

# Evaluative Thinking 101: Building a Culture of Learning and Inquiry to Improve Decision Making

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving - Nonprofit Support Program

Dr. Elena Tamanas Ragusa

# Mini-Series Review

**Session 1:**  
Evaluative Thinking for  
Organizational Success  
February 26, 2025

**Session 2:**  
Putting Evaluative  
Thinking into Practice  
March 26, 2025

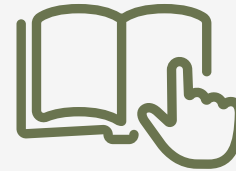
**Organizational homework**  
Between sessions 1 and 2

**Individual consultations**  
March 31, 2025 - June 30, 2025

# How We Will Spend Our Time Together



Review of Modified Evaluative Thinking Assessment



Review of Session 1: Concepts and feedback



Strategies and case studies



Q&A, wrap up, and next steps



# To Maximize Your Experience



Be present and engaged.



Take part in activities,  
and take notes.



Make it your own.





# **Group Share: Feedback from the Modified Evaluative Thinking Assessment**

# Recap of Session 1

**Evaluative Thinking: The ability to use evaluation skills to inform learning and decision making as a matter of habit.**

**5 ways to increase:**



Lean into learning

Ask meaningful questions

Pick a destination

Leverage what exists

Identify (future) experts

A disciplined approach to inquiry and reflective practice; asking thoughtful questions about ***what you do*** and ***why you do it*** to improve effectiveness.

# Session One Themes: Opportunities



## Organizational Culture

Engage in informed decision-making; involve staff in meaningful ways

Lean into learning; model and normalize "what-ifs"

Restructure and develop staff to solidify culture

Establish dedicated time for inquiry

Growth opportunities as middle managers



# Session One Themes: Opportunities



## Programming/Processes

Review processes and procedures

Digitize records for analysis

Use this process to create strategic plan

Work with various age groups; bring additional families into wide range of programming

Improve processes to better serve clients

# Session One Themes: Opportunities



## Tools/Instruments

Add questions to registration forms; increase completion rates

Develop quarterly satisfaction surveys and review associated data

Resources to "get the work done"



# Session One Themes: Challenges



**Time and Capacity**

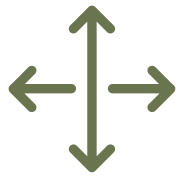
**Staff Buy-in and  
Resistance to Change**

**Insufficient  
Resources**



# Strategies for Consideration

Especially for time and capacity concerns



## Impact/Effort Matrix

A tool that provides clarity in determining easy solutions that produce the most effect (high ROI).



## MoSCoW Method

An analysis technique used to prioritize and manage requirements of a project or initiative.

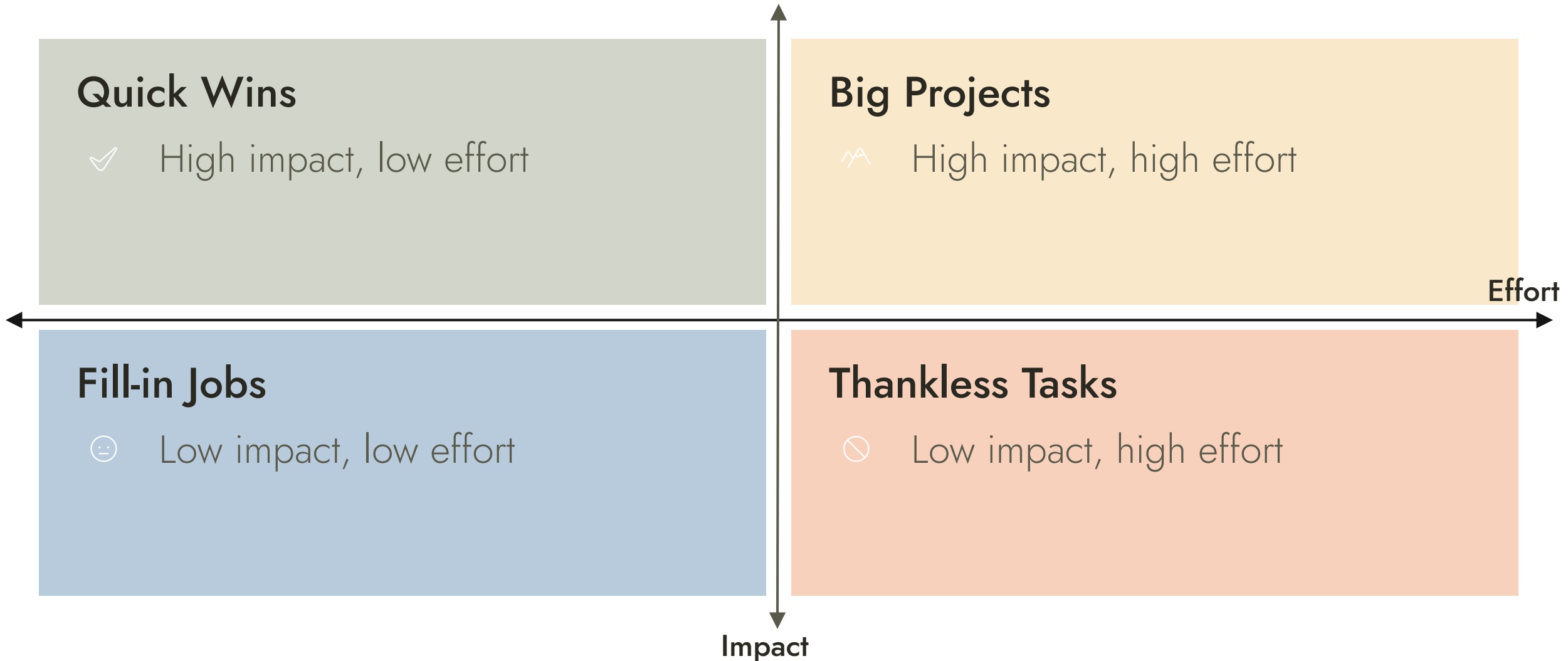


## After Action Review

A process used to analyze a completed event or project to identify successes and future growth opportunities.



# Impact/Effort Matrix





# MoSCoW Method



**Must Have**



**Should Have**



**Could Have**



**Won't Have**





# After Action Review

**What was initially expected?**

**What really happened?**

**Why was there a difference?**

**What have we learned?**

**What will we do about it?**

# Scenario

Harvest Hope, a local food security nonprofit, runs the following program:

- Weekly farmers markets at three locations
- Bi-monthly nutrition education workshops
- Meal delivery for homebound seniors
- Local food policy advocacy

After receiving a one-year \$150,000 grant, funding is now ending. Resource constraints mean they cannot continue all activities at current levels. The team must evaluate and decide which components to prioritize, scale back, or redesign.

Initial data about the program:

- Garden: High volunteer engagement, lower than expected food production
- Markets: Strong attendance but winter operational challenges
- Workshops: Modest attendance with very positive feedback
- Meal delivery: Demand exceeding capacity with high operational costs
- Advocacy: Relationship-building with officials but no policy changes yet

Harvest Hope needs to evaluate these components to make informed decisions about next steps, balancing impact with resource limitations.

- 1 | Impact/Effort Matrix
- 2 | MoSCoW Method
- 3 | After Action Review

**Take a  
break.**





# Strategies for Consideration

Especially for staff buy-in concerns



## **"5 Whys" Root Cause Analysis**

A method to uncover the true root cause of an issue by asking "why" five times.



## **Alternative Explanations Exercise (Devil's Advocate)**

An exercise where someone assumes a contrary or opposing viewpoint to test the strength of an argument, idea, or decision to encourage critical thinking, expose potential flaws, and prevent groupthink.



# "5 Whys" Analysis

Why?	
Why?	
Why?	
Why?	
Why?	



# Alternative Explanations Exercise (Devil's Advocate)

**Critique ideas,  
not people**

**Provide sound  
logic and rationale**

**Offer new  
alternatives**

**Serve the team, not your  
agenda**

**Know when enough is  
enough/to switch it up**

# Scenario

AgingWell Network received \$275,000 to launch "Senior Connect," helping older adults (65+) access online services and reduce isolation.

The program provided:

- Free tablets and internet subsidies for 300 seniors
- Custom step-by-step video tutorials
- Weekly virtual meetups
- Phone-based tech support hotline
- Partnerships with healthcare providers for telehealth integration

Despite these investments, six-month results fell short:

- Consistent weekly platform usage: 22% (vs. 70% target)
- 53% of seniors needed repeated assistance with the same issues
- Telehealth appointment completion: 31% (vs. 65% target)

Program elements appeared well-designed: Simplified user interface with large text and high contrast, in-person orientation sessions at community centers, focus groups with seniors guided feature development, and multilingual support materials.

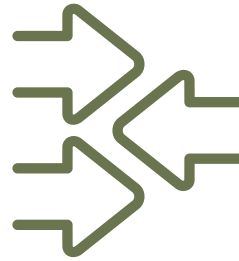
Major funders are now questioning the initiative's approach as the organization faces a critical mid-year funding review.

1 | "5 Whys" Root Cause Analysis

2 | Alternative Explanations Exercise (Devil's Advocate)

# Strategy for Consideration

Especially for resource concerns



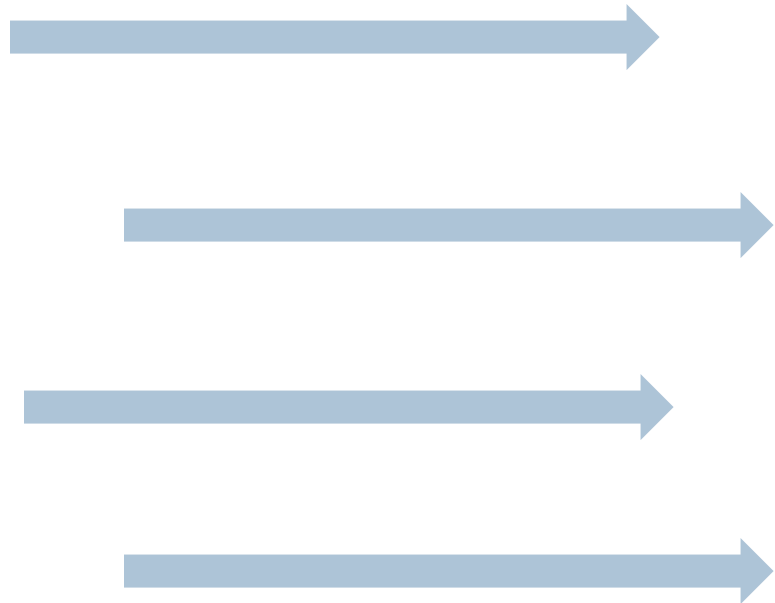
## Force Field Analysis

A decision-making tool to help understand the "driving forces" that promote change and the "restraining forces" that hinder it.



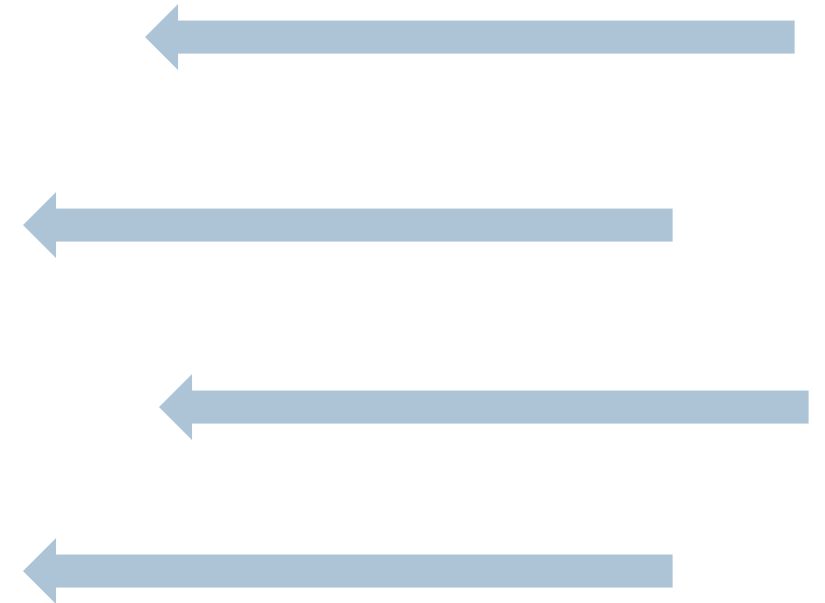
# Force Field Analysis

**Driving Forces**



**Proposed  
Action or  
Change**

**Restraining Forces**





# Scenario

Community Collective houses five nonprofit programs (youth mentorship, adult literacy, job training, arts, immigrant services). They're considering moving from their aging downtown warehouse to a former school building 5 miles away in a residential area.

## Current Location:

- Central with good public transportation
- Deteriorating infrastructure
- Rising maintenance costs
- Becoming too small for growing programs

## Potential New Location:

- 40% more space with modern amenities
- Lower operating costs
- Dedicated parking and outdoor space
- Limited public transportation access
- Further from partner organizations and many clients' neighborhoods

The board and staff must weigh whether this move would enhance their capacity or create barriers to serving their community's most vulnerable populations.

## 1 | Force Field Analysis



# Questions and Discussion

Schedule your  
consulting  
time (3/31 -  
6/30)

## Next Steps

# Where do you go from here?

What is **one concrete action** you will take back to  
your organization?

A white cardboard box is shown from a low angle, resting on a light-colored wooden surface. The word "strategy" is printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font on the side of the box. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the wooden surface and a white wall.



# Thank you!

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