

Program evaluation—and why it shouldn't scare you

CMAA Matters

SUMMER 2010

The Technical Bulletin of Chamber Music America VOLUME 21, NO.3

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CMA Opportunities

CMA Acclaim Awards—National recognition for individuals, ensembles, or organizations whose chamber music activities have had significant cultural impact on a community or region. Awards recognize diversity of musical styles, range of audiences served, and geographic location. Any CMA member may submit a nomination, but the nominee need not be a member. No self-nominations.
DEADLINE: September 30, 2010.
FMI: www.chamber-music.org/gr-awards

CMA/ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming—Recognition for ensembles, presenters, and festivals with exceptional commitment to contemporary chamber music of all styles, including jazz and world music.
DEADLINE: October 1, 2010.
FMI: Susan Dadian (212) 242-2022, ext. 13, or sdadian@chamber-music.org

Presenting Jazz—Support to U.S. presenters for concert engagements of emerging and mid-career professional jazz ensembles.
DEADLINE: October 15, 2010.
FMI: Jeanette Vuocolo (212) 242-2022, ext. 17, or jvuocolo@chamber-music.org

CMA/FACE French-American Jazz Exchange—Support for collaborations of French and American jazz artists.
DEADLINE: October 22, 2010.
FMI: Jeanette Vuocolo (212) 242-2022, ext. 17, or jvuocolo@chamber-music.org

Other Opportunities

American Music Center/CAP Recording Grant—New initiative that provides funds for recordings of music by living American composers. Applications are accepted from composers; nonprofit professional performance ensembles; and nonprofit or commercial recording companies.
DEADLINE: July 15, 2010. FMI: www.amc.net

Trust for Mutual Understanding—Grants to nonprofits for cultural exchanges with institutions and individuals in Russia and Eastern/Central Europe. Letter of inquiry required prior to application.
DEADLINE: August 1, 2010. FMI: www.tmuny.org

Access to Artistic Excellence—NEA support for artistic excellence in projects that preserve the U.S. cultural heritage and provide access to the arts for all Americans.
DEADLINE: August 12, 2010.
FMI: www.nea.gov

Jerome Fund for New Music—Support for commissions by emerging composers, composer-performers, improvisers and sound artists.
DEADLINE: August 20, 2010.
FMI: www.composersforum.org

Mark Your Calendar!

Chamber Music America's
33rd National Conference
January 13–16, 2011
Westin New York at Times Square

Watch for updates at
www.chamber-music.org.



CMA Matters is made possible through the generous support of

by CHARLES COE

As you see it, your project's merit is self-evident. You'll be doing work of unquestionable social and aesthetic value; how could that not be a good thing? But there isn't a funder in the world who will take the worth of your project on faith. Just look at the grant application: it will inevitably ask for a description of your "evaluation model."

The phrase itself might call to mind charts and graphs and people with white lab coats. Don't panic: the process of program evaluation needn't be intimidating. But it does have to be built into the project from its inception. A well-thought-out program-evaluation plan goes a long way toward persuading potential funders that your project is a good investment.

Project evaluation isn't simply a matter of pleasing the grant-giver; it can also be a



valuable tool in helping you reach your goals. It's a key way of documenting and assessing *what actually happens*.

Any project presents its own storyline. The goal may be to improve your organization's marketing efforts, expand its community involvement or deliver an education outreach program. But in all cases, you're looking to tell a story with the following elements:

- 1 This situation at the project's outset
- 2 The ways the project will address the situation
- 3 The situation upon completion

A good program evaluation will involve probing, accurate assessments of each step along the way. It can be a critical step in

CMA Around The Country

CMA will present workshops and member showcases at the regional conferences coming up in August and September/October. Please register for these conferences through their websites.

Western Arts Alliance (WAA)
August 30–September 3, 2010
Long Beach, CA • www.westarts.org

CMA Ensemble Showcase
Wednesday, September 1, 8:00 P.M.
The concert is free and open to the public.

CMA Panel Discussion: Participatory Performances
September 2 (10:00–11:15 A.M.)
Moderated by John Steinmetz, composer, bassoonist; Neoteric ensemble; Adam Benjamin, jazz pianist
Onstage collaborations of music professionals with amateurs, students and audience members.

Midwest Arts Conference
September 13–16, 2010
Indianapolis, IN • www.artsmidwest.org

CMA Panel Discussion: Programming for “Generation Next”
September 14 (11:30 A.M.–12:30 P.M.)
Margaret M. Lioi, CEO, Chamber Music America, moderator; Simon Crookall, president and CEO, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra; David Skidmore, percussionist, Third Coast Percussion
Strategies for reaching 21-40 year-olds, a demographic underrepresented in audiences.

Performing Arts Exchange (PAE)
September 29–October 2, 2010
Pittsburgh, PA • www.southarts.org

Chamber Music Presenters’ Roundtable
October 1, 2010 (9:00-10:00 A.M.)
Moderated by Ellis Finger, with CMA staff and other participants

CMA Ensemble Showcase
August Wilson Center for African American Culture, 980 Liberty Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA
Friday, October 1, 6:00 P.M.
The concert is free and open to the public.

CMA Consultations
Regional conferences are an opportunity for our staff to meet with local CMA members. If you would like to schedule a consultation, please contact Marc Giosi at (212) 242-2022, ext. 14 or mgiosi@chamber-music.org. Registration at regional conferences is not required.

CMA Networking Events
In each of these cities, CMA will also host an evening gathering—an opportunity to meet other CMA members in an informal setting. Details will be announced over the summer on the CMA website and in the weekly *Accent* e-newsletters. We hope to see you there.

helping you design a program that’s consistent with your mission. It can identify ways to develop your organization’s infrastructure. And it can help you discover new ways to broaden and deepen your community ties.

WHY DOES PROGRAM EVALUATION MATTER?

- It helps you make sure the program you’re planning is consistent with your mission and resources.
- It provides a clear sense of what organizational capacity you need to develop, for this particular project and in general.
- Funders demand it.

FIND YOUR FOCUS

No evaluation can address all the issues that might come up in the course of a program. In devising the guidelines for a program evaluation: prioritize, prioritize, prioritize. Identify the most important things you want to achieve, and focus on those.

Let’s look at a typical project: The XYZ Ensemble was based in a town where the local schools provide only limited access to formal musical instruction. The ensemble wants to put together a program of one-hour coachings, two days a week, for two dozen students. As it devises its evaluation plan, the group decides to focus on three questions:

1. What effect will the program have on the students’ level of musical literacy?
2. How will it enhance their instrumental proficiency?
3. How many of the students will be interested in continuing with music lessons after the program concludes?

It’s important to choose goals that you have the expertise and resources to assess. You should especially avoid objectives that involve multiple, complex factors—it may be impossible to determine what role your program played in certain outcomes. The XYZ Ensemble, for instance, initially thought that one project goal might be improving students’ prospects of going to college. But the musicians soon realized that although they could note whether a particular student went on to higher education, they would not be able to determine what role their outreach program had played in the decision. With no way of proving that their musical instruction would lead students to pursue

higher education, they realized it would be unwise to state that as a program goal in their grant application.

KNOW THE TERRITORY

Any program evaluation starts with an accurate reckoning of the baseline situation: the state of affairs before the program starts. This is an absolutely necessary part of the process, since the core of any evaluation is documenting the difference between how the world looks before you started your project and how it looks after the project is done. It will not only help you tell your story; it will also ensure that the entire project proceeds based on the actual conditions rather than assumptions.

First, gather information from individuals in your target population. This can be collected in various ways:

- A simple questionnaire
- A more elaborate survey
- A series of interviews
- A combination of the above

There’s no one-size-fits-all approach. Yours should be based on the nature of the project, your organization’s resources and the nature of the community itself.

Take the XYZ Ensemble and its training initiative. Initially, the project proceeded under the supposition that most of the students would have little or no knowledge of music theory and little experience playing instrumental music. But before it got too involved designing its outreach program, the ensemble went through a very important step: testing its assumptions.

Early in the process, the group had two informal after-school meetings with some teachers, seeking their advice on how best to serve the students’ needs. One teacher mentioned that the town had two excellent church choirs that counted a number of the students as members. A subsequent test revealed two tiers of students: those who sang in choirs not only had a better understanding of music theory than their peers, they were also more musically sophisticated than the ensemble had first imagined. Armed with that data, the musicians were in a much better position to design a program based on what was actually happening, rather than on what they thought was happening.

FACT-FINDING: QUESTIONNAIRES VS. SURVEYS

In the information-gathering step of the process, you may want to elicit written responses to a series of questions. Here you

have a choice of two distinct methods: questionnaires and surveys.

Questionnaires are usually appropriate when the number of people to be sampled is very small and defined. It could be a list of ten questions for the residents of an assisted-living community, asking what kinds of music they like, if they ever attend live music events, whether evening or afternoon events would be of more interest, what kinds of transportation they use if the events are off site, and so on.

Simple questionnaires are also useful when you’re looking for information that’s hard to quantify, like “What kinds of cultural activities do you participate in?” or “How should we let people know about a chamber music series and encourage them to attend?”

Surveys are useful when you’re dealing with a larger population and looking to gather detailed, quantitative information. You might use a survey to analyze audience demographics, such as level of income and education and ethnic background. You might find out how many audience members are season subscribers as opposed to single-ticket buyers. You could ask how many members are interested in volunteering to assist the ensemble with event management, envelope stuffing, fundraising, and so on.

QUANTITATIVE OR QUALITATIVE?

Project evaluations are devised to answer various kinds of questions, depending on the organization planning the project, the funder and the nature of the project itself. Essentially, these questions fall into two categories: quantitative evaluation and qualitative evaluation. Put simply, it’s the difference between numbers and stories.

The XYZ Ensemble, in setting the criteria for its project evaluation, took a quantitative approach. The answers to all three of its questions involved measurement. You can test instrumental proficiency and understanding of music theory, and you can count how many students keep studying an instrument at the project’s conclusion. When a program target involves reaching out to students and new audiences, quantitative evaluation is a fairly obvious choice.

But numerical analysis may not be the most effective evaluation method for every project. As Albert Einstein said, “Not everything that can be counted, counts. And not everything that counts can be counted.” In such cases—especially when a program targets a small number of individuals—

the most powerful way to demonstrate its impact is through anecdotes:

- Students in a jazz outreach program talk about how studying an instrument helped them concentrate better in class, deal with day-to-day stress and develop self-confidence.
- The director of an assisted-living center describes how much the residents enjoyed a weekly lunchtime chamber music series, and how two residents with music backgrounds were inspired to start an ongoing “music club,” listening to the works of a particular composer and discussing them afterward.
- A father talks about how his autistic son started getting along better with his siblings after taking lessons with a percussion ensemble. The father says that he came home from work one evening to find his three children spread out on the living room carpet peacefully playing a board game—something he says never happened before his son started studying music.

All of these are examples of qualitative evaluation: anecdotal demonstrations of the project’s worth.

In their application guidelines, funders will describe the kinds of information-gathering they expect. A grant program that requests elaborate statistical analysis may not be a good fit for a small ensemble with an informal administration. If the funder guidelines leave room for qualitative evaluation, a little imagination on the ensemble’s part, in terms of what kinds of questions they ask their program participants, can often produce engaging and compelling stories.

WHO’S INTERESTED?

It isn’t necessarily just the funders and members of your own organization who might be interested in your program evaluation results. Others may include:

- The program’s beneficiaries
- The community at large
- Other organizations or agencies that are or could become funders of similar programs
- Policymakers
- The media

Be clear about who your beneficiaries are. And after your program is underway, take another look to see if the beneficiaries have changed.

WHERE CAN I GET HELP PLANNING MY EVALUATION?

- State arts councils
- Community development foundations
- Local college and university education departments
- The Internet (See “Some Helpful Online Resources,” below)

Charles Coe is a program officer for the Massachusetts Cultural Council Cultural Investment Portfolio

Some Helpful Online Resources

AMERICAN EVALUATION ASSOCIATION: www.eval.org

The AEA is an international professional association of evaluators devoted to the application and exploration of program evaluation, personnel evaluation, technology, and many other forms of evaluation. Its website includes a searchable directory of evaluators and useful links.

FREE MANAGEMENT LIBRARY: www.managementhelp.org

This complete online library provides technical assistance for both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. Click on the “Evaluations” link to access the “Basic Guide to Program Evaluation.”

CENTER FOR WHAT WORKS: www.whatworks.org

This website provides information on benchmarking: a process charities use to evaluate their policies and programs and compare them to those of similar organizations in their field. The site also includes a section that allows visitors to submit questions on nonprofit management, evaluation, fundraising, and technology; these will be answered by professionals in those fields.

INNONET’S WORKSTATION FOR INNOVATIVE NONPROFITS: www.innonet.org

This website offers interactive work sheets that nonprofit staff members can use to plan new programs and to develop budgets, grant applications, and evaluation and fundraising plans. InnoNet offers to review users’ completed plans free. The site also explains how to conduct focus-group discussions, interviews, and surveys, and provides sample evaluation tools.