



We have been able to make the entire organization more data driven. Where previously we were using mostly professional hunches to make decisions, now we have data to back up those suggestions, and as a leader I can require that others back up their suggestions with data before we invest resources. My Board has also adopted this mindset and is looking to our evaluation to guide future strategy as we adapt to a changing funding and growth landscape. BEC Executive Leader, Class of 2017

BEC helped give us the tools, time, and expertise to make evaluation a priority. BEC Participant, Class of 2017

BUILDING EVALUATION CAPACITY

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT Class of 2017

Submitted To:
**HARTFORD FOUNDATION FOR PUBLIC GIVING
NONPROFIT SUPPORT PROGRAM**

Submitted By:
Anita M. Baker, Ed. D.

August 2017



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, BEC 2016 - 2017

The Building Evaluation Capacity (BEC) program was initiated in the fall of 2006 by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's Nonprofit Support Program (NSP). It was designed to give participating organizations the knowledge, skills and tools to evaluate, improve and communicate about their work. The Class of 2017 is the fifth group of Hartford-area nonprofit organizations to participate. BEC is a multi-year program that includes evaluation capacity development for selected organizations and ongoing study for participating organizations that have completed the initial evaluation capacity building work. The evaluation capacity building training operates in two phases (phase I = initial training and evaluation project design, phase II = project implementation and continued training). Each phase is designed to provide comprehensive, long-term training and coaching to increase both evaluation capacity and organization-wide use of evaluative thinking for participating organizations. The program, adapted from the similar Bruner Foundation-sponsored Rochester Effectiveness Partnership* was developed and delivered by Anita Baker, Ed. D., an independent evaluation consultant, who has lead four other similar projects in Rochester, New York; New York City (2); and the Metrowest (Framingham) area of Boston, Massachusetts. From January 2016 through June 2017, BEC was delivered to representatives of 14 selected nonprofit organizations.

The BEC Class of 2017

Connecticut Association for Human Services
Connecticut Radio Information System (CRIS)
Foodshare
Hartford Neighborhood Centers, Inc.
Hartford Performs
Hartford's Camp Courant
Hockanum Valley Community Council, Inc.
Latino Community Services
North Central Regional Mental Health Board, Inc.
The Discovery Center
The Mark Twain House & Museum
Unified Theater
World Affairs Council of CT
YWCA Hartford Region, Inc.

Class of 2017 BEC participants, like those from the Classes of 2008, 2010, 2013, and 2015 delivered different types of services and were broadly representative of Hartford area nonprofit organizations.

NSP initially undertook the development of BEC because evaluation was an area of organizational capacity the NSP had not been addressing. Many organizations were requesting help with evaluation in response to requirements by their funders to collect data and answer outcomes-focused questions. It was felt that helping them to not only obtain better data, but also to use those data for decision-making would benefit the organizations. NSP elected to continue BEC for a fifth class (see next section), because the previous classes had been well received and participating organizations clearly benefitted from BEC.

* REP was a self-governing partnership of funders, nonprofit service provider organizations and evaluation professionals committed to increasing knowledge and use of participatory program evaluation through comprehensive training and guided evaluation projects

** Though Class of 2017 team sizes varied from two to four members, every participant organization included at least one senior official capable of decision-making (12 of the 14 organizations directly involved their Executive Directors in the training). The organizations also involved individuals from various positions (e.g., Director of Grants and Program Development, Director of Education) according to their own needs for training.

As with all the earlier BEC training classes, the phase I training period for the Class of 2017 participants included didactic training sessions, with opportunities to practice and apply new skills. It culminated with the development by each participating organization of a rigorous evaluation design for a selected program of its own. In a response to requests to increase flexibility, Executive Leaders were given the opportunity to opt out of the three sessions focused specifically on data collection, though most participated. Additionally, efforts were made at all of the initial sessions to encourage interactions between participating organizations. Phase II focused on the implementation of the evaluation project and included five team consultation sessions and four group sessions where there was both review of phase I concepts and delivery of new, more advanced topics such as effective use of pre- post-surveys, data visualization, organization-wide integration of evaluative thinking.

The ultimate outcomes for all BEC participants were enhanced knowledge about evaluation, enhanced skill to conduct evaluation and use evaluation findings (for decision-making and fund development), extension (“Ripple”) of evaluation skills to other projects and personnel and enhanced knowledge about and use of evaluative thinking in organizations.

By all accounts, the BEC program was very productive for the Class of 2017. Though there were multiple staff transitions, all 14 organizations successfully completed their training. Participants from all teams demonstrated they were learning about evaluation and developing evaluative capacity. Their feedback regarding BEC program design, content and especially their own evaluation projects was very positive (32 of 34 participants, 94% who received the survey answered). As had their predecessors in prior classes, those from 2017 gained or honed numerous evaluation-related skills such as: ability to ask clear evaluation questions, design and select data collection methods and construct evaluation designs. They conducted their own evaluation projects, integrated evaluative thinking into their work, and initiated strategies to continue extending evaluation capacity throughout their organizations. Their evaluations included collection and analysis of data, summarization and presentation of findings and development of proposed action steps. Additionally, a total of nine of the Class of 2017 organizations opted to participate in the 2017-18 alumni group. Most will involve new participants from their organizations, and all will continue doing evaluation-related project work.

The evaluation work of the Class of 2017 participants was particularly useful and noteworthy. All project work had to conform to standard professional evaluation practice and it clearly showed that BEC participants were able to apply what they learned. Project reports were presented at the final BEC conference to BEC organizations and the Hartford Foundation’s NSP stakeholders. Those in attendance, including many senior Hartford Foundation staff were once again consistently impressed with both the clarity and thoroughness of the efforts. Most importantly, all of the organizations obtained information through their evaluation projects that informed their ongoing work. All were able to identify program-specific action steps in direct response to their findings and most had initiated at least some of those actions before their participation in the Class of 2017 ended.

As they concluded their work, Class of 2017 participants assessed their own abilities to extend (“Ripple”) the work beyond the class trainees, and they considered integration of evaluative thinking at their organizations. All but one of the respondents to the final BEC evaluation survey (97%)

indicated BEC had prepared them to extend their learning. Each organization indicated they had extended the training at least *a little* (half reported they had done so *a lot*) for example by involving others in the evaluation projects, presenting findings to board and staff, and using evaluation skills to address additional evaluation needs at their organizations (like revising survey instruments or writing evaluation design sections into new proposals). Additionally, on the final survey, 100% of the responding participants indicated that participating in BEC had enhanced evaluative thinking in their organizations and they were able to provide specific examples to clarify and substantiate the changes in their use and understanding of evaluative thinking as it applies to multiple organization capacities.

Conclusion

The Class of 2017 reinforced that their BEC experiences had been important on multiple levels and accomplished what the program was designed to do. Specifically, all or almost all of the participants who responded to the survey indicated BEC was important because it helped them: improve the quality of data they attain; to look at their programs from different perspectives; understand participatory evaluation; to build evaluation into the program planning process; to revise programs based on real data; to increase capacity to analyze data about the outcomes they value; and to incorporate evaluation practices into daily practice. Additionally, the one area that class of 2015 identified as insufficient – the attention to relationship-building and networking across participating agencies – was identified as *important* by all Class of 2017 respondents. Three-fourths of the respondents to the final survey, including one or more from every organization indicated they are *very likely* to continue or expand their evaluation work.

Next Steps and Issues for Further Consideration

A new alumni group will be initiated for the nine Class of 2017 organizations that opted to participate (see the full report for details) and plans for a new class are under serious consideration. Continued vigilance will be necessary to ensure that Alumni Group participants get meaningful opportunities to analyze real data from their own organization programs, continue to successfully plan for and conduct evaluations, and integrate new staff into BEC. It will also be important to attract and inform a suitable new cohort of participants, to continue to use productive strategies for supporting their needs and interests, and to help them stay focused on development of evaluation capacity while also managing other organizational demands. Both the alumni group and any future BEC classes will need assistance to handle the rigor required to fully analyze evaluation data, utilize new available tools to collect, analyze and present data, and summarize and use findings. NSP staff and consultants will need to continue to strive to integrate technology/automation (such as mapping, hand-held electronic surveying) and use of analytical software where possible, and to continue to support programs such as the Evaluation Roundtable and the Evaluation Capacity Grants to increase organizational connections and networking while remaining focused on ensuring that BEC increases evaluation capacity and enhances evaluative thinking for participating organizations.