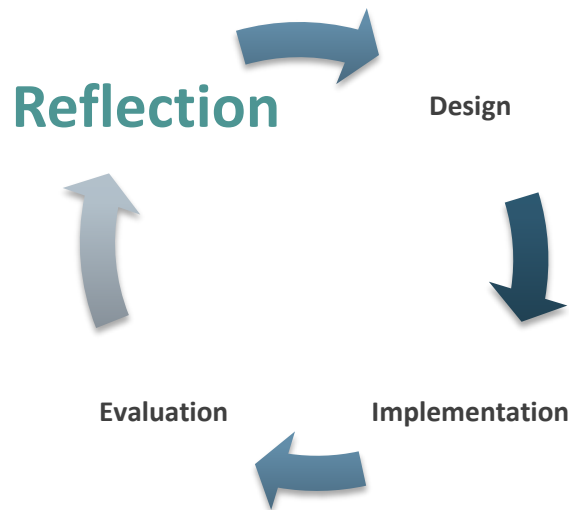
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Perry Yeatman



WHAT ARE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO COURSE CORRECT?

When you find that your outcomes do not align with your target goals, you should be able to look at the measurement process and tools used that resulted in those outcomes. The learning approaches offered, the delivery mechanisms, and other variables can help you determine where improvements should be made. This reflection on your program ultimately brings you back to the design table.

Impact evaluation is considered the Holy Grail of all social enterprise.



You must keep an open mind and understand that changes may need to happen at any one of these levels – design, evaluation, or implementation.

First, take the results back to your stakeholders. This should not be a single group, but rather many groups involved at various levels: board members, management, employees, and probably most importantly your beneficiaries. Because of the nature of the questions and in order to elicit honest responses (the most useful), it is generally best to consult outside help with this element. A third party allows a safe place for discussion so key stakeholders can provide honest, thorough, anonymous feedback.

And yes, it is worth the cost to be sure that your data are reliable.

This process of reflection should include sharing the results and asking appropriately phrased questions to ‘drill down’ to the issue(s). Maybe it is an inappropriate fit of service or content. Maybe it is a misalignment between

Do consider including your beneficiaries in this reflection phase, as they have a perspective that your staff will never have.



mission and demographic. Maybe it is a complete lack of understanding about what the beneficiaries need or want. Once the issue has been identified, ask your stakeholders (especially the beneficiaries) their ideas on how things could be improved. Then, it's back to the design, implement, and evaluate stages.

Be sure to communicate with your stakeholders (especially your beneficiaries, staff) and funding sources (foundations and donors) to explain what you are doing and why.

Honest communication is critical to create trust and confidence that the program has the beneficiaries' best interest in mind.

Lastly, don't be scared to refocus and, if need be, trim your programs. It's best to stay true to your mission and focus only on where you have a competitive advantage – what do you do well? What makes you different from other nonprofits working in the same field?

Go on, make hard decisions.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

1. Map out your key stakeholders and beneficiaries.
2. Enlist the help of a third party for your program reflection.
3. Ask the hard questions through focus groups and, where necessary, interviews.
4. Compile all of your information together.
5. Return to the program's mission, goals, and outcomes: Is everything aligned?
6. Review your performance targets: Are the standards adequate, or did you set the bar at the wrong height?
7. Determine the kind of corrective actions that are needed for program improvement: Start with the easiest changes (the low-hanging fruit).
8. Clearly lay out what is to be done, by whom, and by when.
9. Determine when the next evaluation will be to assess whether these changes are making the needed improvements.
10. Define the implications and consequences of the plan on department policies, content, resource allocations, staffing, etc., and prioritize improvement actions based on high impact and low cost.
11. Communicate:
 - Celebrate and publicize your successes. Identify shortcomings; do not hide or minimize them. Instead, present *how* you intend to improve these weaknesses, and explain what you expect from these improvements.

Communicate
with your
stakeholders.
Build trust by
being
transparent.



- Present results differently to different stakeholders; this includes both content and format.
- Provide reports that tell them what happened, why it happened that way, what the organization learned from it, and what the organization intends to improve in the future.

Remember, build trust by being transparent.

Sources

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