



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR COLLIER COUNTY

Evaluation as a Planning Strategy

Executive Summary

COLLIER COUNTY COLLABORATIVE PLANNING TEAM
SUMMER 2013

UF UNIVERSITY of
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NAPLES CHILDREN
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Executive Summary

The Comprehensive Plan for Collier County (CPCC) is the next step in the development of the Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF) as a proactive, philanthropic, learning organization making powerful strategic investments to support healthy child development and quality of life for the children and families of Collier County. A review of progress in 2010 applauded the success of the oral health, medical and early learning initiatives; identified increasing needs by a population affected disproportionately by the 2008-09 severe economic downturn; and reiterated the need for NCEF to continue thinking about how best to leverage human resources and financial capital to develop holistic, community-based initiatives. The NCEF Grants Committee asked consultants to consider the current thinking on foundation evaluation strategies and review its newest initiatives to inform its future investments.

Proving — Improving: Achieving Balance

There is no one right way to do evaluation. NCEF's diverse initiatives are complex and progressive, and there currently is no one useful measurement tool that clearly and honestly evaluates performance and return on investment. NCEF's initiatives deal with human and community issues that are impacted by societal external elements. The original mission of program evaluation in the human services and education fields was to improve program quality; however, the influence of scientific method — experimental designs and statistical analysis to show causality — has pushed program evaluation to focus much more on *proving* whether a program or initiative worked, rather than on *improving* program quality, efficiency, and impact. Rather than simply labeling complex service projects like those developed by NCEF as “unevaluatable,” it becomes imperative that funders and external evaluators employ more hybrid models with blended quantitative and qualitative designs.

Evaluation for Continuous Improvement

The philanthropic community now embraces evaluation as an ongoing process fundamental to the fabric of all successful initiatives; one that helps decision makers better understand the project and how it is affecting participants, partner agencies and the community being served.

Both the Robin Hood and W. K. Kellogg foundations are doing work analogous to that of NCEF. Although their work is on a larger scale, both organizations try to create community-based initiatives that are primed to be successful, providing technical assistance in design, management and evaluation. Most funded initiatives have an independent evaluator as part of the initiative team. Initiatives often take the form of learning communities working to create innovative, solution-oriented programs that stimulate community reflection leading to systems change and more informed policy prescriptions.



Several evaluation lessons can be learned from reviewing the Robin Hood and Kellogg Foundations' evaluation strategies.

- It is important to learn about the alternative evaluation paradigms and their related methods of data gathering, analysis, and presentation of findings.
- All evaluation designs are political and value-laden; an evaluation team must maintain an open mind and healthy skepticism about the questions driving the evaluation conversation. Open environments in which different perspectives are valued and all voices encouraged promote honest reflection and dialogue about which questions are *not* being addressed and why.
- Strong evaluation designs produce deep understanding and include strategic actions aimed at reducing any negative impact of particular paradigms, political issues, or competing values for stakeholders at all levels of a complex, community-based initiative.

Measuring Impact

National foundations investing in human service development typically require project evaluation to be embedded in any funded initiative (See Appendix C in full report) and use a cluster evaluation model to monitor the overall societal impact. Used to significant effect by the Kellogg and Gates Foundations, cluster evaluation is a means of determining how well a collection of projects fulfills the foundation objective of systemic change in the human service sector. Like Kellogg, NCEF's goal is for its initiatives (project clusters) to improve availability, access, quality and service delivery and provide some innovation and lessons learned that ignite more systemic change than would be possible from a single project.

Review of NCEF Initiatives

Over the last five years, NCEF has developed and funded seven strategic, community-based initiatives, each with two or more partners, all specifically improving child well-being and developed based on commissioned studies:

- Out of School Time
- Mental Health
- Childhood Hunger
- Vision
- Oral Health
- Healthcare
- Early Learning

The Grants Committee felt that a review of the four newest initiatives (the first four initiatives listed above) would provide the committee with a useful snapshot of progress to help guide foundation support and the initiatives' ongoing development. This evaluation focused on issues of vision and leadership, field operations, innovation, resource leverage and impact to structure the review. The full report details these initiatives in Section III. In general, the initiatives have been well designed to reach the NCEF target audience. All the initiatives have a clear immediate mission and benefit from highly qualified, passionate and talented Coordinators. All the initiative Coordinators lack support staff, making it difficult for them to move beyond daily operations to do the relationship building necessary to maximize expansion, develop communication and information management systems, recruit innovative program partners, or think about long term sustainability. Further development of effective outreach strategies would accelerate the development of all the health related initiatives, as their education components may have the greatest potential for long-term societal impact.

Sustainability and impact measurement are the most difficult issues for any initiative. All the initiatives understand that resource leverage is a fundamental principle of all NCEF investments, and all are looking for ways to reduce their future dependency on the Foundation. Again, these initiatives have little or no bureaucratic support, so the Coordinators have no time for marketing and grant writing. Finding ways to create multiple revenue streams will require some technical assistance support from the Foundation.

Suggested Strategic Actions

NCEF is on the cusp of another evolutionary step in its development. The organization has recently changed its management structure; its personnel have new duties; and there is some debate as to the efficacy and sustainability of an investment strategy based on complex, community-based strategic initiatives. Based on its current development trajectory, its expanding initiative portfolio and stated goal of making Collier County the state and national model for healthy child development and school success for **all** children, the consulting team offers the following strategic actions:

1. Promote Cluster Development.

NCEF has slowly and strategically migrated away from sponsoring individual service providers, choosing instead to invest in multi-partner, community based initiatives. The next developmental step is to group program providers and the initiatives into “clusters” of grantees doing like or complementary work; convene those clusters regularly to leverage expertise and new experiential learning; and develop a comparative metric evaluation system to measure long-term societal impact of each cluster.

2. Invest in Internal Capacity Building.

The rapidly expanding size and scope of the foundation’s investment portfolio has outpaced internal organizational growth and development. A single Grants Director with little or no internal supporting bureaucracy cannot do the required Grants Committee support work, manage the application and award process and also have time to do the community relationship building required to anticipate new needs, identify potential service providers and work to craft creative foundation investment responses. To increase internal efficiency and maximize impact, NCEF could hire a program officer(s) from the community pool of recent college graduates or young retirees with business and/or education backgrounds and increase Foundation support staff through a robust internship program of college, university, and select high school students identified through funded programs. Although the complexity of NCEF’s initiatives and the need for employees to understand community dynamics, politics, historical perspective and the like makes hiring from the local labor pool a challenge, an intentional search, thorough orientation, regular professional learning, and strong collaboration with the Grants Director and Grants Committee trustees could produce a lean, highly motivated support staff committed to the organization and its vision for Collier County.

3. Provide Technical Assistance and Opportunity for Organizational Learning.

New initiatives benefit greatly from targeted support; such technical assistance can help an initiative develop a theory of change logic model, create a work plan that anticipates potential operational obstacles and build internal systems to help an initiative with technology, organizational learning, promotion and marketing, and data driven decision making. Foundations with comparable investment portfolios to NCEF typically use program officers to distribute the work of the Grants Director as well as provide and/or coordinate technical support to service clusters from collaborating consultants.

4. Choose or Develop Some Foundation Success Metrics.

The trend in foundation evaluation has changed from measuring outcomes of individual programs and interventions, embedding that work in funded projects; foundations are now looking toward continuous data-driven improvement of initiative effectiveness and ways to determine long-term societal impact through a comprehensive, multifaceted success metric. NCEF could develop a *child wellbeing improvement metric*, a benefit/cost ratio that could be applied across all beneficiaries; alternatively, each cluster might develop an appropriate metric(s) — survival metric, healthcare metric, education metric, social service metric — based on the variables most closely connected to those service sectors. Having clear metrics with which to judge its own performance, i.e., “to keep score,” would give the Foundation renewed energy and sense of purpose for its work, provide a common language and intellectual framework for Grants Committee decisions, and give the Collier community a clear sense of NCEF current investment priorities and long-term impact goals.



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