



Our evaluations were informal and unfocused. BEC helped us design a comprehensive evaluation system for one program that was implemented during BEC. This now allows us to apply the learned methods to our other programs. BEC Participant, Executive Leader, Class of 2015

I think that overall, we're being more deliberate about incorporating evaluation and evaluative thinking into our various initiatives, which I expect to improve the quality of what we do. BEC Participant, Executive Leader, Class of 2015

BUILDING EVALUATION CAPACITY

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT Class of 2015

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, BEC 2014 - 2015

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 2015 is the fourth 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 2014 through June 2015, BEC was delivered to representatives of 11 selected nonprofit organizations.

The BEC Class of 2015

Billings Forge Community Works
Capital Workforce Partners
Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Hartford
Children's Law Center of Connecticut
ConnectiKids Inc.
CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Girl Scouts of Connecticut
HartBeat Ensemble
Hartford Community Loan Fund
Hartford Food System, Inc.
YMCA of Metropolitan Hartford, Inc.

Class of 2015 BEC participants, like those from the Classes of 2008, 2010, and 2013 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 both modify and continue BEC for a fourth 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 2015 team sizes varied from two to four members, every participant organization included at least one senior official capable of decision-making (seven of the 11 organizations directly involved their Executive Directors in the training). The organizations also involved individuals from various positions (e.g., Special Projects Manager, Director of Grant Management) according to their own needs for training.

As with the Classes of 2008, 2010 and 2013, the phase I training period for the Class of 2015 participants included didactic training sessions, with opportunities to practice and apply new skills. The BEC Class of 2015 like those from the Class of 2013 participated in the condensed six-session schedule, which had been restructured after the Class of 2010, to include more emphasis on evaluation planning and data analysis. Phase I culminated with the development by each participating organization of a rigorous evaluation design for a selected program of its own. 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 2015. All 11 organizations were regularly represented throughout both phases (though not consistently by all executive leaders). 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. As had their predecessors in prior classes, those from 2015 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. Most importantly every organization of the Class of 2015 conducted initial assessments of evaluative thinking, formulated plans to enhance it and extend what they learned about evaluation, and all completed evaluations of their own designs. Their evaluations included collection and analysis of data, summarization and presentation of findings and development of proposed action steps. Additionally, a total of 6 of the Class of 2015 opted to participate in the 2015-16 alumni group. Each will involve new participants from their organizations, and all will continue doing evaluation-related project work.

The evaluation work of the Class of 2015 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 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 2015 ended.

As they concluded their work, Class of 2015 participants assessed their own abilities to extend (“Ripple”) the work beyond the class trainees, and they considered integration of evaluative thinking at their organizations. Most participants (96%) indicated BEC had prepared them to extend their learning. Each organization indicated they had extended the training at least *a little* 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 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 2015 reinforced that their BEC experiences had been important on multiple levels and accomplished what the program was designed to do. Specifically, participants indicated BEC was important because it helped them: understand participatory evaluation; improve the quality of data they attain; to look at their programs from different perspectives; to increase capacity to analyze data about the outcomes they value; to build evaluation into the program planning process; and to revise programs based on real data. Additionally three-fourths of the organizations indicated they are *very likely* to continue or expand their evaluation work. Though it was not a specific intended outcome of BEC, as for past classes, the one area that participants identified as insufficient was attention to relationship-building and networking across partnership agencies.

Next Steps and Issues for Further Consideration

A new alumni group will be initiated for the six Class of 2015 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 develop 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 new/developing technologies such as mapping, where possible, and to add and support activities such as the Evaluation Roundtable¹ to increase organizational connections and networking while remaining focused on ensuring that BEC increases evaluation capacity and enhances evaluative thinking for participating organizations.

¹ The NSP Evaluation Roundtable was a new opportunity for area nonprofit organizations and evaluation professionals to meet, share and learn about evaluation practice.