





The Effectiveness of a Competition in Building Program Evaluation Capacity

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Overview

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- Background
 - Methodology
 - Sample Characteristics
 - Results
 - Conclusions
 - Recommendations
 - How Results of This Evaluation Have Been Used

Background

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- Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993.
 - Evaluation culture at EPA.
 - Partnership to create the “Improving Results Program Evaluation Competition” (Competition).
 - Competition has made contract funding, technical support (evaluation advisors), and limited training available to selected programs.
 - At the time of the evaluation, 25 projects had been funded over 4 years, and were in various stages of completion.

Background

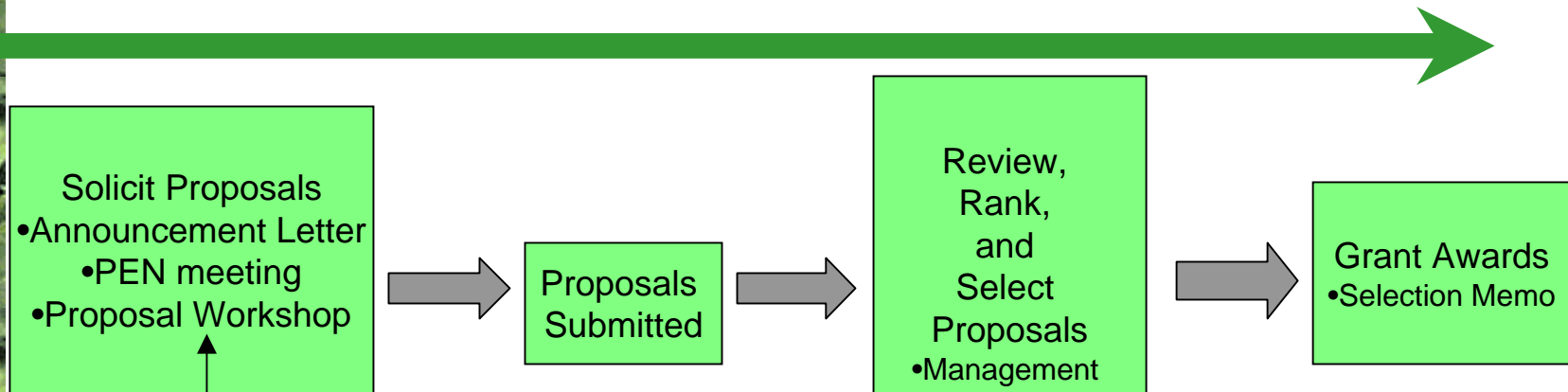
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- Projects focused on significant environmental or management challenges; have been small enough to be completed within resource constraints (~50K).
 - The overall goal of the Competition is to build evaluation capacity throughout EPA.
 - At the time of the evaluation, the Competition was about to enter into its 5th cycle.
 - Timeline (for this evaluation): ~6 months.
 - Resources (for this evaluation): 30% of 1 FTE, assistance from individuals throughout EPA, no contract funding.

Methodology (First Steps)



- 2 facilitated brainstorming sessions outlined Competition activities, outputs, outcomes, and assumptions.
- A logic model that mapped out these ideas was created.
- Broad evaluation questions were developed.
- An evaluation methodology was established.

Methodology (Logic Model—Example)



Assumptions:

- The competition stimulates interest in program evaluation (PE).
- The competition reaches the correct audience.
- Providing resources will lead to evaluations that otherwise would not be done.

Assumptions:

- Higher quality proposals produce higher quality evaluations.
- Funding a large number of small proposals is more effective in building capacity than funding a small number of large proposals.
- Interest in PE is generated.
- Non-selection of proposals does not have an adverse impact on future PE.

Methodology (Evaluation Questions)




- Process
 - Does the Competition process promote evaluation in the most effective way at EPA?
 - Does the Competition stimulate investment (of people/resources) in evaluation?
- Outcomes
 - Do Competition evaluations lead to non-Competition evaluations?



Methodology (Data Collection)

- Survey instruments and interview questions were developed based on methodology and evaluation questions.
- Staff and managers, funded and not funded through the competition, were surveyed via email.
- Selected managers, PE contacts, and evaluation advisors were interviewed in person, when possible.

Sample Characteristics (Response Rate)



Respondent Type	Total Contacted	Total Responded	Response Rate
Staff Funded	25	14	56.0%
Staff Unfunded	55	11	20.0%
Manager Funded	22	4	18.2%
Manager Unfunded	53	3	5.6%
Totals	165	32	19.4%

Sample Characteristics (Interviews)



- Interviews
 - 3 Program Evaluation Advisors.
 - 3 EPA Program Evaluation Contacts.
 - 2 Manager Contacts for Evaluated Programs.
 - 2 Upper Management Contacts.
- Overall sample was a representative mix of staff/managers and regional/headquarters.

Results (Competition Process)



- Who applied to the Competition?
 - Over Competition cycles the number and diversity of the proposals decreased.
- Who received Competition funding?
 - Over Competition cycles the diversity of funded programs decreased.

Results (Competition Process)

- What was the most important factor in entering the Competition?

Program needed to be evaluated.	69%
Ability to receive contractor support.	19%
Other.	6%
Desire to promote Program Evaluation within EPA.	6%
Meeting GPRA or annual report commitments.	0%
Wanted to learn more about Program Evaluation	0%

Results (Competition Process)

- Was the need to evaluate the program identified before hearing about the Competition?
 - Before: 75% of staff and managers
 - After: 13% of staff and managers
- However, evaluation advisors cited several major problems with evaluation knowledge within programs.
 - “The main difficulty was explaining the difference between telling success stories and an evaluation.”
 - “Focusing the evaluation was the most difficult part. The hardest questions to answer were what information they needed and why they needed it.”

Results (Competition Process)

- Would offices have conducted the evaluation without the assistance provided by the Competition?
 - 61% of managers and staff said their office would not have evaluated their program.
 - One manager said: “We did this evaluation because the resources were made available; we would not have done this on our own. The same amount of resources would also be needed in the future.”
 - For staff and managers not funded by the Competition, 29% still conducted some type of evaluation of their program.
 - One staff person said: “Without Competition funding we evaluated on a much smaller scale (9 facilities). We could have gotten more useful information with Competition funding.”

Results (Competition Process)

- Is the Competition the most effective way to support evaluation throughout EPA?
 - 53% of survey respondents felt it was the most effective way.
 - Most respondents who felt that the Competition was not the most effective support mechanism cited a comprehensive EPA program evaluation strategy with dedicated funding sources.
- Does the technical assistance add value to the evaluation?
 - 100% of funded staff respondents felt that the program evaluation advisor was essential to the evaluation.
 - “Advisors have been great, a lot of projects would have never gotten off the ground without them.”

Results (Competition Outcomes)


- Evaluation knowledge before and after.
 - On average, knowledge of staff respondents increased.
 - “The level of knowledge increased; staff felt more comfortable about what to do and were comfortable with the components of an evaluation.”
 - 86% of staff have used program evaluation tools or skills since completing the evaluation.

Results (Competition Outcomes)



- FTE before and after.
 - Funded staff reported a slight increase in FTEs dedicated to program evaluation.
- Program evaluation teams before and after.
 - 1 funded staff respondent reported that a program evaluation team had been created in their office after the evaluation.
 - 2 unfunded staff respondents reported that a program evaluation team had been created in their office after applying to the Competition.

Results (Competition Outcomes)


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- Willingness to participate in an evaluation before and after.
 - 71% of funded staff stated that they would be comfortable participating in an evaluation after the Competition funded evaluation.
 - Evaluation advisors generally agreed that staff were qualified to manage an evaluation after the Competition sponsored evaluation, rather than conduct one.

Results (Competition Outcomes)


- Staff and managers felt that evaluation recommendations were useful and that the evaluation met their expectations.
 - 22% of staff and managers reported that all recommendations had been used.
 - 78% reported that several recommendations had been used.
 - One manager said: “The evaluation found that most of our stakeholders were getting information from our website. This encouraged us to update the website on a more regular basis.”




Results (Competition Outcomes)

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- 100% of staff and managers said that the evaluation met their expectations.
 - 96% of respondents would recommend entering the Competition to individuals in their office or other offices.
 - 86% of respondents would recommend performing a program evaluation to individuals in their office or other offices.


General Conclusions

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- The Competition has had a positive impact on the culture of program evaluation at EPA, in a relatively short amount of time and with relatively few resources.
 - Because of external factors, it is difficult to determine the role of the Competition in building program evaluation capacity at EPA.
 - Budget and resource constraints will continue to have an effect on program evaluation at EPA.


Conclusions

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- Does the Competition process promote evaluation in the most effective way?
 - Many of the evaluations would not have been done without Competition funding.
 - The Competition enhances staff evaluation knowledge.
 - Technical assistance adds value to evaluations.
 - The most common suggestion for improvement was to increase Competition resources.


Conclusions

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- Does the Competition stimulate investment (of people/resources) in PE?
 - Some funded and non-funded offices reported creating evaluation teams in their offices after being involved with the Competition.
 - Managers saw value in allowing staff to participate in the Competition.
 - Investment is dependant on a variety of factors (budget constraints, staff time and knowledge, etc.).

Conclusions

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- Do Competition evaluations lead to non-Competition evaluations?
 - Some funded offices reported undertaking non-Competition funded evaluations.
 - Some offices that were not funded by the Competition conducted the proposed evaluations.
 - Regions and programs need contract resources and educated staff to conduct future evaluations.

Recommendations

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- Increase the accountability of managers and staff who participate in Competition funded evaluations.
 - Create pilot projects with Competition funding.
 - Link the Competition more closely to PART or GPRA.
 - Leverage Competition funds.
 - Develop a database that could track the success of evaluated programs and the Competition.
 - Create a community of evaluation practice.

How Results From This Evaluation Have Been Used



- Latest Competition cycle was funded at a level similar to past years.
- This competition cycle was seen as a transition year.
- Competition criteria were modified to fund proposals that address GPRA, PART, and/or innovation (capacity building vs. visibility of results).
- For some evaluations, technical assistance was increased.

Questions?

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