GETTING TO IMPACT:
USING THE EVALUATION STANDARD
TO MEASURE RESULTS

I serve on a local nonprofit foundation board that awards grants to community organizations that sponsor programs to discourage teen pregnancy. Over the years, the foundation has developed research-based rubrics for scoring grant applications. But recently, board members noted that agencies seeking funding don't describe the impact of their program on the youth they serve.

During a visit to one of the foundation's grant recipients, I was reminded of NSDC's standard on evaluation: Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact.

The agency I visited has had a program for nine years that focuses on helping high-risk students with personal development, health plans, healthy dating habits, and pregnancy prevention. Staff are genuinely engaged and concerned about young people, but the organization has no real assessment of how much difference it is making. The agency had recently implemented a pre- and post-test, but the results provided only anecdotal evidence of what was occurring as a result of the staff's efforts.

The organization's funding depends on whether it can demonstrate the need and value of its program because the foundation is carefully scrutinizing and rating applicants to determine where to award grant money. The foundation now asks applicants, "What outcomes do you hope to achieve with this program? How are these outcomes measured?" The foundation wants specific and measurable outcomes, data measuring stated outcomes, and evidence that the agencies have analyzed and improved their efforts based on data. The foundation now looks for strong evidence (e.g. specific numbers) that the program is successful and has achieved its proposed outcomes. In the current environment, schools are undergoing similar scrutiny with calls for increased accountability. As professional developers, we can lead the march toward effective program evaluation, beginning with our own staff development programs.

> **NSDC STANDARD:**
> **Evaluation**
> Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact.

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Although professional developers are aware of NSDC's Standards for Staff Development (NSDC, 2001), many of us running professional development programs do not evaluate whether we are getting results — the impact of what teachers are learning on student learning.

Professional development leaders are capable of doing far more evaluation than we do. All programs can be evaluated, although perhaps not all at the same level of sophistication. Evaluation is a matter of intentionality. Just a few short years ago, many educators were frightened by the idea of examining student data. Central office evaluation staff usually explained student data to school staffs. Now, more educators are proficient in examining student data after learning through professional development what data means and how to analyze it. Our next emphasis should be on learning to create effective evaluations using the various data we collect.

Many who run school improvement programs, educational workshops, and professional development activities, just as in the case of community initiatives, use evaluation terminology but still rely largely on anecdotal evidence. Paper and pencil pre- and post-tests are an improvement from the absence of any evaluation, but these tests often fail to determine to what extent the skills learned were transferred to new practices that lead to improved achievement — the effect of the program on the ultimate goal of student learning.

In 2000, after a series of projects led by Joellen Killion, NSDC's director of special projects, NSDC concluded that leaders of most staff development programs fail to plan for and to evaluate the impact of programs on student learning. Killion immersed herself in evaluation theory and research, going beyond educational evaluation to examine cutting-edge evaluation work in the medical and community organization fields.

Killion (2002, p. 132) said almost anyone could begin to evaluate program effectiveness by developing evaluation think, which she defined as a frame of reference, a mindset, a set of analytical skills. Evaluation think is based on the assertion that rigorous, ongoing evaluation of new and well-established staff development programs is an opportunity for improvement. Adopting evaluation think as a

In each issue of *JSD*, Saundra Rowell writes about NSDC's Standards for Staff Development. Columns about NSDC's standards can be found at www.nsdc.org.

frame of reference causes staff development leaders to become their own best critics. It requires them to be objective and use data gleaned from evaluations — rather than intuition, opinions, impressions, or assumptions — as the basis for decisions about future staff development.

We can make program evaluation a reality and turn the standards into action with three steps.

Develop evaluation think. To develop the habit of evaluating, always begin with the end in mind. Ask, "What outcomes do we want from this program? How will we know when we have achieved our outcomes? What evidence do we need in order to demonstrate that we have met our goals?" Next, determine while designing the program what kinds of data to collect to monitor progress.

Decide critical benchmarks. Then make evaluation everyone's work by creating and embedding evaluation frameworks in all projects. (See box at right for additional information.)

Adopt a theory of change. Killion refers to Joseph Wholey's theory of change (1987, p. 78) that identifies "program resources, program activities, and intended program outcomes, and specifies a chain of causal assumptions linking program resources, activities, intermediate outcomes, and ultimate goals."

Based on your own understanding of change theory,

- Identify the program's components (what the program does);
- Specify the relationship among the components to explain how the change occurs (sequence of actions); and
- Delineate the underlying assumptions upon which the program is based (Killion, p. 58).

Use measurement processes and tools. Make a conscious choice at the program's outset to evaluate it, and use both formative (ongoing) and summative (ending) evaluation processes. Specify within the plan what processes and tools you will use in your evaluation. For example, use Thomas Guskey's (2000) levels of evaluation and detail how you will gather information. Outline the data you will collect and at what points in the program. When data collection is complete, follow through with an analysis of the information you've gathered, and share the results. The most important step is the one that keeps in motion the cycle of change: Use the information to revise your processes and improve your efforts.

As district leaders continue to make difficult choices on the best ways to use limited resources to improve student achievement, staff developers are responsible for demonstrating results. Staff developers know the most important factor in student learning is the classroom teacher, and the most important factor in assisting teachers to maximize their own achievement is their ongoing pro-

fessional learning. Evaluating professional development in a way that demonstrates that link is vital to teachers' continued success. While many have improved their efforts to assess programs, there is still much work to do.

Evaluate your staff development program

PLANNING PHASE

1. Assess evaluability.
   Determine whether the staff development program is ready to be evaluated.
2. Formulate evaluation questions.
   Design formative and summative evaluation questions.
3. Construct evaluation framework.
   Determine the evidence needed to answer the evaluation questions, the data sources, the data collection methodology, logistics of data collection, and the data analysis methods.

CONDUCTING PHASE

4. Collect data.
   Manage data collection process and collected data.
5. Organize and analyze data.
   Organize, analyze, and display data.
6. Interpret data.
   Interpret data to determine merit, worth, and/or impact and to make recommendations for improvement.

REPORTING PHASE

7. Disseminate findings.
   Identify audiences to receive findings, the most appropriate format for communicating findings to each, and disseminate findings.
8. Evaluate the evaluation.
   Reflect on the evaluation process, the knowledge and skills of the evaluation team, the resources and methodologies used, and the findings to improve future evaluations.

SOURCE: Killion, J. (2002). *Assessing Impact: Evaluating Staff Development,* Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

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