The Nonprofit Institute at Portland State University

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The Nonprofit Nerd (June 2017)

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Comprehensive toolkit: Head Start but applicable to many organizational settings, outlines the principles and practices Members and Philanthropists Need to Know to Keep Improving

Olsen

it, and sharing the findings, to improve the performance of an organization.” Writing for

models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. But what does it mean to be a “learning

DV:

meaning—are real and important, and our community needs them. The challenge is not letting them be

JF:

applications with a zero dollar figure there, but gradually, applicants are starting to see that as a clue

for me to loop back the next time and dive into those expectations and assumptions ahead of time. A

contract personnel, and materials. Just mandating evaluation might get you meaningful info—but it

willing and able to meet organizations where they are, and fund things like evaluation staff time,

JF:

encourage and support their grantees in doing effective evaluation?

And Jonathan, from your perspective, what are some of the unique challenges of

the arts do provide those benefits. But the outcomes that are often left out—beauty and joy and

DV:

the real world, one thing funders could work on is articulating their outcomes more clearly and

JF:

If you've not had the pleasure of logic-modeling before.

My agency is primarily a grant-making one. We don’t do a ton of direct programming. So that

This is the dream—both. Evaluation is time-consuming, so you don’t want to be doing it just as an

 DV: I can’t pretend that evaluation doesn’t take a significant amount of time. But what I

 penchant for evaluation. Why have you done this? And what are you making of the results?

JF: That’s the thing. I’m now working with a small group of evaluating entities, where we’re

DV: For me, there’s another aspect to understanding what our outcomes are, which

JF: Sometimes, other funders, or other people in the organization, want to see the

DV: I have a sense that there’s a norm developing in the world of evaluation, where

JF: Some funders are way ahead of that. And there are funders who aren’t even

DV: My organization has a small evaluation capacity, which means we have to

JF: I don’t know how many funders have an evaluation capacity. I don’t know how

DV: So, if you’re a funder, are you—? I think we can go out on a limb and

JF: If you have an evaluation capacity, I think you are already trying to

DV: A lot of organizations find it useful to have a dedicated time for evaluation,

JF: What advice would you give to folks who want to learn more about evaluating?

DV: I love the idea of evaluation being a systematic approach to learning from your

JF: What is your sense, in general, about the best and worst of how programs

DV: So, if you think about the philosophy of evaluation, it’s all about learning from

JF: I have a funny feeling that the arts do provide a lot of intangibles, like

DV: To be a learning organization, I think you have to be able to learn.

JF: And as a result of that, the ways that people think about how they evaluate, and

DV: The bottom line is this: no matter your organization’s size, history or mission, taking time to reflect on

Peter Senge’s advice? “Start where you are with

DV: I use

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