


Patton, M. Q. (2019). Proposal for evaluation of Women Affirming Motherhood. In C. A. Christie & M. C. Alkin (Eds.), *Theorists' Models in Action: A Second Look. New Directions for Evaluation*, 163, 27–47.

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Proposal for Evaluation of Women Affirming Motherhood

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Abstract

Situated on the use branch of the Evaluation Theory Tree, Michael Patton draws from his experience with collective impact initiatives to explore the complexity of administering and evaluating such a program. He presents an evaluation proposal for the Women Affirming Motherhood (WAM) program that is organized around five key operating principles and that is rooted in a utilization-focused, developmental, and principles-focused evaluation approach. Overall, Patton argues for collaboration with an emphasis on stakeholder learning and participation. © 2019 Wiley Periodicals, Inc., and the American Evaluation Association.

There is a variety of ways to design and focus evaluations. The profession of evaluation has become a many-splendored thing, rich with options, alternative models, diverse methods, and competing theories. A program evaluation must be designed to be appropriate for the specific program being evaluated. The challenge, then, is to match the evaluation to the situation. So, we begin by describing how we understand the WAM program approach and, based on that understanding, how we would facilitate and conduct the evaluation to match your program model and fit your situation.

The first thing that stands out about WAM's programming approach is its collaborative process and structure. Collective impact is fundamentally

based on collaboration among partner agencies; our approach to evaluation is fundamentally based on collaboration between evaluators, program partners, and funders. This means that we would identify evaluation questions together, develop the evaluation design collaboratively, and engage together in analyzing the results to inform program improvements and strategic decision-making.

The nature of the request for proposal (RFP) you prepared, and to which we are responding, suggests that such a collaborative approach is altogether appropriate. Some RFPs are quite specific, mandating precisely what evaluation questions are to be answered with what kind of design, data collection, and analysis. In responding to such specific RFPs, the evaluator's only challenge and obligation is to demonstrate capacity to carry out the desired evaluation design with a high degree of fidelity. In contrast, your RFP was fairly open. That is the only kind of RFP to which we respond, for we believe that the collaborative nature of our approach to evaluation requires that the details be worked out and negotiated face-to-face, so that shared understandings, mutual trust, and contextual responsiveness are achieved.

Utilization-Focused Evaluation

Our approach is called *utilization-focused evaluation*, which emphasizes collaborating in all aspects of the evaluation to ensure intended use by primary intended users. We begin an evaluation by bringing together primary intended users to develop a shared understanding of what the primary purpose of the evaluation is, how it is intended to be used, and what methods and data will support those intended uses. We like to be quite specific about who will use the evaluation and how it will be used. In this case, we would expect to work closely with the WAM program codirectors, Cheri Jackson and Amy McIntyre, to plan the initial workshop that would launch the evaluation. We would expect the workshop to include your primary collective impact partners involving at least one senior person from each partner:

- The primary staff person (or persons) coordinating the collective impact involvement of the local clinic and the city's main hospital.
- The director of Doula 4 U, who is responsible for providing suburban WAM services.
- The person coordinating involvement of the mayor's office.
- The YMCA staff with responsibility for offering educational courses on nutrition and fitness for expectant and new mothers as well as other services.
- The public libraries staff person coordinating WAM-related events and services.
- The major staff person from Heartwood Community College who will be working on the workshop series for new mothers.

- The local clinic leader coordinating and teaching evening breastfeeding and general nutrition classes for WAM.
- The primary person engaged with WAM from the local credit union, Quartz Bank, who will be offering financial programming at WAM.

In addition to engaging collaboratively with WAM's collective impact partners, we would hope and expect to involve Mia Harris, the Empire Foundation program officer overseeing funding for this initiative. We would also extend an invitation to a member of the Empire Foundation Board of Directors, given the foundation's substantial commitment to and interest in this initiative. Since the foundation's board has expressed interest in "innovative programming that promotes strong communities," we would like to involve foundation leadership as primary intended users to ensure that the evaluation addresses their information needs.

Finally, we would work with you to identify some current or former WAM participants to be involved in the initial evaluation workshop and ongoing collaboration. We think that it is essential to include the perspective of program participants in the evaluation design and to do so interpersonally and interactively with all the other key stakeholders and primary intended users. One option, as noted, is to involve one or two former WAM participants in the initial evaluation workshop and evaluation task force advisory group that will be created to follow up after the workshop launch. Our evaluation budget would include funds to compensate and support current or former program participants for their involvement in the evaluation.

Launching the Evaluation Collaboratively

The collective impact approach means that the collaborating agencies, funders, and representatives of WAM participants are all potentially primary intended users for the purposes of developing an effective collaboration together and designing an evaluation to support and enhance the work. With such a diverse group of stakeholders and primary intended users, it becomes all the more important that everyone come together, either in person or virtually, to generate a common understanding about the evaluation. Our experience is that an initial session of this kind requires at least 2 hours, and ideally a half-day, so that the group can engage in some clarifying exercises together. Moreover, before such a session, we would interview each of the primary intended users to learn about their special interests and surface any concerns. Those advance interviews would also provide an opportunity for us to introduce ourselves to the collective impact partners and explain the nature of utilization-focused evaluation. We have found advance preparation through interviews with key partners to be essential for launching an evaluation and facilitating useful evaluations (Patton, 2017a).

In the opening workshop together, we would go over the professional standards for evaluation and their implications for the WAM evaluation. The standards call for evaluations to be useful, practical, ethical, accurate, and accountable. We would look at what those five standards mean for this particular evaluation. We would do the same with the guiding principles developed by the American Evaluation Association (2018). We would also discuss and add any additional standards, norms, and/or principles that the group decides should guide the WAM evaluation.

The initial evaluation workshop would build on any work previously done by the collective impact group. We understand that the group is already holding monthly planning calls and quarterly in-person meetings. We also understand that the group has already begun to discuss establishing shared metrics and data collection procedures. We would want to learn more about what has been discussed and integrate the evaluation into the ongoing work of the collective impact group. We also understand that you have participated in a 3-day workshop on collective impact with other Empire Foundation grantees. We would want to learn what came out of that workshop and the potential implications for the WAM evaluation. We come to this initiative with some knowledge of and experience with collective impact ourselves, which we share next.

Collective Impact

We have been involved with the national and international collective impact movement since it began. The conceptual framework for collective impact was first published in 2011 by John Kania and Mark Kramer in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. In that seminal article, they argued that the nonprofit sector has been dominated by an approach they called *isolated impact*, in which a single organization focuses on its own mission, in part to demonstrate to funders why that organization deserves credit for (and ongoing funding for) outcomes achieved. As a result, they wrote, “nearly 1.4 million nonprofits try to invent independent solutions to major social problems, often working at odds with each other and exponentially increasing the perceived resources required to make meaningful progress” (p. 38). They then made the case that “complex problems can be solved only by cross-sector coalitions that engage those outside the nonprofit sector” (p. 39). They concluded that:

Shifting from isolated impact to collective impact is not merely a matter of encouraging more collaboration or public-private partnerships. It requires a systemic approach to social impact that focuses on the relationships between organizations and the progress toward shared objectives. And it requires the creation of a new set of nonprofit management organizations that have the skills and resources to assemble and coordinate the specific elements necessary for collective action to succeed. (p. 39)

Kania and Kramer (2011) then offered five conditions for collective success: (a) a common agenda, (b) shared measurement systems, (c) mutually reinforcing activities, (d) continuous communication, and (e) backbone support organizations. In the initial evaluation workshop we are proposing, we would expect to go over these five success factors and discuss their relevance as evaluation criteria for the WAM collective impact initiative. In this way, these factors become potential evaluation questions:

1. To what extent do the WAM collective impact partners share a common agenda? What is that shared agenda? How does it guide the partners' work together?
2. To what extent does the WAM collective impact collaboration share common measures and a joint measurement system? How are results of shared measurement used to inform and adapt WAM programming? How can those shared measures be used for evaluation?
3. To what extent and in what ways are the diverse activities of WAM partners mutually reinforcing? How integrated are the partners' separate contributions? How are they integrated?
4. How do the WAM collective impact partners communicate with each other? What does "continuous communication" mean in the WAM context? What are the strengths and weaknesses of communication patterns among WAM partners?
5. How well is WAM operating as a "backbone support organization" for the collective impact collaboration? What challenges have emerged? How are those challenges being addressed? What is being learned about being a "backbone organization"?

These are examples of possible evaluation questions drawn from the collective impact literature. A major purpose of the initial evaluation workshop would be to review these questions, and other potential questions from other collective impact research and evaluation reports, to frame together the appropriate evaluation questions for the WAM collective impact evaluation.

The original Kania and Kramer (2011) article also asserted that collective impact "requires a highly structured process that leads to effective decision-making" (p. 40). They further suggested that a backbone organization should "embody the principles of adaptive leadership: the ability to focus people's attention and create a sense of urgency, the skill to apply pressure to stakeholders without overwhelming them, the competence to frame issues in a way that presents opportunities as well as difficulties, and the strength to mediate conflict among stakeholders" (p. 40). These characteristics can also be reviewed as potential evaluation questions and success criteria.

The article also proposed a different role for funders. Indeed, Kania and Kramer (2011) called for "a fundamental change in how funders see their

role, from funding organizations to leading a long-term process of social change” (p. 41). They continued:

It is no longer enough to fund an innovative solution created by a single nonprofit or to build that organization's capacity. Instead, funders must help create and sustain the collective processes, measurement reporting systems, and community leadership that enable cross-sector coalitions to arise and thrive. (p. 41)

This suggests that the evaluation should include attention to the role of the Empire Foundation in the collective impact initiative both for WAM specifically and for the overall initiative that includes five different grantees nationally. Here again, Kania and Kramer (2011) offered specific success criteria that also constitute potential evaluation criteria:

... that funders who want to create large-scale change follow four practices: take responsibility for assembling the elements of a solution; create a movement for change; include solutions from outside the nonprofit sector; and use actionable knowledge to influence behavior and improve performance. (p. 41)

The important role that funders play in collective impact initiatives is the reason we would want to include the Empire Foundation staff and board as primary intended users for the evaluation and therefore would have them collaborate in the evaluation design. At the same time, it would be our responsibility, as evaluation facilitators, to make sure that the voices of all primary intended users are heard and that the interests of all are represented in the evaluation. This would ensure that no one stakeholder with the power that comes from funding dominates. Given the role that the Empire Foundation has played in developing this initiative, we believe that the foundation's program officer would contribute significantly to ensuring a meaningful and useful evaluation.

Finally, the Kania and Kramer (2011) article offers some longer-term impact criteria for evaluating collective impact initiatives. In particular, communities take true ownership of their own collective impact initiatives and engage in ongoing adaptation to address and ameliorate community problems, thereby strengthening communities and those involved in the collective impact engagement process. Kania and Kramer lead FSG, and we have worked with them and their senior staff, especially Hallie Preskill, over many years. As a former president of the American Evaluation Association and a long-time colleague, Preskill has coauthored the leading *Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact* (Preskill, Parkhurst, & Juster, 2013). She and her FSG coauthors have found that “the collective impact change process typically involves three stages of development; each requires a different approach to performance measurement and evaluation” (p. 5). They have

produced a video on evaluating collective impact that we would consider as a possible resource for use during the WAM evaluation launch workshop. We would also expect to draw on Preskill's experience and expertise throughout the evaluation.

Another important resource for both implementing and evaluating collective impact is the Tamarack Institute, based in Toronto (www.tamarackcommunity.ca/). They have been actively promoting collective impact through conferences, workshops, and resource materials. Of special relevance is the new *Collective Impact 3.0: An Evolving Framework for Community Change*, by Mark Cabaj and Liz Weaver (2016). They have identified five ways to build and adapt the collective impact framework and use it for evaluation. Mark Cabaj is a long-time colleague with whom we have worked over many years. We would draw on his expertise and experience in this evaluation.

The point of mentioning these colleagues and resources is to highlight that we are connected to and have relationships with the leaders in conceptualizing and evaluating collective impact. We can and would access that expertise for the WAM collective impact evaluation. In so doing, we would be sensitive to whatever particular version of collective impact has informed the WAM initiative to date. The 3-day collective impact orientation workshop sponsored by the Empire Foundation would constitute a specific approach to collective impact that would affect both the implementation of the WAM initiative and its evaluation. Moreover, we understand that the foundation has contracted with a national firm that specializes in collective impact to provide monthly ongoing consulting to all five of the grantees. One of our first tasks would be to learn about that firm's approach to collective impact and evaluation. Indeed, it might well be appropriate to have the lead person from that firm participate in the evaluation launch workshop to support consistency of terminology, implementation processes, outcome measures, and success criteria.

We should also note that there is the potential for conflict between the national firm's approach to conceptualizing and evaluating collective impact versus what we develop locally for the WAM collective impact initiative. We are keenly aware that, should we be invited to facilitate the local evaluation, we would be stepping into a process that is already well underway under the auspices of a national organization that has been providing direction and support as well as the work already done by the WAM partners locally in getting to the point of issuing this RFP. The fact that so much work has already gone on is all the more reason for us to be suggestive rather than definitive in what we propose here. As we said in the opening, the actual evaluation questions, design, products, and uses need to be negotiated among the collective impact partners as we engage together.

Essentially, we see collective impact as a potential way to stimulate a pivot or inflection point when key organizations and institutions in a community begin directing their energy and resources toward a common

vision in a productive way. The pillar of mutually reinforcing activity is central to what evaluators call a “theory of change.” It distinguishes the collective impact effort from mere rhetoric toward a common goal with little substantive action, or from individually productive activities that are not aligned. Common, measurable goals as a mechanism for alignment—moving beyond talk and planning to action—and for mutual accountability and learning can be quite powerful, but is not easily implemented, and so deserves rigorous and systematic evaluation.

Advocates and funders of collective impact hypothesize that collective action pushes community efforts toward effective learning processes that embrace disparate inputs from all key constituencies. But again, such efforts face substantial real world obstacles, thus the importance of evaluating what actually occurs. Formal processes for monitoring and evaluation are most useful, we have found, when marked by openness among key leaders to embrace “bad news” and engage with disappointments as catalysts for rethinking, redirection, and improvement. Our collaborative approach to evaluation supports a community’s ability to reflect on its progress (or failure to make progress) in a safe space, in a way that builds trust among the players, enables real learning and adaptation to occur, and thereby enhances the potential for deeper, broader, and more sustainable collective impact.

The Collaborative Nature of Utilization-Focused Evaluation

We opened this proposal by suggesting that the collaborative nature of utilization-focused evaluation is a good match for the collaborative nature of the WAM collective impact initiative. Having reviewed in more detail the collaborative dimensions of collective impact, we turn now to a more in-depth presentation of the collaborative nature of utilization-focused evaluation.

We use the phrase *active–reactive–interactive–adaptive* to portray the nature of the consultative and facilitative interactions that go on between evaluators and intended users. As evaluation facilitators, we strive to consciously and deliberately act, react, interact, and adapt in order to increase our effectiveness in working with stakeholders and intended evaluation users. This requires versatility, flexibility, creativity, political sensitivity, and responsiveness. We have learned that quality, quantity, and timing of interactions with intended users are all important—but quality is most important. A large amount of interaction between evaluators and users with little substance may backfire and actually reduce stakeholder interest. As evaluation facilitators, we understand that we must be strategic and sensitive in asking for time and involvement from busy people, and be sure we are interacting with the right people around relevant issues. It is the nature and quality of interactions between evaluators and decision-makers that is critical.

Utilization-focused evaluation aims to enhance actual use of an evaluation by those for whom and with whom it is being done. The approach advises focusing on use from the beginning and throughout the evaluation, not just at the end when findings are ready. Utilization-focused evaluation is a comprehensive decision framework for designing and implementing an evaluation to fit a particular situation and, in that situation, meet the information needs of primary intended users to enhance their intended use of the evaluation. We reiterate that utilization-focused evaluation is done for and with specific primary intended users for specific, intended uses.

Utilization-focused evaluation begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use; therefore, evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful consideration for how everything that is done, from beginning to end, will affect use. Use concerns how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experience the evaluation process. Therefore, utilization-focused evaluation provides systematic, research-based guidance and a set of steps to decide what approach to evaluation is most appropriate for a particular situation and specific primary intended users. Utilization-focused evaluation does not prescribe what to focus on or what methods to use, but rather prescribes *a process for determining* what to focus on based on unwavering attention to intended uses by intended users. This process involves collaboration with primary intended users to identify priority information needs and then conduct the evaluation to support and enhance appropriate use of findings.

Five Operating Principles for Evaluation Facilitation

With the general overview of how we would approach facilitating and conducting a utilization-focused evaluation in mind, we turn now to five specific principles that would guide our collaborative work on the evaluation. Since you will be making a major decision in selecting an evaluator, we want to be as open and explicit as possible about how we work as evaluators. Because each evaluation situation is unique, we do not have standard operating procedures or rules we follow, but we have articulated the principles that guide our work. Our five guiding principles are as follows:

1. *We Are Guided by the Personal Factor.* We find that it is important to learn about the people we will be working with in order to establish a mutually trusting and respectful relationship. We strive to customize the evaluation to participants' knowledge, interests, motivations, and concerns. We find that some stakeholders come to an evaluation process with backgrounds and experiences that make them ready to fully engage. Others need help, which means training and support to understand evaluation options, make methods choices, and interpret findings. This is usually a learn-by-doing experience in which the evalu-

ator is facilitating the evaluation decision process while also teaching primary intended users about evaluation. This learning is actually one of the benefits that those involved get from their involvement. We treat every session with intended users as both an opportunity to get work done on the evaluation and as a capacity-building opportunity.

2. *We Engage Collaboratively Through Options.* We do not want the evaluation collaboration to be a rubberstamping process where participants go through the motions of adopting predetermined results. The purpose of our collaborative evaluation facilitation with key stakeholders is to generate possibilities, consider options, establish priorities, and make meaningful decisions. As the evaluation facilitators, it is our job to help identify, clarify, and explain evaluation options. Deliberating on options and expressing preferences increases participants' understanding of the implications of making certain choices and increases ownership of the decisions and recommendations that emerge from the process.
3. *We Strive to Observe–Interpret–Adapt.* Our collaboration and facilitation are guided by observation. We monitor stakeholder group dynamics and progress toward priority purposes to inform pacing and changes in the process, and to keep the group moving toward desired outcomes. We have learned that the evaluation facilitator can make adaptations and adjustments by monitoring what is happening, understanding why, and reorienting the collaboration accordingly. We are committed to *adapting our evaluation facilitation to what emerges*. This can mean changing the agenda, changing the timing of activities, changing the process, and even changing the hoped-for outcomes. We are prepared at any time to offer alternatives to the group. We do not get locked into predetermined processes and outcomes. We do not become rigid. We are committed to periodically finding out from participants what their experiences are and how they perceive things are going.
4. *We Embed Evaluative Thinking in All Aspects of the Collaboration and Our Evaluation Facilitation.* This is a distinct and defining feature of how we approach evaluation facilitation. We think of every evaluation facilitation as a training opportunity. We are not just doing an evaluation but laying the foundation for future evaluations and ongoing evaluation in an organization or program. So, we embed evaluation capacity building in our facilitation. Building evaluative capacity enhances the quality of a group's evaluation outcomes while increasing the group's knowledge and skills for engaging in future evaluations.
5. *We Facilitate to the Leading Edge.* Embedding evaluative thinking and capacity building covers evaluation basics. But evaluation is an evolving field of practice. Part of an evaluation facilitator's job, we believe, is to bring before participants new directions, emergent thinking, evolving possibilities, creative opportunities, and inspiring innovations.

Together, these five principles inform and shape our evaluative work. In what follows, we describe how we expect these guiding principles to be applied in the WAM evaluation.

The Personal Factor

The personal factor is about people. People matter. Research on evaluation use demonstrates that the credibility and utility of evaluation depends on the characteristics of the evaluator and the evaluator's relationships with primary intended users as much as it does on the particular methods used. Utilization-focused evaluation enhances mutual understanding by building a relationship between evaluators and intended users. Thus, should you decide to take a utilization-focused evaluation approach and work with us, you would not only be getting a methodologically appropriate, credible, and useful design and approach, but you would also be working with a team that operates on distinct values, principles, and personal commitments.

First, as team leader I would bring to this effort 48 years evaluation experience and the credibility of having written evaluation textbooks used in hundreds of universities worldwide. As indicated earlier, I am also engaged in a global network of evaluators, including collective impact evaluators, so I have access to expertise from others to fill gaps in my own knowledge base. The operations director for this project would be the director of organizational learning and evaluation for utilization-focused evaluation, Charmagne Campbell-Patton, who is my business partner as well as my daughter. As this proposal is being written, she is nearing the end of her second pregnancy. So, she would be a new mother at the time of fieldwork, interviewing and engaging with other new mothers. This will enhance her rapport with program participants as well as deepen the participants' sense of having an evaluator who understands the challenges of being a new mother.

We are also proposing to engage the TerraLuna Evaluation Collaborative (<http://www.terralunacollaborative.com/>) in some of the evaluation facilitation and fieldwork. TerraLuna is made up of diverse young evaluators deeply committed to social justice as a frame for evaluation. The director of TerraLuna, Nora Murphy, has a long history of working with families in poverty and is, herself, a single mom. TerraLuna's values are, we believe, consistent with the values of WAM and the program's codirectors. Sharing values enhances trust and mutual understanding.

Values That Guide the TerraLuna Collaborative

- *Social Justice.* Civil rights, human rights, and human dignity develop remedies to historical and systemic inequities.

- *Social Equity*. Working within nondiscriminatory and accessible systems accounts for the unique needs and obstacles of individuals and communities.
- *Human Focus*. All people share the same basic desires: to have their basic needs met; to love and be loved; to see and be seen; to have and realize their dreams; to hear and be heard; and to find belonging and purpose in communities.
- *Inclusive and Responsive Collaboration*. Inclusive and responsive strategies elevate fresh insights, diverse perspectives, and marginalized voices.
- *One Size Does Not Fit All*. Evaluation is a continuous process of self-discovery, reflection, and inquiry that finds solutions by lifting up marginalized voices, employing effective methods, and recognizing specific lived experiences.

We find that sharing values, building mutual trust, and engaging interpersonally enhances and deepens our capacity to provide honest, meaningful, and independent feedback about what is and is not effective. We do not hesitate to provide negative feedback about things that are poorly done or have failed to produce desired outcomes. We are forthright in our feedback precisely because we share values about making a significant difference in the lives of those in need. At the same time, we do not hesitate to provide positive feedback when merited by the data. We do not find that distance from program staff enhances objectivity; it just creates distance. Nor do we find that rapport undermines our neutrality about whether the program is effective; rapport is not a source of bias but, rather, provides a basis for mutual understanding and straight talk.

One of evaluation's pioneers, Bob Stake (2004), has articulated insightfully that being an evaluator does not mean we do not care about what we are evaluating, but rather it obligates us to make explicit what we do care about. We find his list compelling and share it below as a way of more fully introducing ourselves and our values in accordance with the importance of the personal factor in evaluation.

Beyond Neutrality: What Evaluators Care About

(Stake, 2004, pp. 103–107)

1. We often care about the thing being evaluated.
2. We, as evaluation professionals, care about evaluation.
3. We advocate rationality.
4. We care to be heard. We are troubled if our studies are not used.

5. We are distressed by underprivilege. We see gaps among privileged patrons and managers and staff and underprivileged participants and communities.
6. We are advocates of a democratic society.

Engaging Collaboratively Through Options

The *engage through options* principle means that we provide a process for generating and comparing evaluation options, thereby facilitating primary intended users in exercising choice and making decisions. We find that deliberating on options and expressing preferences increases participants' understanding of the implications of making certain choices and deepens ownership of the decisions and recommendations that emerge from the process.

Our evaluation facilitation typically involves working with diverse groups of people. Human groups inevitably manifest power differentials, diverse patterns of interaction, variations in emotional engagement, and whatever is brought into the group from the larger society and culture: gender and race, political, social, cultural, and language issues, to name but a few. These issues frame and contextualize evaluations and therefore, inevitably, must be addressed in evaluation facilitation. Our job as evaluation facilitators, in part, is to anticipate and have ways of dealing with whatever emerges at the intersection of society and evaluation on the path to group success in determining what options are most appropriate for the situation at hand.

In the case of the WAM evaluation, we would begin, as noted earlier, by finding out what discussions have already occurred about potential shared measures. Each of the collective impact partners likely has some kinds of data that they already collect and evaluation processes that they use for their own work. We would do an inventory of data already being collected and evaluation processes already being used, and assist in making comparisons and seeking areas for synthesis and aggregation. We would also do an inventory of existing community indicators, sources of existing data related to WAM outcomes, and examples of data and evaluations from published WAM research and evaluation, of which there is a substantial literature. This inventory would provide a substantial range of options for the WAM collective impact common goals and shared indicators. We would also facilitate consideration of new or alternative data collection approaches and measures unique to WAM. We would facilitate quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods options while always maintaining a focus on what data would be useful, what is practical, how to enhance data accuracy, and how to gather data in ways that are ethical and accountable. All of this would be in accordance with the standards for professional evaluation quality.

One of the challenges of collective impact initiatives is how to integrate the contributions of the various partners. There are various conceptual approaches to enhance integration, including constructing an overarching theory of change, mapping the interplay of each partner's logic model, and geographic mapping of the territory, services, and target population covered by each partner to identify gaps, redundancies, and opportunities for collective action. One approach we would offer for consideration in support of collective impact is *outcome mapping*. This is a well-established approach to planning, monitoring, and evaluation that "puts people at the center, defines outcomes as changes in behavior, and helps measure contributions to complex change processes" (<https://www.outcomemapping.ca/>). Outcome mapping was developed by evaluation staff at the International Development Centre for Research (IDRC) in Ottawa specifically to address the challenge of helping diverse partners working on a problem display the contribution that each makes to ultimate impacts. There is an active international community of practitioners and highly accessible resource materials to support outcome mapping as both a planning and evaluation process. We think it is an option worth considering for the WAM collective impact initiative.

The Observe–Interpret–Adapt Principle

Our third operating principle, *observe–interpret–adapt*, emphasizes the evaluation facilitator's responsibility to react and adapt. Being active–reactive–interactive–adaptive expresses the evaluation facilitator's role in getting things started through the initial evaluation launching workshop and then to provide ongoing direction for and management of the evaluation. As the collaborative process unfolds, we find that the focus shifts to being reactive, interactive, and adaptive. That is the essence of this third principle.

In the WAM evaluation we would expect to provide timely data on the how the collective impact collaboration process is unfolding. Sharing those observations with the primary intended users, and interpreting their meaning and implications, would provide guidance for adapting the process. This includes a commitment to watching for unintended consequences, changes in the larger context that may affect the program, and emergent opportunities.

This principle leads us to propose a developmental evaluation approach under the broader umbrella of utilization-focused evaluation. Because the WAM collective impact collaboration would be getting *developed* as partners collaborate and constitutes an innovative initiative with multiple services, components, and partners, developmental evaluation (DE) may be especially appropriate. DE serves the purpose of supporting innovation development. It provides *evaluative* information and feedback to social innovators, their funders, and supporters, to inform adaptive *development* of change initiatives in complex dynamic environments.

DE brings to innovation and adaptation the processes of asking evaluative questions, applying evaluation logic, and gathering and reporting evaluative data to inform and support the development of innovative programs and initiatives with timely feedback. DE feedback and findings are used by social innovators and change agents to illuminate and adapt innovative strategies and decisions. That is intended use by intended users; that is utilization-focused evaluation with a developmental purpose. Funders of social innovation use DE findings to inform funding decisions and meet accountability expectations and demands. That is also intended use by intended users; that is also utilization-focused evaluation. In short, DE is a particular kind of utilization-focused evaluation. All that has been learned about enhancing use over 40 years of utilization-focused evaluation practice and research undergirds it.

Developmental evaluators track, document, and help interpret the nature and implications of innovations and adaptations as they unfold—both the processes and outcomes of innovation—and help extract lessons and insights to inform the ongoing adaptive innovation process. At the same time, this provides accountability for funders and supporters of social innovations and helps them understand and refine their contributions to solutions as they evolve. Innovators often find themselves dealing with problems, trying out strategies, and striving to achieve goals that emerge from their engagement in the change process—things that could not have been identified before that engagement, and that continue to evolve as a result of what they learn. The developmental evaluator helps identify and make sense of these emergent problems, strategies, and goals as the social innovation *develops*. In this case, the social innovation is the WAM collective impact initiative and collaboration. The emergent/creative/adaptive interventions generated by collective impact can be significant enough to constitute *developments* and not just improvements, thus the appropriateness of *developmental* evaluation.

DE involves ongoing data gathering, interpretation, and use. Judgments of merit, worth, significance, meaningfulness, innovativeness, and effectiveness (or such other criteria as are negotiated) inform ongoing adaptive innovation. Such evaluative judgments do not just come at the end of some fixed period (e.g., a 3-year grant); rather, they are ongoing and timely. Neither empirical conclusions and interpretations nor evaluative judgments are reached and rendered by the evaluator independently. DE is a collaborative, interactive process. Because it is utilization-focused, and because it unfolds in complex dynamic systems where the particular meaning and significance of information may be difficult to predetermine, making sense together of emergent findings involves developmental evaluators interpreting patterns in the data *collaboratively* with those engaged in the initiative, their funders, advocates, change agents, and systems change supporters. Through this empirically focused interaction, DE becomes an integral part of the innovative change process. The initial launching work-

shop, then, would include a presentation on DE as an option for the WAM evaluation.

The Evaluative Thinking Principle

We treat every evaluation facilitation assignment as an opportunity to train those involved and deepen their capacity to engage in evaluative thinking. We believe that everything an evaluation facilitator does should model evaluative thinking. In embedding and modeling evaluative thinking, the evaluation facilitator walks the walk of thinking evaluatively. Participants learn from that modeling, or at least we hope that is the case.

Building the evaluation capacity of an organization to support staff in thinking evaluatively means integrating evaluation into the organization's culture. As the backbone organization for the collective impact initiative, it will be especially important for WAM to demonstrate evaluative thinking both internally and externally. Indeed, having examined evaluations of collective impact initiatives, and building on the work of Hallie Preskill of FSR, who has highlighted the importance of learning together as essential to collective impact success, we posit that learning to think together evaluatively is a critical element of collective impact collaboration. This goes well beyond just using findings. It takes us into the arena of organizational and program culture, looking at how decision-makers and staff incorporate evaluative thinking into everything they do as part of ongoing attention to a shared vision, continuous improvement, and cumulative collective impact engagement together.

Embedding evaluative thinking and capacity building into the evaluation brings us to the idea of *process use*. Process use highlights what people learn by being involved in the evaluation collaboration. Process use is distinct from use of the substantive findings in an evaluation report. It is equivalent to the difference between learning how to learn versus learning substantive knowledge about something. Learning how to think evaluatively is learning how to learn and think critically, and those who become involved in an evaluation learn by doing. Thinking about and interpreting collective impact data will provide opportunities for those involved to learn to think differently about the nature and functions of evaluation, especially utilization-focused developmental evaluation.

As the diverse partners in a collective impact process get to know each other, articulate the interests and perspectives they represent, and share their priorities and concerns, they begin to cohere as a group with common interests and concerns. This does not mean that everyone agrees on everything, but, hopefully, through skillful facilitation, they develop some significant degree of mutual respect and trust. As the evaluation facilitator helps the group agree on core evaluation questions, evaluation's overarching purpose, and the data to be collected, participants cohere around a shared commitment to the evaluation's credibility and utility. Our job as evaluation

facilitators is to get them to that shared commitment and to guide them through the design decisions that are the result of thinking evaluatively.

Evaluative thinking is embedded in all aspects of an evaluation: (a) focusing the evaluation and generating priority evaluation questions; (b) determining the evaluation design and selecting appropriate methods; (c) reviewing data collection instruments and protocols in advance of fieldwork; and (d) interpreting results and rendering evaluation judgments. We find that participation in these evaluation processes enhances evaluation thinking and deepens evaluation use. *Participants come to see the value of evaluative thinking by practicing it.*

Options at the Leading Edge of Evaluation

This final principle calls for invigorating evaluation facilitation with leading-edge inputs and possibilities. The way that we engage in evaluation facilitation offers opportunities to introduce those involved to innovative possibilities, emergent trends, creative approaches, new knowledge, and leading-edge ideas. Doing so can energize, stimulate, and open up new pathways for the group to consider. Of course, that means we must be up-to-date and aware of what is happening and emerging at the leading edge if we are to offer those possibilities during facilitation.

Collective impact is a leading-edge, innovative, systems change intervention approach. It deserves to be matched with a leading-edge, innovative, evaluation approach. Several possibilities may be worth considering: systems change evaluation, culturally responsive evaluation, and multisectoral evaluation. We mention these here to indicate that the field of evaluation is alive with new possibilities. The leading-edge evaluation approach that we think is most aligned with the leading-edge nature of collective impact is *principles-focused evaluation*. An especially effective way of building a collaboration is to identify, develop, and generate commitment to a shared set of principles among collaborating agencies. Agencies have their own missions, visions, plans, program priorities, and organizational cultures. A collective impact collaboration does not mean any organization subsumes its mission or priorities, but rather that the integrated strength and synergy of collaborating can be well served through shared principles.

The distinguishing characteristic of principles-focused evaluation is the focus on principles as the object of evaluation, what we call in evaluation jargon the *evaluand*. Three core questions bring the focus to principles-focused evaluation: To what extent have meaningful and evaluable principles been articulated? If principles have been articulated, to what extent and in what ways are principles being adhered to in practice? If adhered to, to what extent and in what ways are principles leading to desired results? Next, we offer three examples of principles-focused evaluation in collective impact situations.

First, in April 2002, fifteen communities and three national sponsors met for a 3-day forum in Guelph, Ontario, to create Vibrant Communities. They jointly developed an experiment designed to test a “new” way to tackle poverty that acknowledged its complex nature and the challenges of achieving scale in poverty reduction efforts. The new way was not a model but rather a set of five core principles that local communities agreed to follow in mounting locally unique campaigns.

Second, in 2014, the Thrive Foundation, acting on its new mission to “guide disadvantaged youth to reach their full potential by strengthening the presence and impact of caring adults in their lives,” searched across the nation for organizations providing services to disadvantaged youth with a caring adult at the center of their program delivery model. The search turned up eight exemplary organizations. Thrive then embarked on an evaluation of these organizations to see what they were doing with youth that made them effective. The inquiry identified and validated nine common principles that guided the work and explained the effectiveness of these diverse national organizations (Samuelson, 2016).

Our final example may be most relevant. Six agencies serving homeless youth in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota, had long worked independently as autonomous organizations. They had developed their own distinct mission statements, strategic frameworks, value statements, program models, and staff operating manuals. When they came together to exchange ideas, learn from each other, and work together for greater collective impact, they found, unexpectedly, that they shared fundamental principles about how to work with homeless youth. These principles, taken together, constituted a coherent approach to overcoming youth homelessness. We think their approach is relevant to WAM. Here, for example, is the introduction to their presentation on evidence-based principles to help overcome homelessness:

All homeless young people have experienced serious adversity and trauma. The experience of homelessness is traumatic enough, but most also have faced poverty, abuse, neglect or rejection. They have been forced to grow up way too early. Most have serious physical or mental health issues. Some are barely teenagers; others may be in their late teens or early twenties.

Some homeless youth have family connections, some do not; all crave connection and value family. They come from the big city, small towns and rural areas. Most are youth of color and have been failed by systems with institutionalized racism and programs that best serve the white majority. Homeless youth are straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or questioning. Some use alcohol or drugs heavily. Some have been in and out of homelessness. Others are new to the streets.

The main point here is that, while all homeless youth have faced trauma, each homeless young person is unique. Each homeless youth has particular needs, expe-

riences, abilities and aspirations. Each is on a personal journey through homelessness and, hopefully, to a bright future.

Because of their uniqueness, how we approach and support each homeless young person also must be unique. No recipe exists for how to engage with and support homeless youth. As homeless youth workers and advocates, we cannot apply rigid rules or standard procedures. To do so would result in failure, at best, and reinforce trauma in the young person, at worst. Rules don't work. We can't dictate to any young person what is best. The young people know what is best for their future and need the opportunity to engage in self-determination.

This is where principles come in. Organizations and individuals that successfully support homeless youth take a principles-based approach to their work, rather than a rules-based approach. Principles provide guidance and direction to those working with homeless youth. They provide a framework for how we approach and view the youth, engage and interact with them, build relationship with them and support them. The challenge for youth workers is to meet and connect with each young person where they are and build a supportive relationship from there. Principles provide the anchor for this relationship-building process. (Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation, 2014, p. 2, emphasis in original)

Principles-driven initiatives typically operate in dynamic environments striving to meet and serve the diverse needs of diverse participants. A common mantra of such programs is that "one size does not fit all." Services are matched to participants' situations. Processes vary by participant. Outcomes vary for different people. Diversity demands responsiveness. Responsiveness generates variability based on determining what is appropriate, possible, and relevant. What is the anchor in the midst of such dynamic adaptation? Principles. What is the appropriate matching evaluation approach? Principles-focused evaluation. Thus, we would offer the WAM group principles-focused evaluation for consideration as a leading-edge approach that is well-matched to collective impact collaboration.

Conclusion

We propose utilization-focused evaluation as a comprehensive decision-making framework for determining what kind of evaluation is appropriate for WAM's particular situation and specific primary intended users to serve individual and collective intended uses. Developmental evaluation is one particular purpose of evaluation: supporting development of social innovations introduced by social innovators into complex dynamic situations. Collective impact is such an innovation. Principles-focused evaluation calls attention to and focuses on one particular object of evaluation: shared principles. Principles-focused evaluation is especially appropriate when devel-

oping collaboration among partners with separate organizations, programs, missions, and services. Coherence comes through shared principles. These evaluation approaches, like the integrated activities of collective impact partners, are synergistic and mutually reinforcing.

Bottom Line. We offer a principles-driven evaluation facilitation process for considering and choosing among options to find the one that is most appropriate for WAM's collective impact initiative. One such possibility, suggested in this proposal, is a utilization-focused developmental evaluation that is principles-focused. Many other options are possible. We propose providing the WAM collective impact partners and funders with a menu of evaluation options and facilitating selection of the approach and methods most aligned with your initiative and information needs, and with any mandates of the national collective impact group in which you are participating. Whatever evaluation design and data collection approaches are taken, if you choose to work with us, your evaluation will be utilization-focused, based on the personal factor, the result of choosing among options, adapted to changing conditions as the program and evaluation unfold, infused with evaluative thinking, and open to incorporating leading-edge ideas and methods.

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