

The Developmental Evaluation Toolkit

THE “RIGHT NOW” SURVEY

An important role of the developmental evaluator is to help surface issues that could quickly become problems if not resolved, or become lost opportunities if not captured. You can also go much deeper, helping untangle issues that are already known, but difficult for participants to manage, identify pathways to success and even resolve conflicting perspectives or information.

To do any of these, you need to keep your finger on the pulse of what is happening. There are many ways to do this, but I have a core set of tools I like to use. One of these is the “Right Now” survey.

Survey Design: The “Right Now” survey is short (*see the example on the next page*), never more than half a page. It’s designed to be distributed in-person at an existing meeting, such as a Steering Committee meeting. I often use it quarterly or when I have reason to believe the results will be particularly helpful. The questions typically include no more than the following three questions:

- Right now, the greatest opportunities for success are...
- Right now, I am most concerned about...
- Right now, I most need help with...

It takes participants around five minutes to complete. What they write down in those five minutes helps to get a quick snapshot of what is and is not being said in the room. You may not need this survey once you have established trust and relationships with participants, as they will approach *you* to let you know what’s “really going on.” However, in some settings, the number of stakeholders is large enough that, without a tool like this, you will quickly lose sight of the breadth of opinions and understandings about what is happening.

Analyzing the Data: The analysis is also very simple: sort and categorize what you learn in order to surface the major themes. Pay equal attention to outliers – the people whose thoughts are different enough from the rest to make you wonder why the disconnect is happening.

Once I have my results, I sometimes decide that an issue surfaced by the survey needs more investigation through interviews, observation, etc. Often, I share the results back with the group using a facilitated learning dialogue focused on taking action in response to the learning.

Example of Sharing the Results: Working with a Collective Impact Task Force that was roughly six months into their initiative, the “Right Now” survey revealed that the most pressing concerns were the wide-spread worry that the work moving forward wouldn’t achieve the desired results, as well as a general lack of clarity on how each organization would contribute to the results. The opportunities consistently had to do with how well their leadership group was functioning and the depth of the relationships that had been developed. To share the results back with the group, I framed what I had learned using a simple collaboration framework that is fairly well known – the Results, Process, Relationship Triangle. The information led to a dialogue around how to prioritize results alongside all the good work already happening on process and relationships.

Are you interested in more tips and tools for developmental evaluation?

Spark Policy Institute (www.sparkpolicy.com) will be sharing a Developmental Evaluation Toolkit in the summer of 2014. To be notified of its availability, please contact jewlya@sparkpolicy.com.

Right now, my biggest concerns are...	
Right now, the best opportunities for success are...	
Right now, I most need help with...	

Right now, my biggest concerns are...	
Right now, the best opportunities for success are...	
Right now, I most need help with...	