



RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY COLLABORATION EVALUATION WORKSHOP

November 10-11, 2003
Bozeman, Montana



Measuring Progress Evaluation Workshop A New Way of Approaching Evaluation

In November 2003, Resources for Community Collaboration program of the Sonoran Institute (RCC) brought together 16 RCC grantees in Bozeman, Montana for an evaluation workshop.

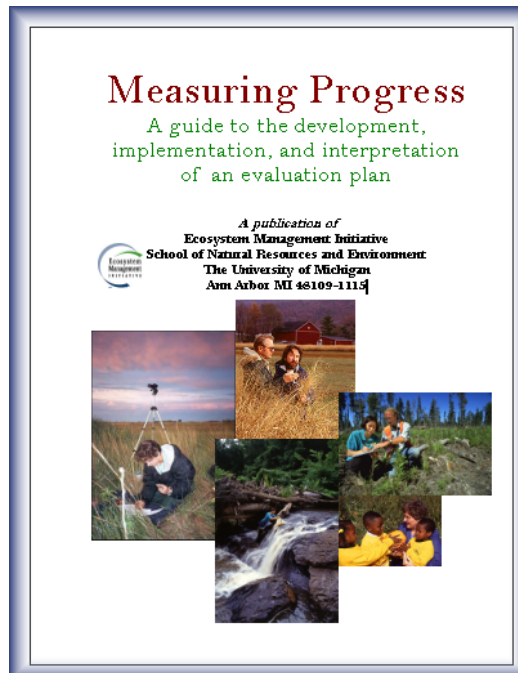
The workshop consisted of a variety of interactive lectures and activities and was led by researchers from the Ecosystem Management Initiative (EMI), a group directed by Dr. Steven Yaffee in the School of Natural Resources & Environment at the University of Michigan.

Objectives of the workshop:

- To foster learning among grantees about the challenges facing their collaborative processes
- To explore the benefits and challenges of measuring success of collaborations
- To present and practice use of a multi-metric evaluation process
- To get feedback on the pilot process and tools
- To discuss next steps and needed capacity-building



16 RCC grantees attended the evaluation workshop. Participants developed preliminary approaches for evaluating their projects and learned from each other.



The cover of the *Measuring Progress* evaluation guide. It features four stages, each consisting of a series of manageable steps. Worksheets are provided to help develop the products of each stage.

“Thank you very much for the workshop. So often ‘training’ turns out to be largely irrelevant. Not so this week! What I learned is definitely going to be of great help to all the projects that I work on.

Thanks for putting such a great ‘cookbook’ together. Also, it was truly a pleasure to put faces to your names. Thanks very much!”

~ RCC Grantee

Evaluation increases the likelihood of projects achieving ecological and social improvements in two fundamental ways:

- by producing new knowledge;
- by improving the process of the project.

The framework advocated in the workshop was not an “end-of-the-pipe” process. Instead we encourage participants to think about a range of ways to weave evaluation into their project’s existing activities in order to manage adaptively and achieve greater impact.

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What's the Value of Evaluation?

The first portion of the evaluation workshop focused on the benefits of evaluation. Evaluation activities can increase the likelihood that projects will have an impact through ecological, social, economic or process improvements.

Evaluation can help project leaders and participants make their project more effective.

Evaluation:

- Clarifies objectives
- Helps understand the system addressed by the project so that appropriate strategies can be identified and implemented
- Helps a project cope with uncertainty and change
- Ensures that project activities are carried out as efficiently as possible

- Ensures that the project is as effective as possible in moving toward objectives
- Improves group dynamics and processes
- Provides a platform for collaboration
- Creates learning organizations

Evaluation can build support by documenting success.

Evaluation improves a group's ability to:

- Celebrate successes
- Communicate accomplishments to the public – the media, supporters and opponents
- Frame effective funding proposals
- Demonstrate progress to funders, leading to additional funding

A survey of over 100 collaborative

ecosystem management initiatives suggests that projects which engaged in evaluation activities report significantly greater outcomes. Setting clear goals, monitoring change, and managing adaptively improves how groups manage their projects. This in turn makes it more likely that groups will meet their objectives.



Workshop participants enjoyed learning about new ways to reap the benefits of a evaluation by choosing indicators based on the needs of their project's situation.

“This can be done at different scales and throughout the process. It's just a *habit of thinking*, a way of organizing; it's part of your strategic and daily planning.”

~ RCC Grantee

Overcoming the Challenges of Evaluation

Workshop participants discussed the challenges projects can face when undertaking evaluation. The evaluation process is based on the idea that by structuring the process according to your needs, you can overcome many perceived barriers.

You can overcome the challenges of evaluation if you:

- Integrate evaluation into the process of managing the collaboration

“We are going to build this evaluation into the front-end of our next strategic planning cycle. It's just part of the process rather than having more things to do.”

~ RCC Grantee

- Consider the motivation and capacity of project members
- Use multiple measures of success including ecological, social, and process factors
- Be strategic in your choice of indicators
- Overcome data problems by taking advantage of existing data and partnerships with others

Who Attended the Workshop?

Workshop participants represented projects focused on issues including ranching, water quality, forests, and land planning. Many of the groups had just one paid staff member but a wide range of involved stakeholders. Important goals of these projects are to increase or maintain biodiversity, threatened/endangered species, community character and resilience, environmental awareness, economic health, and collaboration among stakeholders.

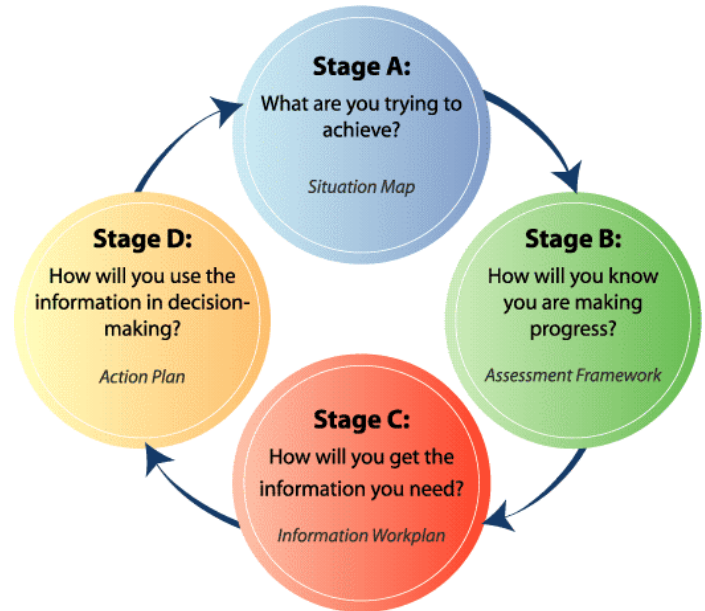
The projects measure progress in many ways, from the number of people attending meetings to the chemistry of river water. Many reported that it is difficult to document progress for funders or stakeholders and that process changes, such as better trust or collaboration, are the most difficult to measure.

The Evaluation Process in a Nutshell

The EMI-developed evaluation process, *Measuring Progress*, pulls together a diverse set of ideas drawn from current literature and the experiences of on-the-ground project managers into a compact and useable evaluation process.

This process includes a multi-metric approach to evaluation. Guidance is provided not only for measuring *ecological* objectives, but also *socioeconomic* objectives, as well as issues related to *process* – how projects make decisions, communicate and carry out activities.

Measuring Progress breaks evaluation into four manageable stages. As the figure on the right illustrates, the process of evaluation is iterative, not linear. Information gained from the process can be used to begin the process again with more clarity and effectiveness. The tools of each stage can be used and re-used throughout the life of your project.



The *Measuring Progress* evaluation cycle showing the series of stages and products.

“I feel the document and the principles expressed through the presenters are grounded in sound advice and will prove to be quite useful to organizations, as well as individuals.

I was able to meet and talk with many of the participants and was pleased to note their dedication to a fair and informed process for working at the community level.”

~ RCC Grantee



Thinking about the process of evaluation and discussing thoughts with colleagues are good ways to improve the effectiveness of a project.

“I know who I’m going to share the Guide with, and I will be able to facilitate others through this process. This is a superb resource. I think it will be very tangibly useful.”

~RCC Grantee

In **Stage A**, you ask yourself the following questions:

- What are your *goals* and *objectives*?
- What are the *threats* and *assets* affecting your project?
- What are your *strategies* and *activities*?

In **Stage B**, you think about the ecological, social, and process aspects for each of the aspects of Stage A. To do so, you consider:

- What *evaluation questions* will you ask?
- What *indicators* and *comparisons* will you use to assess progress?

In **Stage C**, you prepare for the logistics of doing your evaluation plan. This includes thinking about:

- Where will *data* come from?
- How will you *process* and *analyze* data?
- *Who will be responsible* for these activities?

In **Stage D**, you consider ways to tie the evaluation back to decision-making. Ask yourself:

- What will your *trigger points* be?
- What possible *actions* might you take based on various trigger points?

Next Steps

At the end of the workshop, we discussed ways that RCC projects could imagine applying the ideas and tools of the workshop back home.

Most participants liked the overall approach to evaluation. They also liked its relevance to a range of objectives and activities, not just biodiversity conservation.

Many saw the potential for applying particular elements of the process. "I could see working with my Board on the situation mapping piece, incorporating this into our strategic planning process," said one participant. Still others indicated that they were ready to dig into indicator development or even start working through the four steps of the process (if they could find the time!).

All participants felt they needed additional assistance to help them realize the full benefits of the process. This assistance could take a variety of forms:

- On-site training of the Board or project staff in the evaluation process, particularly if it can be done in a focused, efficient way.
- On-site facilitation of the evaluation process that is adapted to the project's specific needs.
- Web-based access to sample evaluation products and tools.
- Ongoing coaching provided through a "hotline." "If I hit a roadblock, I need to be able to be in touch with someone at EMI or RCC—an evaluation staff person," commented one participant.

Workshop participants also noted the continuing need to collect "stories from the field" to highlight successes and diagnose problems. "This helps make us credible. Nothing is going to improve ecologically or socially if you don't have people buying into the process."

EMI and RCC are committed to following up on these suggestions by providing on- and off-site assistance and web-based tools. We will also continue to collect lessons from real-world experience. Our shared goal is to improve the effectiveness of community-based collaboratives such as the RCC-funded projects by expanding their capacity through funding, technical assistance, networking and support.

How To Bring Evaluation Training To Your Project?

If this evaluation process appears to fit well with your project, consider requesting assistance from the Ecosystem Management Initiative, Resources for Community Collaboration, and the Sonoran Institute. We are committed to on-site work with a number of projects to implement this approach to evaluation. In many cases, evaluation training can be provided free of charge to qualifying projects. We believe that evaluation is

vital to the success of collaborative projects, and we'd like to help yours succeed!

Many levels of assistance are available: single or multi-day trainings, process facilitation, materials with phone follow-up, and in the future, web-based material. Contact us to find out more about how you can make your project more effective and efficient by incorporating evaluation into your efforts.

For more information, contact EMI or:

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The training team provided a dynamic mix of lectures, activities, and material.