

Building A Data-Driven Nonprofit Sector in Philadelphia

Joe Pyle, Alyson Ferguson 16 November 2016

Summary

The people and organizations of Philadelphia are collectively poised to achieve great things, but a lack of data-driven decision-making among nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies is impeding growth. Recognizing that many organizations are already collecting huge volumes of data, but are unable due to limited infrastructure, resources, or know-how to maximize the impact of that information, the Scattergood Foundation has undertaken its Building Evaluation Capacity Initiative, to help organizations continually improve performance and outcomes, and changing the way nonprofits are thinking and delivering services for the better.

As several news outlets have questioned over the years, will Philadelphia be the next great American city? It got the Thomas Scattergood Behavioral Health Foundation thinking: How will Philadelphia get there? And how will we know when Philadelphia has achieved this? The only thing the Scattergood Foundation did know for sure was that

part of being the next great American city included all of us investing in services and supports that are efficient and effective for all Philadelphians.

While exploring this concept further, the Scattergood Foundation quickly recognized there was a lack of data-driven decision-making among nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies. The lack of data-driven decision-making appeared to be caused by the absence of internal capacity to collect and understand evaluation or continuous quality improvement data. The Scattergood Foundation further recognized that the lack of capacity resulted in organizations having difficulty with: 1) making informed program changes; 2) retaining funding in an era of increased accountability; and 3) competing for new funds. In addition, many nonprofits did not have the staff with essential data-related skills to adequately implement evidence-supported practices that required the ongoing monitoring of program processes, outcomes, and impacts. Yet, almost all agencies were collecting data, and, in many situations, lots and lots of data.

The Scattergood Foundation also came to realize that there are very few entities that will fund this challenging situation, as most funders tend to fund direct services or programs that are already evidence-based. Thus, the Scattergood Foundation has invested \$668,710 into an initiative known as the Building Evaluation Capacity Initiative.¹ Over the past five years, 44 organizations have been selected to participate out of the 206 organizations

that have applied to the initiative. From the inception of this initiative, demand has far outpaced the supply. The initial success and tremendous need of Philadelphia nonprofits led The Barra Foundation,² The Philadelphia Foundation,³ and the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey⁴ to join the Scattergood Foundation to fund an additional 13 organizations to participate in the Initiative over the last two years.

The Building Evaluation Capacity Initiative developed by the Consultation Center at Yale University School of Medicine is a unique model of training and consultation that focuses on empowering the organizations to perform multi-method and multi-level evaluations looking at issues focused on social justice, prevention, diversity, citizen participation, community strengths and more. The model allows for organizations to develop their theory of change from concept to practical, thoughtful action in support of their mission. The consultation and training provides much more than learning how to count interactions and creating reports; it is about a culture change and understanding what impact is happening in the community. Further, it is noteworthy that the organizations themselves determine what they are most interested in evaluating about their programs versus an outside entity making this decision. This ensures that the data collected will be utilized by the organization's staff to continually improve performance and outcomes.

INITIATIVE OUTCOMES

Each year our initiative continues to grow and each year participating staff and organizations have experienced gains in evaluation capacity. Below are some of the achievements.



Gain in positive
BELIEFS
about evaluation



Gain in
evaluation
KNOWLEDGE



Gain in individual
evaluation
SKILLS

"This initiative has markedly changed the way we view, discuss, and implement evaluation. The most striking shift is our confidence to approach evaluation ourselves without being intimidated or overwhelmed."

"We have learned how useful the logic model is in helping others, both within and outside of our agency, to understand our program better."

"During Year 2 of the Building Evaluation Capacity Initiative, we used data collected from the pilot to revise our training materials, data collection forms, and programming efforts to support broader implementation of our program."

A common outcome reported by participating organizations is the increased ability to communicate more effectively about their programs. This has led several organizations to successfully receive additional funding for program expansion (e.g., support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, PEW Charitable Trust, and the City of Philadelphia). The initiative has also helped organizations identify the need for more staffing and has led to the creation of new positions within organizations, particularly in the area of evaluation and continuous quality improvement. Importantly, the initiative has also been critical in helping organizations make often difficult decisions about whether to continue to offer existing programs or to focus efforts on new programs to achieve their goals.

The Building Evaluation Capacity Initiative is changing the way nonprofits are thinking and delivering services for the better. If we, the collective, want Philadelphia to be the next great city to live in, work in, and visit, we need for all organizations to experience the building evaluation capacity work. We need Philadelphia to be data-driven across all sectors. The Scattergood Foundation hopes that the Mayor, city agencies, philanthropic leaders, and nonprofits will work together to create and improve existing systems to be transparent, include timely data collection and data sharing, and have reasonable and responsible reporting practices.

References

1. "Building Capacity for Evaluation Initiative," Scattergood Foundation, accessed November 6, 2016, http://www.scattergoodfoundation.org/building-evaluation-capacity-initiative-2016-2018-cohort-announced#.WB_qrmNbrOh.
2. The Barra Foundation, accessed November 6, 2016, <http://www.barrafoundation.org>.
3. The Philadelphia Foundation, accessed November 6, 2016, <https://www.philafound.org>.
4. United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, accessed November 6, 2016, <http://unitedforimpact.org>.

5. The Consultation Center at Yale, accessed November 6, 2016, <http://consultationcenter.yale.edu>.

Author bios

Joseph Pyle, MA, the President of the Thomas Scattergood Behavioral Health Foundation, has more than 30 years experience in philanthropy and behavioral healthcare, serving ten years as CEO at institutions including MeadowWood Behavioral Health System, Northwestern Institute of Psychiatry, Malvern Institute and Friends Hospital.

Prior to his administrative positions, Pyle held clinical positions, including Clinical Director of Adolescent Services at MeadowWood Hospital and psycho-educational specialist at Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic. With a degree in special education, he held teaching positions in the Pennsauken, New Jersey and Montgomery County Intermediate Unit school systems.

Under his leadership, the Scattergood Foundation has developed and implemented numerous innovative programs and initiatives. Four years ago the foundation established public grant reporting to ensure transparency in its grantmaking by creating a repository of original ideas for others to learn from. The Scattergood Foundation has also developed the largest capacity building program for outcomes and

evaluation in the region, with over 33 organizations participating in a three-year initiative.

The Scattergood Foundation also manages two crowd-sourced annual programs: the annual Innovation Award and the Design Challenge. The Innovation Award recently led to a partnership with former United States Representative Patrick Kennedy and the Kennedy Forum. Over the last four years, the Design Challenge has made a national call for creative and implementable solutions. The Design Challenge has led to the creation of trauma informed shelter services, a college based stigma reduction web platform, a implementation plan for bringing Mental Health First Aid to Philadelphia and the nation's first mental health screening kiosk for use in retail clinics, among others.

Over the last year, the Scattergood Foundation initiated the development of the first Mayoral Forum on Health and Human Services in Philadelphia and supported a series of educational opportunities to the new administration, to ensure health and human services are a priority in our city.

Joe is also the co-founder of The Exchange PHL, a shared workspace made up of twelve non-profits organizations, and accommodating over 40 individuals. The Exchange PHL is one of the only member ran co-working spaces in Philadelphia and

includes both non-profit programs and funders.

Pyle sits on several non-profit boards. He was most recently appointed to serve on the boards of Friends Behavioral Health System, The Brattleboro Retreat, and Philanthropy Network of Greater Philadelphia. Joe serves on advisory boards including WHYY's Health and Science Advisory Board, the Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice at the Drexel School Public Health, the Philadelphia Mayor's Office Food Access Collaborative and the Holy Redeemer Advisory Board on Intellectual Disability Services

Formerly he served as Board President of Access Matters (previously The Family Panning Council) and a board member of: the National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems, the Delaware Valley Health Care Council, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and Bartram's Garden. He has also served as a senior leadership consultant to many healthcare and human service organizations.

A graduate of LaSalle University, Pyle holds a Master's Degree from Glassboro State College in School Psychology. Mr. Pyle lives in Chester County with his wife and has two adult sons.

Alyson Ferguson, MPH is currently the Director of Grantmaking at the Thomas Scattergood Behavioral

Health Foundation. At the Scattergood Foundation, Alyson wears many hats including leading the Philadelphia Adverse Childhood Experiences Taskforce, having advisory roles to several organizations implementing Mental Health First Aid initiatives, and providing technical assistance to the Foundation's many partners, all in addition to overseeing the grant portfolio. Alyson also contracts with the Brandywine Health Foundation to manage their youth philanthropy program. Prior to working at the Scattergood Foundation she worked for the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Delaware Department of Health and Human Services and the University of Delaware.

Ms. Ferguson just completed the Lebow Leading for Change Fellowship recognizing Philadelphia's top emerging public sector leaders and was recently named a Grantmakers In Health Terrance Keenan Institute Fellow.

Alyson is a graduate of the Drexel University with a Masters in Public Health and obtained her Bachelors in Health Behavior Sciences with a Biological Sciences minor from the University of Delaware.