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EVALUATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:
EVERYONE IS AN EVALUATOR

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We encourage you to share your feedback with us and tell us how you are using the tool or resource. Nexus Community Engagement Institute and our partners intend these documents and tools to introduce practitioners, funders, evaluators, and community members to community engagement and to give the field clarity in its language and principles. However, community engagement is not a field that can rely on written materials alone; it takes a community of practitioners to support one another in practicing community engagement effectively, meeting its challenges, and tapping the strengths within each unique context. We encourage you to seek out experienced practitioners to support you in implementing these tools, principles, and concepts.

Nexus Community Engagement Institute is available for consultation. Please contact us at www.nexuscp.org/ncei or email NCEI@nexuscp.org.

Nexus Community Engagement Institute is continuing the work of the Building the Field of Community Engagement (BTF) collaborative. The BTF collaborative was a partnership between Casa de Esperanza, the Cultural Wellness Center, Hope Community, Lyndale Neighborhood Association, the Native American Community Development Institute, and Nexus Community Partners.

Building the Field of Community Engagement is a collaborative initiative designed to magnify and elevate the power of community engagement to change the way problems are solved and resources are invested. Building the Field is bolstering the work of community engagement practitioners and encouraging other organizations to integrate community engagement into their work. As part of the project, the partners produced a film, *Community at the Center*, which discusses the core principles and values of this important work. They also host the Engaged Learning Series, which are community conversations on critical community engagement topics. This report is part of a series of tools and stories that document the partners' and other practitioners' expertise and learning. Find us at **www.buildthefield.org**.

Building the Field partners:

Casa de Esperanza

Cultural Wellness Center

Hope Community

Lyndale Neighborhood Association

Native American Community
    Development Institute

Nexus Community Partners

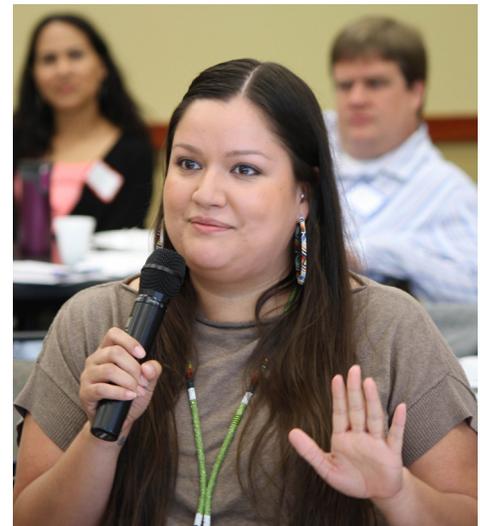# EVALUATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:
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At the last two Building the Field of Community Engagement Engaged Learning Series events, participants explored the crucial role that evaluation plays in supporting the work of community engagement. At the latest event in May, participants discussed the role of evaluation in improving the work and providing evidence of its impact in community. An insight that emerged was that evaluation can also play a role in advancing community engagement.

The questions asked and the outcomes defined in an evaluation have a powerful influence on the outcomes an organization achieves. Community engagement evaluation creates processes for many people in a community to bring their experience, knowledge and dreams to shape the evaluation and, thus, the outcomes of the work. A best practice of community engagement is to involve community members in shaping and leading evaluation.

Participants at the Engaged Learning Series event on May 13, 2015.

Above: Participants discussing ways to engage community members in evaluation.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS EVALUATORS

A community engagement approach to evaluation requires a shift in thinking. Instead of thinking about how to include participants in the evaluation that the organization conducts, practitioners must consider how the organization can support the community in evaluating itself and its work.

WHEN ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDE COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN THE PROCESS OF EVALUATION, THE EVALUATION:

- Answers the questions the community wants answered
- Lifts up and strengthens the common visions and values of the community
- Builds trust in the community and provides accountability among people participating in the work, as well as between participants and organizations
- Builds power, ownership, commitment, and confidence among community members as they work together to develop common goals and vision for community engagement work
- Gives community members a voice in the way an organization does its work and measures its impact
- Breaks down silos and creates balances of power
- Better integrates organizations into the community
- Allows participants to recognize and celebrate successes together
- Creates a sense of community pride when positive results are revealed

A community authentically engaged in evaluation builds power. Providing a process for community members to reflect on how they are engaged in a project and what changes they want in their community sends a different message than asking people to give feedback on how successful the organization is. The first approach acknowledges that people have the power to influence the work; the second keeps the power within the organization.

WAYS TO INVOLVE COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN EVALUATION

Some ways organizations can create opportunities for community members to participate in evaluation include:

• **Convening a group of community members to help design the evaluation questions.** Ask them: What do you want to see change as a result of this project—in yourself and in your community? This can be done with or without external evaluators.

• **Reserving the last 15 minutes of every meeting** or event for an informal group evaluation process.

• **Conducting informal community interviews.** This can happen on an ongoing basis. You can ask people to stay for a few minutes after a meeting or event, or arrange a special time.

• **Asking an external evaluator to conduct more formal interviews** in a systematic, community-designed evaluation process and invite community members to attend the interviews.

• **Convening a group of community members to review the results of an evaluation** and ask them what information is significant, if there is anything missing and how they will use the information.

More than 50 people attended the Engaged Learning Series event on May 13, 2015.

A community authentically engaged in evaluation builds power.

QUESTIONS TO ENGAGE COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN EVALUATION

Community-led evaluation does not need to be complex. There are two primary ways organizations can conduct community engagement evaluation: 1) evaluating the **process of community engagement** (how well an organization is engaging the community), and 2) evaluating the **impacts of community engagement** (what happens because of the engagement).

EVALUATING THE PROCESS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: **Questions organizations can ask community members about their engagement**	EVALUATING THE IMPACTS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: **Questions organizations can ask community members about what is changing as a result of their engagement**
• What is working? What is not working? • Do we have the right processes to get where we want to go? • Are our goals the right goals? • Are the right people at the table? • How satisfied are you with your role? • Are you doing what you want to do in this project? • How do you rate the effectiveness of the leadership? • Are resources used well?	• What have you learned from your participation that is helpful to you? • Have you made new connections with people since you began participating? How many? What kind of connections? • Have you shared information you have learned from a previous meeting with anyone else? What have you shared? • Have you told friends and neighbors about your work in this project? Have you invited anyone to come to meetings/events, etc.? • What has changed for you as a result of your participation? • Do you feel more able to make change in your life and/or community? • Have you noticed any changes in others, in your community?

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ORGANIZATION

The questions on page 4 can serve as a guide to community engagement practitioners who want to provide ways for community members to have ownership in the evaluation. However, there are several responsibilities that come with this process. Organizations that include community members in the evaluation process need to:

• Make sure all participants in the evaluation planning are clear about the **purpose of the evaluation** and how it will be used.

• Take time to ensure all participants have the same **understanding of the project** and process to ensure that feedback provided by participants is useful and practical.

• Learn from community members about the **cultural differences** that may shape the way questions are interpreted. Your organization may need to develop new language for your evaluation that is more inclusive and meaningful to your community.

• Work with community members to understand that **negative feedback about a program's progress is not a reflection of their contributions.** Develop a spirit of learning and improvement through evaluation.

• Work intentionally on changing the understanding of evaluation as a "report card" that judges people. Rather, evaluation should be framed as a **tool for people and organizations to be accountable** to one another and to improve the work.

• Take into account **how much power** community members have to shape a project or program. If community members don't actually have power or authority to make changes, organizations should avoid asking questions that imply that their responses will inform future work.

A lack of participant power to drive change may also indicate that the organization's community engagement activities could be improved. The Building the Field initiative's assessment tool found at **www.buildthefield.org** can serve as a resource to determine whether an organization's work is meeting the basic standards of community engagement, including building in ways for community members to be a part of project and organizational decision-making.

Participants capture their table's discussion on evaluation and community engagement.

Participants report back on their table discussions at the Engaged Learning Series event.

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We all evaluate ourselves and our work. We ask ourselves questions like: Is what I am doing the best way to get to where I want to go? What do I need to do to improve my work and/or my relationships? Is my work making any difference? By recognizing that evaluation can be as simple as asking ourselves and community members questions like these, we can demystify evaluation and support the process of making everyone an evaluator.

One of the most important benefits of including community members in evaluation is that it affirms everyone's role as an evaluator within an organization or community. When everyone is viewed as an evaluator, staff is not burdened with the "extra" job of evaluation—rather, the evaluation is built into the work and many people are responsible for it. It helps people doing the work—both staff and community members—to be more effective and to use finite resources well. Reflecting on how to involve more community members in evaluation can help practitioners integrate their daily work into evaluation and integrate evaluation into their daily work.

Community members have knowledge and power that can benefit our organizations and our communities. Putting community members at the center of the design and implementation of evaluation projects is just one more strategy that can improve our community engagement practice—strengthening our organizations and our communities.

Learn more about this dynamic, challenging field by visiting **www.buildthefield.org** where you can find resources, sign up for invitations to events, and join in the conversation about community engagement. For more information, contact Janice Barbee at janicegwb@yahoo.com or Theresa Gardella at tgardella@nexuscp.org