Connecting Coffee: Program Evaluation/Measurements & Outcomes   Feb. 6, 2014
Notes by Cheryl Weiss

Overview/Purpose
The session focused on the difficulty in aligning various services and/or programs that do not *neatly* lend themselves to outcomes and specific measurements (e.g., how do you know that taking children to a ballet or symphony performance will impact their lives).

General Comments RE: Challenges
- Some participants noted that they had difficulty in finding a tool to help measure impact as in emergency services, or metrics to evaluate community involvement, or measuring the concept of play;
- In another instance participants noted that results of test taking demonstrate knowledge gain via pre- and post-tests, but does that actually translate into behavioral changes; without actual observation cannot know
- Just collecting data as in how many people attended a class or a session is not in of itself terribly useful; what is effective participation?
- Can we define aspects of mission (public participation or play) if it cannot be isolated?
- Due to federal regulations, there are some limitations regarding access as in HIPPA
- How to address financial costs associated with data bases including personnel given funding sources reluctance to fund overhead or administrative costs above and beyond program, or long-term impact (most funders do not provide support for longitudinal studies)

Potential Solutions/Responses to Above Challenges
- Define what success looks like for your organization or program and work backwards; how does your intervention make a difference
- Small nonprofits could consider collaboration as a means of purchasing a data base in which costs are shared, or enlisting support of universities; Ashley suggested contacting her to make use of the George Washington University program evaluation department that takes on nonprofits for free; However it should be noted that nonprofits need to be ready and able to dedicate time to undertake evaluation;
- Often nonprofits will pursue funding for program or service at the expense of infrastructure, so it is equally important for nonprofits to pursue funding for outcome/evaluation with similar rigor
- Finding the research or evidence that supports your intervention is an important step. There are many resources to find proven, "evidence-based" programs, all of which will have a program evaluation tool. (One example is cancer.gov for evidence-based cancer interventions) Open Plans.org is a government data base that shares information
- "Badging" is a methodology for measuring competencies (similar in design to Girl Scouts)

General Summary Comments
- Regardless of giving sector (individual, corporate or foundation or government) data and outcomes are required
- Nonprofits should assess data to change programs or make enhancements not simply collected to report to funders
- Invest in infrastructure that enables nonprofits to build internal evaluation capacity just as you would for programming