Evaluating a Nonprofit Organization: Methodological and Management Strategies from the Foods Resource Bank Evaluation

Evaluators: Thomaz Chianca and John Risley
Supervisor: Michael Scriven
Interdisciplinary PhD in Evaluation
The Evaluation Center
Western Michigan University

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The Foods Resource Bank (FRB)

- Inspired by the Canadian Foodgrains Bank
- “… a ‘Christian Response to World Hunger;’ a non-government humanitarian organization committed to providing food security in the developing world through sustainable small-scale agricultural production.”
- $2.3 million Net Assets in 2004 (contributions, in-kind commodities, and grants).
Growing Projects, Implementing Members & Overseas Programs

- ~140 Growing Projects in at least 15 states in 2004.
- 16 Implementing Members—mostly church-related missions organizations (e.g., CWR, LWR)
- ~40 food security programs in developing countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, Middle-East and Eastern Europe
The FRB Evaluation

- Formative purposes: provide information for FRB’s new, full-time President
- Overall framework: Michael Scriven’s Key Evaluation Checklist (KEC)
- Design: Surveys (GPs, IMs, OPs), Site Visits (GPs), Phone Interviews (GPs, FMs), Doc Review (FRB reports, OPs eval reports)
- Main questions: How well FRB is doing re: GPs, IMs, OPs, and Governance? How to improve GPs?
Management Issues

- Identifying values and developing the evaluation plan
- Evaluation Advisory Committee
- Reporting evaluation findings
- Metaevaluation
- Working with FRB staff
Values and the evaluation plan

- Three main values from organization’s mission
- Major success criteria linked to each of the main values
- FRB components also linked to major success criteria (and proposed data sources)
- Agreement on evaluation plan before contract was signed
Evaluation Advisory Committee

- Stakeholders from
  - Growing projects
  - Implementing members
  - FRB staff
  - Government funder (USAID)
  - Foundation funder (WKKF)

- Good feedback early on
- Lack of commitment throughout the process
Reporting evaluation findings

- Report sent to FRB staff
- Oral presentation at FRB annual meeting
- Issues about language used in annual meeting presentation
- Be open to feedback while maintaining commitment to findings
Metaevaluation

- Ideally would be an external metaevaluator
- Included a self-criticisms/caveats in place of a metaevaluation
- Included in report and presentation to FRB board
- Helps FRB’s future evaluation planning
Working with FRB staff

- Staff open with information
- Helpful with increasing survey response rate
- Commitment to evaluation reinforced with funders, partners, overseas programs and growing projects
Success Case Method Component

- **Purpose**: Identify any organizational features and operations, and type of support received from FRB influencing Growing Projects’ level of success.
Source of evidence:
- database on 86 GPs with FRB headquarters info and responses to eval survey

Success Criteria
- Donation: significant increase in donations over the years or high mean donation (bottom-line)
- Sustainability: at least 2 years as a GP and intention to continue as a GP in the following year
- Participation: increasing number of project participants
Interviews with GPs

- Random selection of:
  - 5 of 16 (31%) highly successful GPs
  - 3 of 14 (21%) least successful GPs

- Questions designed to identify convincing evidence linking behaviors and practices of project leaders with greater or lower GP success
  - Could you describe a typical week of work in the project? What exactly you do? How often? How?
  - What do you see as your most important tasks?
  - How do you know how successful you are being? What measures and feedback do you rely on?
  - How do you get and maintain people involved with the project?
  - What does the FRB field manager do to help your project succeed?
  - What kind of support from FRB would you need to continue to be successful?
Interviews with Field Managers

- All 7 field managers interviewed
- Interviews served to distinguish behaviors and tasks developed by field managers that could foster or hinder GPs’ success
  - What are the 3 or 4 most critical GP leaders’ tasks and behaviors that lead to the greatest success?
  - How and where should GPs spend most of their time? What is least important for them to do?
  - What do you see as your most important tasks?
  - How do you make decisions as to how and where to spend your time?
  - How do you know how successful you are being? What measures and feedback do you rely on?
Characteristics of highly successful GPs (survey)

- Comparison of 16 most successful GPs and the other 70 GPs on key aspects.

- Statistically significant differences:
  - growing and high number of active participants (especially farmers)
  - larger number of businesses and churches involved with GPs (especially urban churches)

- Other important differences:
  - slightly wealthier communities (about $2,000 higher median household income)
  - leadership committees in place (21% more than in less successful GPs)
  - greater participation of farmers and clergy (5% and 9%, respectively)
  - slightly higher percentage of donations to FRB (3%) coming from crops
Secrets for GP success (interviews)

- Establishing effective communication with project participants (or potential participants) and donors (or potential donors)
- Having lay people leading the project
- Dividing tasks among the members of the leadership committee
- Promptly covering small farmers’ expenses
- Getting a wide variety of organizations involved
- Networking with other GPs
- Using FRB mission to attract more people
- Inclusive and diverse group of participants
- Always open to new participants
- Innovating in fundraising
Challenges for Success

- Lack of a leadership committee and dependence on external leadership (pastors or FRB field managers)
- Limited collaboration between participating churches
- Lack of mission-oriented church members

Great corroboration with previous findings!!!
Successful Field Managers

- Linking FMs and highly successful GPs
- Good news: 6 of 7 FMs supervise at least one highly successful GP
- Identification of 12 key roles played by FMs with GPs
- Most successful FMs:
  - Maintaining existing GPs:
    - Literature and contacts
    - Inputs and guidance on communicating work
  - Identifying new opportunities:
    - Persistency
    - Dealing with frustration
    - Being attentive 24/7
    - Contacting the right people
  - Using clear outcome measures to assess own work
Summing up SCM component payoff

- Distribution of level of success of GPs
- Main characteristics/secrets of success of highly successful GPs
- Challenges for increasing success
- List of activities performed by FRB field managers supporting most successful GPs
- Main characteristics/secrets of success of most successful FMs