Measuring Nonprofit Results
Excerpt from Report to the World Bank and Nonprofit Roundtable of Greater Washington

January 2007

1. **Program Outputs** – These are the most basic measures of what a nonprofit does. A nonprofit can track its outputs by counting the numbers of people served or the numbers of units of service provided.

2. **Participant Outcomes** – These are the consequences of a nonprofit's efforts on its participants, either during or following the nonprofit's intervention. While causation is difficult and costly to prove, many nonprofits can show some correlation between participation in their programs and a positive result for their participants (as compared to the larger population). For example, a drug prevention program might show that a smaller percentage of its participants, as compared to rates for the teen population in the community overall, subsequently uses drugs.

   During planning – the flip side of evaluation – many nonprofits identify "goals" to operationalize their missions. These goals become target outcomes for evaluation. Many nonprofits understand that they must move beyond reporting basic outputs to showing outcomes for participants, but they may not have the capacity to do so.

3. **Community Outcomes** – Teasing out the benefit or value to the community puts the participant outcomes in a larger context, the "so what" for the community in which the nonprofit intervention occurs. (Note: The Kellogg Foundation and other knowledgeable sources blend community benefit into the category of "outcomes," but over the longer term. Through our experience collecting examples of outcomes from DC-area nonprofits, however, we are inclined to make this mid-point between participant outcomes and social change/impact more explicit.)

   Continuing the example above, a drop in teen drug use could be shown to correlate with higher graduation rates or lower crime. Most nonprofits not only need help showing results at this level, they also need help seeing themselves and their efforts as part of a larger context.

   Community outcomes can be captured in the following ways:

   - **Economic –** Dollars saved because a nonprofit program <u>diverted</u> participants from government services and systems, <u>prevented</u> higher-cost behaviors and activities, and/or <u>delivered</u> services efficiently by leveraging government and private investments (for example, using volunteer versus paid staff).

- **Social** – Improved social conditions due to innovation, policy change, increased civic engagement, and/or community building across lines of difference. Social benefit might also include access to services by groups that are otherwise marginalized and underserved.

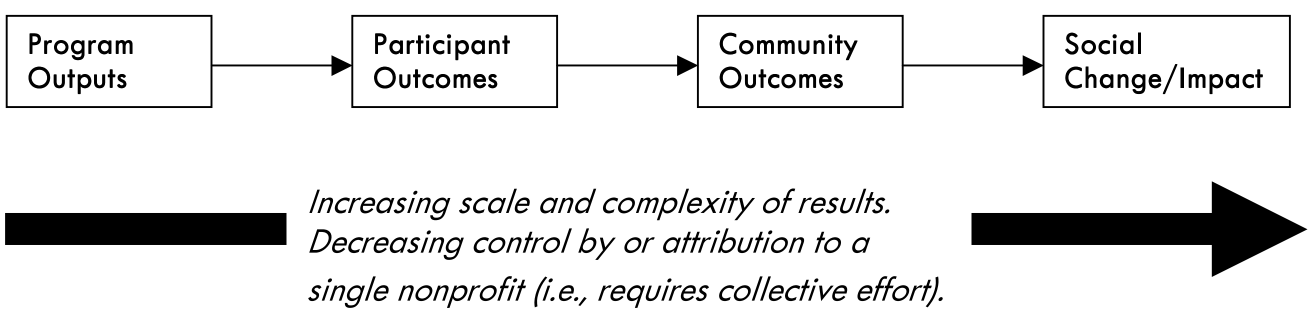
- **Intrinsic** – Improved self-esteem, leadership capability, empowerment, or other intangible qualities.

4. **Social Change or Impact** – This is long-term change, for which a single nonprofit cannot be fully responsible. Rather, achieving impact is a collective responsibility and the result of cumulative efforts of nonprofits, funders, government officials, and others over an extended period of time. During planning, a nonprofit might express "impact" as its vision, which is not achievable in the short term or through a single nonprofit's efforts alone, but which requires a nonprofit to see itself as part of a larger context. An example of impact, continuing from above, would be a decline in poverty or other indicator of improved quality of life in the community.

   In "Outcomes Assessment and the Paradox of Nonprofit Accountability," David Campbell notes that by responding to the pressure to produce "impact," nonprofits "risk taking inappropriate credit for social change or assuming the blame for factors beyond their control."

   Unfortunately, some funders and others, frustrated with the shallowness of output measures, have gone to the opposite extreme of trying to hold individual nonprofits accountable for achieving and showing impact. This is simply unrealistic, and not a good use of nonprofit resources to try to evaluate at this level. It also shifts the responsibility away from those who do have the capacity to work and evaluate at this level – namely, government, some private funders, and others working with a "portfolio" of groups across a geographic region or field of work.

Consider the following visualization of this framework:



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