



Alliance for Peacebuilding

Starting on the Same Page:

A Lessons Report from the Peacebuilding Evaluation Project

Summer 2011

By Melanie Kawano-Chiu

With contributions by Susan Allen Nan, Meredith Blair, Su Flickinger,
Deborah Laufer, Alan Lessik, Peter Woodrow and Craig Zelizer

Published by the Alliance for Peacebuilding

Support for this report was provided by
the United States Institute of Peace

Acknowledgements

The leadership and staff at the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) would like to thank the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and Andrew Blum, Program Officer at USIP, for his contribution to the genesis and success of the Peacebuilding Evaluation Project (PEP). PEP was possible because of his vision, support and involvement.

The author would also like to thank Chic Dambach, for his insightful leadership, guidance and facilitation of the entire PEP process. PEP would not have been possible if he were not open to expanding the reach and scope of the services the AfP provides to the entire peacebuilding field. A special thanks as well to Emily Mallozzi for her cheerful support and dedication during each PEP meeting and in the review of this report.

AfP thanks the group of individuals that served as core advisors to PEP:

Melanie Greenberg, President and Founder of the Cypress Fund for Peace; Cynthia Irmer, Senior Conflict Prevention Officer at the US Department of State; Nick Oatley, Director of the Institutional Learning Team at Search for Common Ground; and Sharon Morris, Director of the Conflict Management Group at Mercy Corps.

These individuals dedicated their time and expertise by providing nuanced guidance to the agenda and focus of each PEP meeting. Thanks to their integral input and the insights of Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church, the PEP meetings targeted the underlying issues that keep the peacebuilding field from reaching the next level of evaluation practice.

To the contributing authors of this report, we give a special thanks as well. Your contributions to both the PEP meetings and the final lessons report contributed a great deal to all of our success in dealing with the field-wide challenge of evaluation.

Alan Lessik, Assistant General Secretary for Goal Leadership, American Friends Science Committee; Peter Woodrow, Co-Director, Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects; Susan Allen Nan, Assistant Professor, Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University; Craig Zelizer, Assistant Director, Conflict Resolution Program, Georgetown University; Meredith Blair, Associate Director of Research, Humanity United; Su Flickinger, Chair, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, Mediators Beyond Borders; Deborah Laufer, Board Member, Mediators Beyond Borders.

Lastly, we thank the phenomenal student interns who gave their time and talents to the organization of PEP: Valerie Oliphant, Jessica Mariglio, Allison Jill Pearlman, Doug Smith, Keavy Nahan, and Sarah Cechvala.

Table of Contents

Introduction: The Need for a Deeper Conversation.....	4
Section One: The Current State of Peacebuilding Evaluation.....	7
Section Two: Debunking the Five Most Common Myths.....	10
The Balance of Accountability and Peacebuilding Through Peacebuilding by Meredith Blair	
A Common Purpose.....	14
Adding Value Together Through A Donor Challenge by Su Flickinger and Deborah Laufer	
The Need to Illustrate Impact and Effective Programming.....	18
Methinks He Doth Claim Too Much: The Problem of Over-Claiming by Peter Woodrow	
Support Systems & Organizational Cultures.....	22
Internal Reflection – the Genesis of Organizational Change by Alan Lessik	
Conclusion.....	26
Challenges and Opportunities in Online Network and Social Impact by Craig Zelizer	
Teaching Evaluation to Scholar-Practitioners by Susan Allen Nan	
Appendix 1: PEP Participants.....	32
Appendix 2: Dynamics & Syndromes of Peacebuilding Evaluation.....	33
Appendix 3: Additional Readings.....	37

Introduction

The Need for a Deeper Conversation

In recent years, the peacebuilding field made a commitment to improving its evaluation practices. From the newer Search for Common Ground evaluation database, to the established OECD-DAC evaluation guidelines, to the practical CDA Collaborative Learning Projects' Toolbox and Church and Roger's Designing for Results, resources for program design and implementation evaluation now exist. It is clear that while more improvements need to be made, we have a solid body of work that provides guidance on how to conduct evaluations.

What is less clear, however, is how we manage the way the interdependent relationship between funders and implementers inherently affects evaluation, learning and transparency. Unavoidable issues of power and competition for resources color our ability to be transparent about how we can improve our programs and practices. Fear and concern for reputation can build walls around our openness to program evaluation and lead to misconceptions about the need, benefit and costs of evaluation. Funders and implementers have tried to address what some call the 'wicked problem' of peacebuilding evaluation, but many found themselves in recurring, and often frustrating, conversations.

In the summer of 2009, United States Institute of Peace (USIP) Program Officer Andrew Blum hosted a meeting for peacebuilding funders and implementers to address these issues. Over the course of the afternoon, it became clear that both funders and implementers grapple with their own respective complex challenges regarding evaluation and potential solutions rarely lie within one organization. USIP and the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) recognized that if the peacebuilding field were to affect positive change around its evaluation practices, funders and implementers needed to address these challenges collectively. This is, after all, the model for successful programming: effective funder-implementer collaboration that starts from the issuing of an RFP and continues until the final evaluation.

Unavoidable issues of power and competition for resources color our ability to be transparent about how we can improve our programs and practices. Fear and concern for reputation can build walls around our openness to program evaluation and lead to misconceptions about the need, benefit and costs of evaluation.

Within this context, USIP and AfP designed a series of dialogues to facilitate relationship-building and mutual problem-solving called the Peacebuilding Evaluation Project: A Forum for Donors and Implementers (PEP).¹ Donor, or funder, as the term is used in the report, refers to any individual, private organization, government agency, or multilateral agency that provides funds to implementers for peacebuilding programs.

The term implementer, as used in the document, refers to both practitioners and analysts within the peacebuilding field who also work on peacebuilding programs.²

PEP consisted of four all-day meetings of a group of 24 peacebuilding funders and implementers. Once a quarter, USIP and AfP provided a neutral space for PEP participants to honestly address the challenges and myths within evaluation, achieve a mutual understanding of the use of evaluations, and build momentum to create both policy and broader systemic change in ways that acknowledge the interests and priorities of both funders and implementers.

Each PEP meeting covered a different aspect in the donor-implementer dynamic:

- At meeting one, PEP facilitators helped participants develop a basic understanding of the main sources of tension in the donor-implementer relationship around evaluation.
- At meeting two, a guest speaker from CARE International provided an overview of state-of-the-art evaluation methodologies that are available to the peacebuilding field and how these methodologies can help the field improve its practices. Several PEP participants presented on the interests, pressures and constraints of donors and implementers in regard to evaluation methodologies and the types of evidence they need those methodologies to produce.
- At meeting three, guest speakers from International Alert and the George Washington School of Business discussed internal strategies for organizational change to improve evaluation and support systems through the donor-implementer relationship. Participants then discussed patterns of positive organizational change.
- At meeting four, PEP participants focused on developing field wide-strategies to address specific aspects in our funding systems, implementing policies, and cultural peacebuilding practices that undermine better and more transparent evaluations

¹ For these meetings, peacebuilding was defined, as USIP describes it, as involving “a transformation toward more manageable, peaceful relationships and governance structures—the long-term process of addressing root causes and effects, reconciling differences, normalizing relations, and building institutions that can manage conflict without resorting to violence.”

²All PEP meetings were conducted under the Chatham House Rule. However, PEP participation is openly acknowledged. A full participant list can be found in Appendix One.

To ensure that the learning and conversation in PEP benefits the wider peacebuilding field, USIP published a Special Report by Andrew Blum entitled “Improving Peacebuilding Evaluation: A Whole-of-Field Approach” and AfP published this lessons report.³ All the information in this document is based on input and insights made by PEP participants during PEP meetings, calls with PEP participants, or online discussions. This document is not a direct report on those discussions.⁴ The recommendations in this reference document are the responsibility of the author and contributing authors, not the PEP participants.

³This report can be found online at www.usip.org/publications-tools.

⁴Nothing in this report is attributed to individual participants that the participant did not readily provide themselves. For the external version of the PEP meetings notes, visit www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org.

Section 1: The Current State of Evaluation

Regardless of the role we play - funder, implementer or analyst - as peacebuilders we enter into chaotic, complex and ambiguous situations.

With our good intentions to 'do no harm' and to consolidate fragments of existing peace, our identities as external, comparatively neutral actors help us mediate seemingly intractable differences and support devastated communities. Being an external actor, however, does not mean we are uninvolved or completely detached.

For most of us, there is an added dimension to consider. In the international aid system, in which we are able to complete a project thanks to a counterpart, such as a funder or implementer, we openly state our intentions to foster peace in the proposals we write and the mission statements we seek to fulfill. In these partnerships we become answerable to Boards of Directors, private donors, Congressional bodies, Parliamentary oversight committees and tax-payers. These layers of accountability result in a need to show if and how our efforts enabled a community to move toward certain intended goals.

In the past, the intentions we had to contribute to a more peaceful world seemed to be sufficient accountability. The chance that our actions could have negative unintended consequences was not always considered. As a field, calls for accountability are a relatively recent development. Today, we are collectively faced with the difficulty of evaluating our programs and, if we have the necessary resources, learning from our past experiences to improve our practices. The reality of the system in which we operate necessitates evaluation, or some equivalent form of assessment and measurement of our programming.

In the exact moment that we as peacebuilders become involved in a potential or on-going conflict, we make a pledge, spoken or not, to provide assistance until the situation is stable or self-sustaining, and become accountable to the people we are serving.

A Snapshot of Peacebuilding Evaluation

In the last five to ten years, the field has made significant improvements in developing tools and guidelines on how to measure the impact of peacebuilding programs. Consequently, implementers have cultivated their technical skills and provided feedback on the feasibility of the evaluation criteria set out by funders given the natural constraints of real-life application.

Nonetheless, the peacebuilding field seems to have reached a frustratingly long plateau in the use, understanding, and application of evaluation. As a result, most peacebuilding funders and implementers express dissatisfaction at the current state of evaluation. In fact, both funders and implementers at the first PEP meeting rated, on average, the current state of peacebuilding evaluation a dismal four out of ten. Though many of the PEP participants gave caveats prior to their ratings, the most optimistic score given was a 5.5.

Upon closer examination, it is evident that the field's frustration with evaluation stems from the real and complex obstacles that still need to be overcome. For instance, **implementers** confront tight program budgets, an aversion to risk on the part of many funders that leads to the favoring of 'safe and proven' programs, the occasional lack of basic knowledge on how to design or complete an evaluation, resistance to evaluation by their own colleagues, the pressure to impact the peace writ large level with community level projects, and the risk of losing funding. **Funders** face uneven or disjointed data collection, unrealistic evaluation reports, calls for 'sexy,' relatable or easy to understand programs with news-worthy impact, and the need for a clear return on philanthropic or government investments. **Analysts** find the work they do to improve the field's understanding and practices overlooked and struggle against external demands for evaluation methodologies that work in other disciplines but may not pertain and translate into peacebuilding.

These challenges, already complex in their own right, are complicated by their systemic nature and origins. Between the third and fourth PEP meeting, a small working group created a visual representation of these dynamics, as seen in Appendix Two.¹ The map in Appendix Two is not a comprehensive representation of the main dynamics in peacebuilding evaluation, and therefore does not include all of the dynamics and scenarios we encounter when evaluating peacebuilding programs. The map does show, however, how the entire field contributes to and participates in the syndromes which hinder improved evaluation, learning and, ultimately, peacebuilding programs and practice.

At the PEP meetings, both funders and implementers rated the current state of peacebuilding evaluation an average four out of ten.

¹The working group included Susan Allen Nan, Melanie Kawano-Chiu, Tamra Pearson d'Estree, and Peter Woodrow. The group took many of the factors identified by the PEP participants at the first PEP meeting and several additional factors to establish a common understanding of the peacebuilding evaluation system. The group also identified a number of countervailing positive factors in the field. To see the top five priorities of discussion for the PEP meetings, as identified by the PEP participants, see the notes from PEP Meeting One.

In complex situations like this, a basic approach to improve the system is two-pronged. The first works at change at the policy level, and the second works at change on an individual or relationship level. In either case, both require distinctive collective and individual efforts that work in concert to address the syndromes illustrated in Appendix Two and the underlying issues that perpetuate them. For the former, Andrew Blum has written a USIP Special Report entitled “Improving Peacebuilding Evaluation: A Whole-of-Field Approach.”

For the latter, this Lessons Report will cover the long-held misconceptions on what our partners need, what our partners can provide and the purpose and limits of any evaluation. As in many peacebuilding efforts to foster peace, attitudinal change is a key component to transforming the root causes of the conflict. By addressing the myths and misconceptions we as a field believe about evaluation, we can also begin to illuminate the syndromes we face, shift our own detrimental cultural and behavioral dynamics, and reinforce our positive practices.

Myths & Misconceptions

Misconceptions on peacebuilding evaluation tend to fall into one of several re-occurring themes. These themes revolve around how to do an evaluation, why evaluations are even done and the underlying dynamics of the funder-implementer relationship.

- Myth One: Peacebuilding’s impact is particularly difficult to measure due to the complex dynamics of conflict situations.
- Myth Two: Staff in country offices must be trained social scientists.
- Myth Three: The primary purpose of evaluations is to highlight flaws and faults and assess when the program is a “success” or “failure.”
- Myth Four: The expectation is that nearly all projects will be “successful.”
- Myth Five: Countervailing forces against good evaluation practices are too entrenched to change.

Throughout the PEP meetings, these themes kept reappearing through the process and in conversations – showing how very prevalent and powerful these understandings are to the framework of peacebuilding evaluation. Nearly a quarter of the participants in PEP contributed vignettes to this publication to show how their organization addressed one of the misconceptions described above.

Section 2: Debunking the Five Myths

Myth One: Peacebuilding's impact is particularly difficult to measure due to the complex dynamics of conflict situations.

It is undeniably true that peacebuilders operate in chaotic and quickly-changing situations in which human lives are at stake. These layers of complexity certainly make it difficult to attribute social, political, behavioral or attitudinal changes to individual contributions. Nevertheless, for the reasons outlined in the previous section, this does not mean that we are exempt from being accountable to our partners or learning from our past experiences.

The field of professional evaluation actually offers many insights into evaluating programs like those found in peacebuilding. Since there are many elements in peacebuilding mirrored in other sectors and disciplines, peacebuilders can find resources in disciplines that have addressed evaluation for some time. For instance, the human rights field regularly aims to shift ingrained cultural attitudes, behaviors and practices. Likewise, humanitarian and disaster response teams by definition operate in chaotic and disrupted systems. In both cases, connectors and countervailing forces often need to be taken into consideration when seeking positive impact. Both fields have made significant strides in their own evaluation practices in the midst of contextual challenges they face.

A Note for Implementers

Instead of reinventing the proverbial wheel, the peacebuilding community can build on the evaluation practices of other fields and tailor them to our own unique needs and considerations. The American Evaluation Association (AEA), an international professional association of program evaluators, provides numerous resources.¹ AEA has a membership of over 5,500 individuals around the world and focuses on the exploration and application of all forms of evaluation. In addition to hosting an annual meeting, which some of the peacebuilding field's foremost evaluators find incredibly beneficial, AEA offers publications, trainings, community discussion groups and these resources:

- AEA 365 Blog - A Tip-a-Day by and for Evaluators (<http://aea365.org/blog/>)
- Online Libraries (both Public and Private Member Libraries) (<http://comm.eval.org/EVAL/EVAL/Resources/LibraryDocumentList/Default.aspx?LibraryKey=1eff4fd7-afa0-42e1-b275-f65881b7489b>)
- Find an Evaluator Database (www.eval.org/find_an_evaluator/evaluator_search.asp)

The opportunity to learn and develop your skills will help not only improve your technical abilities to evaluate programs and make real-time program improvements, it will also give you more skills to educate your funding partners on what kinds of evaluation techniques may or may not work for peacebuilding programs.

A Note for Funders

To assist grant-makers in understanding the benefits of evaluation and how to work with their partners in developing productive M&E practices, GrantCraft has produced several guides, including:²

- Making Measures Work for You (www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&pagelid=1543)
- Using a Theory of Change to Guide Planning and Evaluation (www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&pagelid=1542)
- Participatory Action Research (www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&pagelid=1538)
- Learning Together (www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&pagelid=1541)

¹For more information, visit the American Evaluation Association at www.eval.org/.

²GrantCraft was set up by the Ford Foundation and now run by Foundation Center and the European Foundation Centre: <http://www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?>

The fact that certain methodologies are applied to other somewhat similar fields does not mean, however, that they should be automatically applied to peacebuilding. Caution and due diligence should always be taken into account given peacebuilding's unique attributes, which include distinctive environmental and contextual factors, time sensitivities, the presence of detractors, opponents and allies, security issues, quickly changing dynamics, and high risks for programs.

This is particularly true for more popular methodologies, such as randomized control tests, in which there may be reputation and security risks in forming control groups. The tension between the existence of other evaluation methodologies and the need to wisely apply general evaluation methods within peacebuilding contexts can be balanced and addressed within a healthy funder-implementer relationship.

A Note for Implementers

When a funder asks you to use a methodology that may not be appropriate for your program design or the context you are operating in, take the opportunity to strengthen your partnership and provide constructive alternatives. Negotiation conversations like this can become win-win situations if you come prepared not to just say no, but to offer viable and valid methodology alternatives.

Your funding partner may have organization-wide requirements on the type of data that needs to be captured. (This practice helps many funders easily aggregate data across the many projects and programs they are funding.) If possible, ask your funding partners what type of data needs to be captured at the end of the evaluation and then explore within your internal team alternative options to the funder's proposed methodology.

Myth Two: Staff in country offices must be trained social scientists.

As daunting as it may be to untangle the complex web of attribution and contribution in peacebuilding evaluation, funders and upper management staff at international implementing organizations do not necessarily expect staff in the field, and peacebuilders in general, to be trained social scientists who are able to definitively point to an intervention as the basis for new found peace. Those within the peacebuilding field understand the complex dynamics that make issues like attribution and contribution all the more challenging when dealing with peacebuilding evaluation.

Instead of demanding an expert social scientist in every organization's in-country staff, funders and implementers are finding half-way points and strategies to work with peoples' existing technical skills and build capacity. A particularly clear voice on how to support partners in peacebuilding evaluation is Meredith Blair, Associate Director of Research at Humanity United. Humanity United understands that peacebuilders operate in chaotic and unstable situations, but responds to these challenges with a nuanced approach and practical solutions.

The Balance of Accountability and Peacebuilding Through Partnership

While Humanity United feels strongly that the best role of M&E is for learning and improvement, our accountability needs are real. We have a Board of Directors, intended beneficiaries, and the public looking to us to ensure that we are fiscally responsible and producing results that support our mission. We value formal evaluations and collect meaningful data that allows us to track progress, yet we also emphasize designing monitoring programs and applying the lessons learned in future programming.

Much of the initial conversation we have with a partner about program assessment is focused on overcoming assumptions about the kinds of specific skills needed to perform useful M&E. For instance, every day practitioners make decisions about what intervention or tactic is needed. These decisions are often based on implicit – sometimes even unconscious – context and conflict analysis. We know that by giving our partners the time to examine their assumptions about why X plus Y leads to Z, we have the opportunity to design better programs.

Decisions about what that data looks like, who will collect it, and what it will be used for are more complex. Even the most well-trained partners encounter limitations, including overworked staff, constricted budgets, lack of on-the-ground expertise and - not least of all - environmental barriers.

Humanity United knows identifying the specific changes we seek to create and thinking through the potential consequences of our efforts are invaluable parts of any peacebuilding intervention. As a grant-making organization, we drive toward a system of M&E that is practical, useful in course-correcting for better results, and ensures mutual expectations about program outcomes. We do not expect all of our partners to be social scientists. Instead, we ask our partners to be evaluative in their thinking while promoting learning and improvement in their programs.

Meredith Blair
Associate Director of Research, Humanity United

Despite the many challenges we face, evaluations are now an integral part of peacebuilding programs. Practitioners and implementing agencies have a responsibility to ensure their work has the intended impact. As Humanity United explains, in working with our partners to meet both the funders' need for accountability and the implementer's current evaluation capacities, there are options. Other PEP participants also have strategies to work with their partners in conducting evaluations and having the sometimes difficult discussion on the limits and benefits of evaluation:

- Make strategic decisions to start evaluation initiatives despite imperfect realities or contextual challenges.
- Have mid-term conversations with partners to discuss feedback.
- Create a safe space for discussions among people in the field and the people who are doing the evaluations, especially if they are external evaluators.

While a strong working relationship with your partner cannot fundamentally change the systemic dynamics in which we operate, building deeper trust and relationships with your partners will facilitate discovering solutions that work for both of you.

A Common Purpose

Myth Three: The primary purpose of evaluations is to highlight flaws and faults and assess when the program is a “success” or “failure.”

Even when the feasibility of evaluating complex peacebuilding programs is established and realistic technical expectations are defined, for some implementers, evaluations can be unwelcome activities.

As mentioned in Section One, in the international aid system implementers rely on resources from external sources. Competition for these resources is

built into the funding application process in which implementing organizations submit program proposals to a funder and the most viable and promising programs get funded. In such an environment, negative, or even constructively critical, evaluations can mean a loss of funding and, in prolonged and worst-case scenarios, even mar the reputation of the organization. Evaluations then can become not just tools for course-correction or learning, but a means of chastisement and potentially losing resources to support local partners in their pursuit of peace. From this perspective, evaluations have very high stakes - even dire consequences. No implementer wants to see a program end because an evaluation misrepresented the outcomes of a program.

A Note for Funders

As you ask for transparency from your implementing partners, it is important that transparency is reciprocated. An evaluation with an end goal of solely accountability, which can have consequences on future funding, is different in scope and nature from an evaluation with an end goal of learning, which can allow an implementer to try newer program designs. It is important to clearly communicate your goals and consequences of an evaluation. If future funding decisions are riding on an evaluation, this should be clearly stated.

When a practitioner or implementing partner is reluctant to conduct an evaluation, the cause may have deeper roots. Take the time to work with your partner in determining the causes of this reluctance and find a way to reach your goals together. If you want an evaluation of a program made public to share learning or highlight a particular aspect of the program, ease your partner into this higher degree of transparency over time as you help build internal buy-in and capacity for better evaluation practices.

PEP Participant and AfP member organization, Mediators Beyond Borders (MBB), was recently in a situation in which it seemed as if there was internal reluctance to engage in evaluative thinking on a series of programs. Upon deeper examination and reflection, MBB found that the initial reluctance turned out to be an issue of semantics and familiarity.

Adding Value Together through a Donor Challenge

In the fall of 2010, Mediators Beyond Borders (MBB) received a grant from an individual donor who was interested in encouraging projects to be very clear about their purpose and expected results, that is, projects with a clear theory of change. We had absolutely no other criteria.

Since few of our project teams had much experience in articulating their theory of change or in developing proposals, we wanted to provide as much support as possible. This was a good opportunity to assist our teams in building internal capacity in these areas. We formed an ad hoc committee of individuals from the MBB Fund Development, Projects, Membership, and Monitoring/Evaluation committees. Through a collaborative process, the ad hoc committee decided to evenly split the donor's funds among six projects and provide project leaders with an overview of how to incorporate M&E and budget planning into proposals and explain the "value added."

Over a period of six months, MBB walked their project leaders through the following questions to help them develop a theory of change now and in the future:

- What change is hoped for and why is that change important?
- What capacity (knowledge, resources, contacts, etc.) does the project already have or will need to develop to complete this project?
- What specific outcomes will this project have for the local partners and participants?
- How will these outcomes be measured?

MBB considers this endeavor a significant step toward requiring all project proposals to include M&E components and begin projects with conflict and need assessments and values the opportunity our donor gave to us to internally reflect on our own expertise and develop these guides.

Su Flickinger, Chair of M&E Committee
Deborah Laufer, Executive Secretary
Mediator Beyond Borders

This example demonstrates the impact a process of internal reflection can have on putting a implementer organization on the same page as a funder. By taking the next step to provide their staff with the tools, time, and space needed to design and develop a clear theory of change and M&E plan. MBB enabled its staff to take advantage of a new funding opportunity and to gain the added value of knowing how to establish clearer goals and objectives for future projects. MBB could not have come to a common understanding with their donor without visionary leadership and a willingness to be candid about their internal needs and capacities.

Building Off Commonalities

Depending on the needs and goals of individual funders and implementing partners, evaluations can have a variety of purposes: accountability, learning, gauging effectiveness, reflection, and/or compliance. When choosing evaluation tools, it is beneficial if you and your partner are in agreement about your joint goals.

If finding a common goal is proving to be difficult, it is important to acknowledge your differences and to start with the commonalities you and your partner have in the program. In every partnership there will be hurdles to overcome. In some cases, one's ability to find consensus and move forward may not be as clear as it was for MBB and their funding partner.

Just as we as peacebuilders use similar tools to find a common point to start building bridges among communities in conflict, regardless of your role, there are commonalities to build upon with your partner. For example:

- Short-term outcomes and goals - Both funders and implementers have their own focus on short-term goals. Sometimes, this focus is greater than the focus on long-term outcomes because of the constraints of 12 to 24 month funding or accountability cycles, but both have short-term goals to complete the program with as much success as possible, to learn in a short amount of time or to meet certain accountability goals.
- Learning - During the second PEP meeting, the participants agreed that the primary purpose of evaluation is, or at least ideally should be, learning.¹ Funders and implementers are all trying to learn from projects, even if learning is not deliberately built into an organization's internal structure. For instance, with a training program, implementers in the field are learning how to do better workshops, implementers at NGO's headquarters are trying to find a model that can be applied to other contexts, and the funder is trying to scale-up successful models and increase impact.

In either case, good measures are needed to produce replicable models. The best way to do this is through sound evaluations. An evaluation is not an end in and of itself. Evaluations, and the use of rigorous social science methodology, are however a means to evidence that proved how effective a given program or project was in meeting certain goals.

¹It should be noted, that while it may not be optimal, sometimes evaluations are not about learning, or even accountability. Some evaluations are merely tracking tools. Indeed in certain circumstances, evaluations are not even needed. Through an evaluative or reflective process you and your partner can incorporate a feedback mechanism, or mechanisms, in your programming.

The Need to Illustrate Impact and Effective Programming

Myth Four: The expectation is that all projects will be “successful.”

If the field is going to prove the effectiveness and value of peacebuilding to external audiences, evaluations – or more accurately, the evidence they provide - are essential. Unlike a construction project or immunization campaigns, which have relatively quick tangible results, building sustainable peace takes decades and can be a convoluted process. During this extended time period, obvious signs of progress on the path to peace can be few and far between. In the absence of definite markers to clearly show one is on the right path, the incremental steps we are taking toward peace need to be pointed out and highlighted. Evaluations meet this need for both implementers and funders.

This is especially true when it seems as if a situation has regressed during the time of an intervention. If a program has not been able to meet its intended goal(s) and/or objective(s) due to unforeseen circumstances, the implementer and funder can at least use the evaluation as an opportunity to learn, analyze the dynamics that contributed to a less successful intervention and provide recommendations for the future.

The vast majority of funders in the PEP meetings openly acknowledged that, among other things, they do not expect flawless programs and evaluations that report on a program’s complete and absolute success in definitely ending war for the foreseeable future. It is actually rare in any field to determine success as attaining perfection. In the classroom, for instance, a student who answers only 90% of his/her answers correctly is not considered a failure. Even in health care an operation which provides a patient a 50-60% improvement is considered a vast improvement. Instead of increasing confidence in peacebuilding’s accomplishments, standards of perfection and a tendency to conceal the real challenges we face can actually set the field up for genuine failure.

In their work since 1999 on the effectiveness of peacebuilding programs at the field level and at headquarters, the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project at CDA

The vast majority of funders in the PEP meetings openly acknowledged that, among other things, they do not expect flawless programs and evaluations that report on a program’s complete and absolute success in definitely ending war for the foreseeable future.

Collaborative Learning Projects has identified poor conceptualization of program goals as a frequent error in program design — which then has a profound effect on the “evaluability” of peace programs. One of the problems with goals is “over-claiming.” Peter Woodrow, Co-Director of the Reflecting on Peace Practice and PEP participant, identifies three common types of over-claiming in the vignette below.

Methinks He Doth Claim Too Much: The Problem of Over-Claiming

The NGO tendency to “over-claim” the expected results of their peacebuilding programs is, unfortunately, indirectly encouraged by funders, who seek to justify peace programs by showing that they are transforming conflicts at a macro level. We find a degree of inadvertent or unintended collusion between funders and program implementers in making unrealistic claims regarding what a relatively short-term and modest effort can achieve with regard to significant changes in an overall conflict situation.

Consider this typical set of program claims:

Goal: National reconciliation and sustainable peace.

Strategic Objective: Train community leaders in conflict resolution skills, thereby managing conflicts and reducing the threat of violence.

In the example above, increasing the conflict management skills of community leaders might be a reasonable building block towards the lofty goal of sustainable peace—but will not necessarily make a significant contribution. In order to ascertain whether and how local level community leader skill development might contribute to reconciliation and peace at a national level, it would be necessary to identify the existing impediments to reconciliation and the blockages to peace—which may or may not have anything to do with community-level dynamics. Enhancing community-level capacities for conflict resolution might be a worthy goal/objective in itself, and therefore does not need to be justified by a link to national levels.

We find “claiming errors” in three dimensions. Here are questions that may help you avoid these errors:

Time/timing of change: Given the projected length of the program, can it realistically achieve its stated goal(s)—or will those be achieved only through a more sustained engagement? If the project is 18 months long, what can be done?

Level of change: Is the level of intervention (i.e. personal change, group relationships, informal social norms, economic structures, etc.) appropriate to the stated goal?

Or, is the program trying to unrealistically achieve national peace through individual change strategies only? Strategies only?

Depth of change: Is the degree of change required to achieve the goal or objective reasonable? Does the program demand unrealistic changes in attitudes, perceptions, behaviors and institutions? For instance, if you are aiming to create a responsive, respected and accountable police force, can you do that through two-years of training new police recruits only?

Overblown goals and unrealistic objectives lead to a certain cynicism about the effectiveness of peacebuilding programs, as they rarely achieve the stated outcomes — or at least not at the expected levels. In fact, this leads us to become “dependent” on ineffective M&E processes, as effectual M&E might actually expose our outlandish claims. As a community we need to become more realistic, explicit and intentional in how we think change will happen, while still striving to maximize our effectiveness — and how our work will contribute to peace.

Peter Woodrow,
Co-Director, Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, CDA Collaborative

As one would expect, with such insights into over-claiming and programs that are not “achieving peace,” progress is being made toward setting realistic expectations. Funders are beginning to seek not perfection in programming, but movement toward intended learning and the positive development of the situation one intends to affect. Additionally, funders are beginning to build into their proposal requirements that implementers design their programs to address sustainability, build-in institutional or application of lessons learned and flexibility for mid-course corrections. An understanding

is growing that evaluations are not a determination of perfection, but rather an attempt to answer these questions:

- Was this program effective? If the focus was on violence reduction, was the likelihood for violence reduced?
- Did it have its intended impact? Or, if not, what impact are we having on the problems we sought to address?

A Note for Funders

It is understandable that funders are increasingly under pressure to show results, or a return on philanthropic investment. However, achieving peace at a national level, or even reconciling groups that have had a volatile relationship for several generations, within the timeframe of a single 12 or 24 month grant, is not realistic. Attitudes, societal relationships and governance systems are deeply entrenched structures with complex systems in place that work to maintain the status quo. These dynamics do not change overnight, or in one year. The benefit of establishing clear theories of change is that it allows one to claim smaller, but still vital, results toward larger goals. These incremental successes are much needed way stations on the path to peace.

To avoid unsatisfying reports with over-claimed results, clarify your needs to your partners. Since reports are often based on a funder's requirements, evaluation and monitoring reports come as much from the practitioner as from the funder. Encourage your partners to provide the information you need for your leadership and internal accountability structures, in a format and language that they can understand. If left without this guidance, most of your implementing partners will provide you with information that is positive and as polished as possible.

Audience and Evidence

Another repeated point at the PEP meetings was to craft evaluation findings in a manner that is accessible for the primary audience, who may be unfamiliar with the peacebuilding field. External audiences find certain goals, such as reconciliation, self-sustaining peace or demobilization and reintegration, highly desirable because these are terms that are understood and therefore valued, by non-peacebuilding specialists. Peacebuilding projects however, may be working on smaller, less compelling, but nonetheless, important goals. Rather than over-claiming, it is important to engage with external audiences to help them understand how well-designed, focused programs can contribute to peace writ large with sustained investment over time.

Support Systems & Organizational Cultures

Myth Five: Countervailing forces against good evaluation practices are too entrenched to change.

Change is a challenge.

We, as peacebuilders, know all too well that the fundamental goal of all peacebuilding programs is change. The paradox, however, is the sense we can get at times that our own organizations and system of international aid are too complex to change. As complicated, difficult and sometimes awkward it is to address issues of power, fear, transparency, and accountability with our partners, we need to acknowledge that these problems are not so entrenched that we cannot try to move forward in our efforts to improve evaluation.

To provide some options and models of organizational change, PEP participants observed and shared factors that led to positive change within their own organizations.

Leadership – It Starts at the Top

It takes key leaders to see the necessity for change and, at times, be risk-takers. Leaders, in this case, can take the form of either the organization's top people or several key stakeholders. Change agents and leaders have the ability to find institutional support, such as funding, bureaucratic clout and/or space within the organization for change.

PEP participants also noted providing how-to templates to their staff, supporting them in tangible ways by demonstrating how the new changes will work for them. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) initiated efforts to address the demands of evidence and evaluation and then backed that up with a list of solutions for its field staff. This included guidance such as:

- evaluation and then backed that up with a list of solutions for its field staff.
- globally accepted indicators that incorporate theories of change;
- programs based on theories of change by using “if..., then” statements;

- results statement from monitoring and evaluation information; and
- requirements to link M&E information to overall strategies and objectives.

These steps actually helped CRS field staff see changed community perceptions, build stronger relationships with stakeholders, understand which outcomes the community valued most, and become more engaged in the evaluation process.

Communication – Casting a Vision

A simple vision can motivate and inspire your team. An early investment in time and effort to get people on the same page is well worth it since perceived relevancy, and even urgency, can foster intended change.

For instance, Mercy Corps has a headquarters-field structure that necessitates that leadership in one part of the world consistently reviews the strategies that affect their work in other parts of the world. Mercy Corps' leadership at their global headquarters asks questions like: how do we improve our efforts to get evidence? What should we do when former policies did not support evaluation? What can be done given the scenarios in which we work do not offer the conditions that make for ideal evaluation?

From their headquarters, they have cast a vision to start to move forward with evaluation, even if conditions are not ideal. Collectively, they then look for solutions to current evaluation problems that support their staff.

Realistic Expectations and Consistency of Purpose

Change can take different forms and paths. PEP participants recommended allowing change to emerge instead of forcing it, allowing for “successful change” to take at least two years and supporting change with institutional internal systems, such as building capacity among personnel and providing incentives and skills and performance metrics in job responsibilities.

When International Alert (IA) decided to examine their own internal evaluation, the process was initiated by key program directors, but it was also supported by the organization's highest executive leadership team. The organization spent 12 months on the process of reflection and recommendations for their own internal changes - before a funder, or negative external attention, forced them to take steps to improve their practices. IA carried over their focus on evaluation to their hiring practices and internal employee review processes – linking evaluation and reflective thinking to job expectations and performance measurements.⁵

⁵For more information on how the UK-based organization evaluated their own processes and then set about to build organization capacity for evaluation, visit the Alliance for Peacebuilding Meeting Three Notes, http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/resource/resmgr/Docs/USIP_and_AfP_PEP_Meeting_Thr.pdf, or International Alert, <http://www.international-alert.org/>.

First Steps are Big Steps

Change, however, does not need to be a top-down, multi-year process that will encompass the entire organization. Change is usually expected to be handled in a formal way, but informal change can be even more common, and as a result, effective, in the cultures in which we work. Encompassing informal conversations and less formal feedback mechanisms into your intended change can help ensure the process is not just top-down but rather, build trust and mitigate fears.

Change can also start with an internal reflection process. The American Friends Service Committee did just that when they conducted an evaluation in a framework that emphasized organizational program learning.

Internal Reflection - the Genesis of Organizational Change

In the fall of 2010, American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) decided to reflect on how the organization was reaching the largest portion of their four-goal Strategic Plan: Peace and Conflict Resolution.

An evaluation of this goal conducted by PEER Associates incorporated work over the past five years, investigated progress toward meeting the goal and strategic objectives.

The results of the evaluation will inform our next strategic plan and be used as an organizational learning tool to continue a dialogue on increasing program effectiveness.

Specific evaluation findings included:

- The AFSC peace goal and objectives were seen as relevant, but diffuse.
- AFSC peace work was reported to be most effective at individual and community levels. Claims of impact at national and international levels were difficult to substantiate.
- No one practical method for AFSC peace programs emerged as most effective, as interviewees offered a variety of best practices employed by AFSC.

Some of the most important recommendations included:

- Articulate one or more theories of change, and consider looking for theories of change in specified practical methods.

Whenever possible, choose measurable outcomes and indicators of impact.

- Look to the “bright spots” within AFSC for guidance - find the AFSC peace and conflict resolution programs that are demonstrating success and study those programs intently and think about how they could be replicated.
- Narrow the scope of peace programs to increase their depth.

After the evaluation was completed, the findings and recommendations were discussed in several internal AFSC fora—one with all regional directors and two other meetings of program staff worldwide. Since the results came in just before three year program plans were due, AFSC was able to revise its training on writing program plans with more specific and focused measurable indicators and short-medium-long term results. AFSC expects to start collecting in-depth data in the next fiscal year to gain even greater insights into program management effectiveness and accomplishments.

Alan Lessik
Assistant General Secretary for Goal Leadership, American Friends
Service Committee

By taking the time and resources to reflect on the progress being made on their peace and conflict resolution goals, AFSC made an important and fundamental step in improving their programs and impact. The additional step of integrating the recommendations from their internal reflection and embedding its use into the organization in tangible ways ensures the report was not just completed, but used. Feedback is only valuable if it is looped back in to organizational practices and policies.

Change is challenging, but it is not unattainable. Everyone at your organization may not be ready to leap into a new M&E system or provide funding support for your partners to be able to do so, but building readiness through organizational change will help. Organizations ready for change usually have people within the organization that are welcomed to ask “why” questions and who thoughtfully examine projects and new initiatives in an evaluative processes.

Change has costs. As a result, it will not just spontaneously happen. Being a champion of supporting less tangible and long-term projects like organizational change can be lonely, but framed as organizational capacity building with the payoff of an improved understanding of your programs’ impact, organizational change can be an attractive investment.

Conclusion: The Multiplier Effect of Shared Knowledge

Whether the purpose of your evaluation is for learning, accountability or compliance, the role of evaluation in your peacebuilding program is a vital and essential one. Well executed evaluations can lead to stronger relationships with local stakeholders, more effective programs and the various consequential benefits of both of these outcomes. Many of the barriers we face are rooted in a shroud of mystery that still surrounds peacebuilding evaluation. Collectively, the field can also evolve its practices in two ways: 1) with greater openness and transparency in the lessons we are learning; and 2) by focusing on the skills and expertise of the peacebuilding funders and implementers, including the next generation of practitioners and scholars. This process will be facilitated by a common understanding of the uses, benefits and costs of evaluation.

Field-Wide Transparency: Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Transfer

Transparency with our evaluations and learning is a particularly large institutional hurdle since evaluations can expose program or institutional weaknesses. Craig Zelizer, Associate Director of the Conflict Resolution Master's Program at the Department of Government at Georgetown University, highlights the dynamics behind our hesitancy toward transparency and examines those institutions that are leading the way in online information dissemination for peacebuilding evaluation.

Well executed evaluations can lead to stronger relationships with local stakeholders, more effective programs and the various consequential benefits of both of these outcomes.

Challenges and Opportunities in Online Networks and Social Impact

One of the critical challenges in the peacebuilding field is how to facilitate sharing of best practices, lessons learned from successes and failures and networking around issues of evaluation and impact measurement. Given the hundreds of institutions around the world funding, implementing and evaluating peacebuilding efforts to date, it has proven challenging to find a common means for sharing.

There are several challenges to developing a key online platform related to impact and evaluation. First, is that so far there has been no central platform for peacebuilding and evaluation. The Institutional Learning Team at Search for Common Ground is currently working with American University's Peacebuilding and Development Institute and web developers to create a Learning Portal for DM&E for Peacebuilding that will support a community of practice and foster learning. Second, due to concerns over proprietary information, and lack of an appropriate platform, many organizations are reluctant to post their M&E work in public settings. This hampers cross-institutional learning among the field, and is something that some pioneering organizations are starting to challenge by placing most of their evaluation work online and available for the wider public. Third, as discussed elsewhere in this paper, many organizations are reluctant to share information about challenges or failures of their work out of concern that this may affect future funding and programming opportunities. Finally, funding for evaluation work and staffing in many cases is limited, and to truly facilitate cross-institutional learning requires a more significant investment in dedicated staffing and programming.

Fortunately, in the last few years, social networking tools have started to become an essential source of learning and programming around evaluation. The tools range from simple listservs to social networking portals to general efforts focused on evaluation/impact in the larger international development field. These online platforms provide a vital means for training, learning, sharing and more. Below is a brief list of some of the key online platforms related to evaluation or impact:

- Development Exchange Clearinghouse – (<http://dec.usaid.gov/index.cfm>)
A USAID supported site that contains many evaluations of agency funded projects.

- International Initiative for Impact Evaluations (<http://www.3ieimpact.org>) Promoting best practices, research and funding on impact evaluations in conflict and development.
- Monitoring and Evaluation News (<http://mande.co.uk>) Website and listserv with extensive discussions of best practices in larger field of international development.
- Peace and Collaborative Development Network (<http://internationalpeaceandconflict.org>) – Leading online network connecting over 20,000 professionals and organizations. Extensive discussions of how to conduct evaluations.
- Search for Common Ground Institutional Learning (http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilt/dme_home.html) publishes all of its evaluations online. SFCG will launch the online DME community learning in Fall 2011.

Craig Zelizer
Associate Director of the Conflict Resolution MA Program
Department of Government
Georgetown University

Opportunities do exist for the field to develop collectives of knowledge. As you engage in internal discussions and discussions with your partners, consider how to build in internal and external mechanisms that encourage, through rewards and incentives, both better evaluation practices and transparency with the resulting lessons learned.

A Note for Funders

The participants and mechanisms in complex systems are unlikely to change without incentives. As you discuss improving evaluation practices with your partners and increasing their willingness to be transparent with their evaluations and lessons learned, they will most likely need external support for those internal changes. Dramatic changes such as this will have a significantly higher chance of success if adequate resources are provided. If you need viable and concrete evaluations from your partners, a good starting point is to provide your partner with the resources necessary for good evaluations.

Comfort with good evaluation and transparency build off one another – as the former increases the latter does as well. The relationship between the two can become symbiotic and self-sustaining. A first step of course will come from institutional support for improved evaluation and a clear and common internal understanding of what constitutes a “successful program.” Even programs that do not meet their intended goals can be successful - violence can be reduced even if attitudes are not fundamentally changed and stability can be increased even if truth and reconciliation commissions have not yet convicted perpetrators. Accepting, and sometimes even celebrating programs that are less than perfect, starts with internal support. This includes addressing the potential wariness to admit or discuss failure within a single implementing organization because of professional reputation and personal career goals.

Fostered Transparency: Teaching Skills and Changing Norms

As the field looks to improving its current practices, we also need to consider preparing the next generation of peacebuilders for rigorous evaluation and transparent learning. Susan Allen Nan, Assistant Professor at the School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, below discusses how she handles the challenges of teaching an evolving subject like peacebuilding evaluation.

Teaching Evaluation to Scholar-Practitioners

Evaluation in the field is a fast-developing area. Six years ago, I developed a course on evaluation for the International Peace and Conflict Resolution Program at American University. A year later, I reworked the course to introduce new material and introduced it at George Mason University. With innovations from faculty colleagues and changes within the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR), I find the course requires continued updating and revision.

Students demand guidance in evaluation both for research and practice. To provide a quality course that meets both of these needs requires that the pedagogy and course content continue to develop.

Having just completed the Spring 2011 course at S-CAR, where Dr. Mara Schoeny and I taught sections of Conflict Assessment and Program Evaluation, I see three areas I hope to introduce for the course next time around:

Developmental Evaluation

Developmental Evaluation by Michael Quinn Patton is a late 2010 book that I learned about at the 2010 American Evaluation Association Conference. I intend to assign this book in its entirety in future courses because peacebuilding evaluation occurs so often in developmental contexts. Quinn Patton's instructions on how to monitor, respond to and innovate in complex systems are useful for our still developing field. In a field where action research has proven its utility, many scholar-practitioners will find developmental evaluation useful in their research and practice.

Theories and Indicators of Change

Articulating theories of change has been a developing area of evaluation in our field for many years (e.g. Woodrow and Chigas, 2004 and Church and Rogers, 2005). Over several years, the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation at USAID developed a matrix of the core theories of change in our field. I was part of an effort to update the matrix, ensuring it reflects core theories of change, and also to develop example indicators of change relevant to each set of theories.

The discussions amongst my colleagues were fascinating. In particular, I was struck by the real worries that a "cut and paste" approach to theories of change would prevent quality conflict resolution programming in response to contextual factors. Theories of change driving programming need to be open to change themselves as the context changes, and indicators of change must be contextually relevant. I plan to introduce further exercises on articulating theories of change and developing appropriate indicators in future iterations of the course.

Peacebuilding Evaluation Project insights

Finally, PEP, and particularly this report, will be another new addition to the course. The conversations amongst funders, practitioners, and scholar-practitioners led to the many new insights consolidated in the surrounding pages. Particularly the systemic approach to understanding evaluation in a real-world context will be helpful in orienting students.

Susan Allen Nan
Assistant Professor, School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution
George Mason University

Opportunities to Grow, Collaborate and Learn

As the peacebuilding field evolves our individual evaluation practices and partnerships, focus on collective approaches cannot be ignored. Fostering partnerships that both get at your intended peacebuilding goals and build capacity for improved evaluation and program design takes time and effort. Like the long-term goals, with built-in incremental steps, we set for ourselves in our peacebuilding programs, the evolution of peacebuilding evaluation is a multi-step process.

Fortunately, many are grappling with the same evaluation challenges. The work of our counterparts in evaluation and international relief and development fields is available for our use. Perhaps most importantly, many organizations and agencies within the peacebuilding field are ready to address the issues around evaluation in very real and tangible ways. Several have even begun to experiment with new models, tools and concepts. We are by no means alone in our efforts to show impact and integrate our learning – and certainly not alone in our efforts to provide better support to the people we serve around the world.

Appendix One:

PEP Participant List

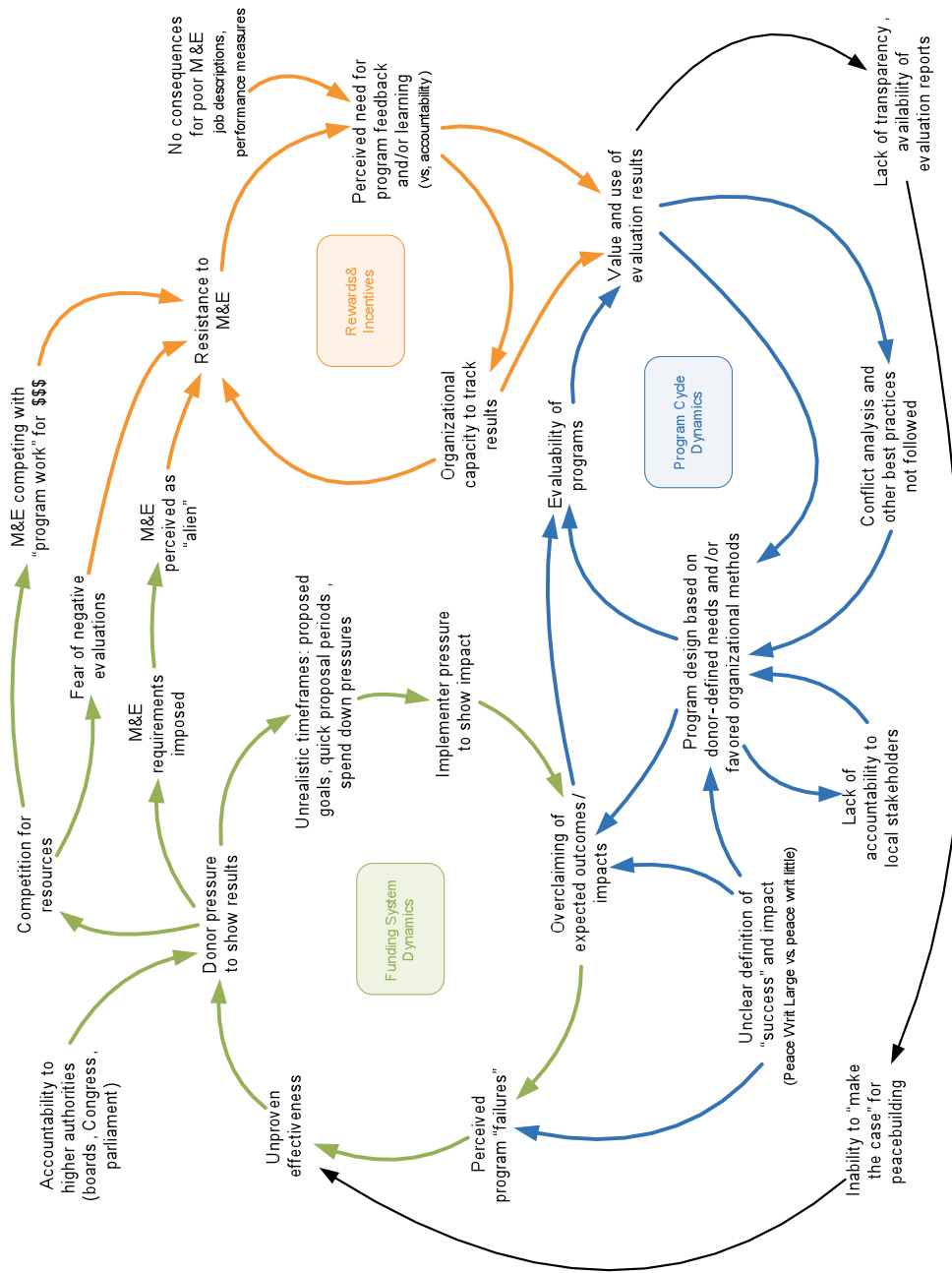
3D Security	Jennifer Kuiper	Director, Israeli Palestinian Congressional Initiative
Alliance for Peacebuilding	Chic Dambach	President and CEO
Alliance for Peacebuilding	Melanie Kawano-Chiu	Program Manager, the BEFORE Project
American Friends Service Committee	Alan Lessik	Assistant General Secretary for Goal Leadership
Besa Consulting	Cheyenne Scharbatke-Church*	Principal
CARE International	Carlisle Levine	Senior Technical Advisor, Advocacy Evidence Systems and Impact Assessment
Carnegie Corporation of New York	Steve Del Rosso	Director, International Peace and Security
Catholic Relief Services	Tom Bamat**	Senior Technical Advisor, Justice & Peacebuilding
Catholic Relief Services	Aaron Chassy	Senior Technical Advisor, Governance
CDA Collaborative Learning	Peter Woodrow	Co-Director, Reflecting on Peace Practice Project
Columbia University	Mary Jo Larson	Associate Professor
Cypress Fund	Melanie Greenberg	Former President and Founder
George Mason University	Susan Allen Nan	Assistant Professor, School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution
Georgetown University	Craig Zelizer	Associate Director, Conflict Resolution Program
Humanity United	Meredith Blair	Associate Director of Research
Mediators Beyond Borders	Deborah Laufer	Board Member
Mercy Corps	Sharon Morris	Director, Conflict Management Group
Microsoft Corporation	Ted Okada	Director, U.S. Global Public Private Partnerships
PACT	Kipp Efinger	Program Officer, Peacebuilding and Democracy, Asia/Eurasia
Partners for Democratic Change	Julia Roig	President
S/CRS, US Department of State	Cynthia Irmer	Senior Conflict Prevention Officer
Search For Common Ground	Nick Oatley	Director, Institutional Learning Team
UN Peacebuilding Support Office	Stefan Rummel-Shapiro*	Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Advisor
UN Peacebuilding Support Office	Willemijn Van Lelyveld	Associate Expert
University of Denver	Tamra Pearson d'Estrée	Director, Conflict Resolution Institute's Center for Research & Practice
US Institute of Peace	Andy Blum	Senior Program Officer, Grant Program
US Institute of Peace	Lawrence Woocher	Senior Program Officer, Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention
USAID/Conflict Mitigation and Management	Kirby Reiling	Conflict Specialist, Technical Leadership
USAID/Office of Transition Initiatives	Eleanor Bedford*	Acting Team Leader, Applied Best Practices & Coordination
World Bank	Ozong Agborsangaya-Fiteu**	Consultant on Conflict, Crime, and Violence, Social Development Department
	Su Flickinger	Independent Consultant

* Attended one PEP meeting

** Confirmed attendance only

Appendix Two:

Dynamics and Syndromes in Peacebuilding Evaluation Map



Draft March 2011

Dynamics & Syndromes in Peacebuilding Evaluation

Dynamics & Syndromes of Peacebuilding Evaluation

Draft for discussion [March 2011]

The accompanying systems “map” is one representation of the ongoing dynamics that work to impede the effective evaluation of peacebuilding work, broadly defined. Many of the factors included in the mapping are drawn from issues identified in the first meeting of the Peacebuilding Evaluation Project in the spring of 2010. Additional factors were added by a small working group.¹ The group has also identified a number of countervailing positive factors in the field. The paragraphs below provide a narrative explanation of the systems map.

Funding System Dynamics

Government donors and private foundations operate under a number of pressures, primarily from higher authorities, including Congress and boards of directors—and ultimately to the general public. As a result of those pressures, donors have increasingly established requirements for the evaluation of peacebuilding work. At the same time, in many instances funding has been tightened, leading to competition for scarce resources—which also triggers fear regarding the possible consequences of a negative evaluation. In addition, some donor systems have proposed distorted goals for peacebuilding work, imposed unrealistic time frames for “completion” of peace efforts, short deadlines for proposal submission, and, once projects/programs have been approved, strong pressures to spend down funds according to log frames and work plans. These elements have passed the pressure for results from the donor to implementers.

Under pressure and competition, implementing agencies make unrealistic claims about the changes they can produce with limited time and resources. As a result, many peacebuilding programs are seen to “fail” under the terms of their own stated goals and objectives—or at least to underperform—and peacebuilding programs as a whole remain unproven in terms of their effectiveness in producing “peace” (itself poorly defined). The doubtful effectiveness itself increases the skepticism of governing bodies and reinforces the pressure on donors to show results.

Organizational Rewards and Incentives

The scarcity of funds leads program staff to perceive that M&E competes with program activities (“If we have to spend \$10,000 on an evaluation, that will mean fewer program events...”), which contributes to resistance to M&E, also reinforced by the fear of negative evaluations noted above. At the same time donor requirements for evaluation reinforce the impression that M&E is an alien activity imposed from the outside, rather than an integral part of good programming practice. Many organizations fail to include

¹Susan Allen Nan, Melanie Kawano-Chiu, Tamra Pearson d’Estree, and Peter Woodrow.

monitoring and evaluation as an element of personnel performance—and hence there are no consequences for poor M&E practices. Coupled with staff resistance, there is low perceived need for programmatic feedback mechanisms and/or learning. As a low priority, organizational capacity for M&E is not developed, increasing the threshold difficulty for implementing M&E and reinforcing resistance to M&E integration.

Program Cycle Dynamics

Given low perceived priority on feedback and learning and inadequate organizational capacity, the information available and the quality of evaluations is often poor, leading to low usage of the results in further programming. Even if evaluations point to accepted best practices in the field (such as the need for conflict analysis), field programs are generally designed in response to donor RFPs (or other instruments) or in line with the organization's favorite methodologies ("We do dialogue work, there must be a need for dialogue in this conflict..."). In addition, the overall system is not designed to be accountable to local needs and priorities. Meanwhile, the peacebuilding field as a whole has been unable to clarify what "success" should look like, and whether programs should be measured according to their contribution to a broader societal level peace or achievement of local level successes in conflict resolution. The distorted program design and unclear definition of success reinforce the tendency to over-claim and the resulting sense of failed programming, and also impair the "evaluability" of programs, which, in turn, contributes to less useful evaluations and learning.

Finally, low quality evaluations result in a general unwillingness to share evaluation reports (lack of transparency), which contributes to the inability of the field to make the case for peacebuilding, reinforcing the unproven effectiveness of this valuable work.

Countervailing Positive Factors Supporting Peacebuilding M&E

- Growing acceptance of the need to evaluate/learn and to incorporate ongoing feedback mechanisms into programming
- Donors are increasingly emphasizing learning from programs (in addition to accountability)
- Several large iNGOs are integrating learning into organizational structures
- Increased interest in exploring a range of evaluation methods, including empowerment evaluation, action evaluation, developmental evaluation, most significant change and theory-based models, as possibly useful for peacebuilding evaluation

- Evaluation experts increasingly consulted throughout program implementation
- Increased efforts by program implementers to identify explicit theories of change and donor work on definitions (CMM project)
- Increased interest in exploring a range of evaluation methods, including empowerment evaluation, action evaluation, developmental evaluation, most significant change and theory-based models, as possibly useful for peacebuilding evaluation
- Conflict analysis processes are applied during design processes (such as, USAID ICAF), providing a form of baseline information
- Collaboration on regional/national projects in evaluation
- Efforts to make evaluations open to public analysis and an open evaluation database
- Acceptance of community level contributions to peace
- There is innovation for evaluation in other dynamic and complex fields that may help the peacebuilding field
- Evaluation experts increasingly consulted throughout program implementation
- Increased efforts by program implementers to identify explicit theories of change and donor work on definitions (CMM project)
- Increased interest in exploring a range of evaluation methods, including empowerment evaluation, action evaluation, developmental evaluation, most significant change and theory-based models, as possibly useful for peacebuilding evaluation
- Conflict analysis processes are applied during design processes (such as, USAID ICAF), providing a form of baseline information
- Collaboration on regional/national projects in evaluation
- Efforts to make evaluations open to public analysis and an open evaluation database
- Acceptance of community level contributions to peace
- There is innovation for evaluation in other dynamic and complex fields that may help the peacebuilding field

Appendix Three:

Additional Reading

Allen Nan, Sue. "Theories of Change and Indicator Development in Conflict Bamberger, Michael, Jim Rugh, and Linda Mabry. *RealWorld Evaluation: Working Under Budget, Time, Data, and Political Constraints*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006.

Church, Cheyanne and Mark Rogers. *Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring & Evaluation in Conflict Transformation Programmes*. Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 2005.
http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilr/ilt_manualpage.html.

Davies, Rick, and Jess Dart. *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique: a Guide to Its Use*. Cambridge, UK: Rick Davies, 2007.
<http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf>.

Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Improvement Plan. *International Alert*, 2006.

D'Estree, Tamra Pearson, Larissa Fast, Joshua Weiss, and Monica Jakobsen. (2001) "Changing the Debate about 'Success' in Conflict Resolution Efforts." *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 17., no. 2. pp. 101-113.

Elliot, Michael, Tamra Pearson D'Estree, and Sanda Kaufman. "Evaluation as a Tool for Reflection." *Beyond Intractability - More Constructive Approaches to Destructive Conflict*. Sept. 2003.
http://beyondintractability.org/essay/Evaluation_Reflection/?nid=1268.

Evaluating Development Co-operation Summary of Key Norms and Standards 2nd ed. Development Assistance Committee, 2006. OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation.
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/12/56/41612905.pdf>.

Gasper, Des. *Evaluating the "Logical Framework Approach": towards Learning-oriented Development Evaluation*. The Hague, the Netherlands: Institute of Social Studies, 1999.
<http://publishing.eur.nl/ir/repub/asset/19048/wp303.pdf>.

Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2009.
<http://www.usip.org/publications/guiding-principles-stabilization-and-reconstruction>.

Lederach, John Paul, et al., Reflective Peacebuilding: A Planning, Monitoring and Learning Toolkit. The Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace, University of Notre Dame, Indiana and Catholic Relief Services Southeast Asia, 2007. http://crs.org/publications/showpdf.cfm?pdf_id=80 (and on course homepage).

Natsios, Andrew. "The Clash of the Counter-bureaucracy and Development." Center for Global Development. 13 July 2010.
<http://www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/1424271>.

Patton, Michael Q. "Conceptualizing the Intervention: Alternatives for Evaluating Theories of Change." Utilization-focused Evaluation. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008. 333-37. Web. http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/22861_Chapter_10.pdf.

Ross, Marc Howard. (2000) "'Good-Enough' Isn't So Bad: Thinking about success and failure in ethnic conflict management" Peace and conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology 6(1). pp. 27-47.

Search for Common Ground. "Evaluation Guidelines." July 2006.
http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/sfcg_evaluations.html.

Shapiro, Ilana (2006) "Extending the Framework of Inquiry: Theories of Change in Conflict Interventions" Berghof Handbook Dialogue Nr. 5. Berghof Center for Constructive Conflict Management.
http://www.berghof-handbook.net/uploads/download/dialogue5_shapiro_comm.pdf.

STEPS Steps to Transforming Evaluation Practice for Social Change,
<http://www.stepstoolkit.org/>.



Alliance for Peacebuilding

1320 19th Street, NW Suite 410 Washington, DC 20036

Tel: (202) 822-2047 Fax: (202) 822-2049

www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org