



# PROGRAM EVALUATION and COMMUNITY SCHOOLS of the ARTS

## Purposes, Concepts, and Tools

*By David Pankratz, Emc.Arts Director of Evaluation and Research*

### **Definition:**

**Evaluation** is the systematic acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of information to provide useful feedback to decision-makers, e.g., administrative staff, artist/teachers, board members, donors, and constituencies.

### **What can be evaluated?**

There are many activities of community schools of the arts that can benefit from formal evaluation activities:

- ◆ *A project*, such as a series of professional development workshops for music faculty
- ◆ *A program*, e.g., an ongoing program to deliver music instruction to young people
- ◆ *A partnership* involving collaboration between a community music school and public schools
- ◆ *A policy*, e.g., a local arts agency's support of arts education partnerships, and
- ◆ *An initiative*, e.g., by a foundation, designed to build the skills of community schools to reach and serve new constituencies.

### **Is your organization ready for program evaluation?**

- ◆ Is the program targeted for evaluation valued by the organization's board, staff, artists, and constituencies?
- ◆ Will results of the evaluation make a difference to the organization and to the future of the program?
- ◆ Is the organization ready to commit resources, such as time and funds, to ensure the evaluation yields a full set of results?
- ◆ Is the organization willing and ready to act on findings and recommendations from the evaluation, and is there enough stability of leadership to ensure that happens?



### Purposes that evaluation can serve

Evaluation can serve many purposes for community schools of the arts. Many see evaluation as something an organization does to *meet external requirements*, e.g., of funders. Public agencies and foundations increasingly want documentation of the impacts of their investments on organizations and the constituencies they serve. This is an important function that formal evaluation can serve. In addition, many arts organizations are finding that evaluation can serve important internal purposes. Evaluation can:

- ◆ *Foster understanding* about whether and how a program is meeting its goals or not, and whether the community school is committed to achieving those goals through adequate human and financial resources
- ◆ *Identify strategies* to make changes, where possible, in program goals, human and financial resources, activities, and program administration, that can lead to improvements in a program, and
- ◆ *Promote organizational planning* concerning whether and how the evaluated program should be continued, discontinued, expanded, or revised.

### Program logic models

A *Program Logic Model* is a framework devised by evaluators and the organization being evaluated. It shapes questions that are posed in designing an evaluation, as well as the methods for collecting information. It focuses on the details of **how** a program actually works in actual practice, and is a tool that can be used throughout an evaluation.

A program logic model is a device that lays out in logical sequence how the various parts of a program are designed to fit together in order to produce intended outcomes. These inter-relationships are usually represented graphically to present the logic of a program's design. Elements that are included in the creation of a program logic model include:

- ◆ **Goals** (changes and benefits anticipated as a result of a program)
- ◆ **Resources** or "inputs" dedicated to a program--leadership, expertise, personnel, and financial resources)
- ◆ **Activities** (the content, strategies, and delivery systems of a program)
- ◆ **Outcomes** (changes and benefits to program participants that a program is expected to achieve)
- ◆ **Performance Measures** (measurable indicators of success in meeting outcomes).

These elements are then linked together logically to explore how **Program Goals** are supported by the **Program Resources** that are in turn applied to the **Program Activities** which lead to defined **Program Outcomes** the achievement of which are indicated by specific **Performance Indicators**.



Finally, a program logic model can be a valuable tool at the beginning, middle, and final stages of a program evaluation.

- ◆ At the beginning stages, it can uncover gaps or disconnects in the elements of a program. For example, development of a logic model may bring to light a question about whether the implementation of program activities is undermined by a lack of personnel resources. This kind of working hypothesis can shape the kinds of questions that are examined subsequently in the evaluation.
- ◆ During an evaluation's middle stages, the logic model can offer a lens during observations of a program as it is being implemented – the program-in-action.
- ◆ At an evaluation's final stages, a logic model can be used to measure the effectiveness of a program's design, while also explaining why outcomes are achieved or not. A logic model can also identify gaps and needs in the program, leading to a new alignment of goals, resources, and activities that can help to improve and sustain the program.

### **Data collection methods in evaluation**

There are multiple methods to collect both quantitative and qualitative data during the course of an evaluation. Primary among them are:

- ◆ Document Review
- ◆ Survey Questionnaires
- ◆ Individual and Group Interviews
- ◆ Direct Observation

### **Synthesizing an evaluation's overall findings**

The final stage of an evaluation draws together findings from the data collection methodologies. Brought together with the program logic model framework, these data form sets of findings, conclusions and, in some cases, recommendations for program enhancement. An analysis of program management may also be included. The report ends with conclusions and recommendations on the program being evaluated.

Final reports, ideally, should speak to multiple audiences, combining summaries of key findings, action-oriented recommendations for decision-makers, easy-to-interpret tables and graphs, and vivid examples and case studies.

Issuing a report is not the final step, however. Subsequent meetings and dialogue between evaluators and clients can help foster ownership of the evaluation's conclusions by the constituents involved, and can elicit their knowledge of opportunities and constraints to bear on the report's recommendations. This sort of dialogue and weighing of possible implications of an evaluation can be a crucial element in the successful conclusion and utilization of evaluation projects.

*For more information about Emc.Arts' evaluation practice, please visit our web-site at [www.EmcArts.com](http://www.EmcArts.com) or contact Melissa Dibble, Emc.Arts Director of Client Partnerships at 212.362.8541 x24.*