Self-Evaluation in Youth Media and Technology Programs
A Report to the Time Warner Foundation

EDC

Education Development Center, Inc.
Laura Jeffers and Tony Streit
November 2003

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth media, efforts to engage young people in media making and technology, have grown significantly in recent years. Programs ranging from small youth-driven production teams to large multimedia centers now exist throughout the country. The goals of youth media programs vary broadly from giving young people a voice to engaging them in their communities, to facilitating the production of alternative works. For some programs, the development of technical expertise is a priority while for others technical skills are a secondary concern. The media makers and youth activists who founded many youth media programs were often less interested in measuring the impact of their work on participants than were their colleagues in the youth development field. As youth media programs have grown and begun to consider their sustainability, however, the need to demonstrate a range of impacts has become increasingly evident. As a result, many programs are now struggling to articulate the impact they wish to have on young people and to find ways to assess that impact as well as appropriate resources to support their assessment work.

This report reviews the resources now available to youth media programs wishing to conduct program and outcome evaluations, and begins to identify useful directions for the development of resources and technical assistance services. We believe that this information will help guide funders, technical assistance providers, and others in the development of additional materials and resources to support youth media practitioners in assessing their programs.

For this report we conducted a search for research, resources, and materials related to self-evaluation of youth media programs, conducted interviews with directors of nine youth media programs whose evaluation strategies range from relatively informal to quite sophisticated, and had conversations with a number of researchers and technical assistance providers who have worked with youth media programs in some capacity.

Key Findings

Through this scan, we obtained a snapshot of what some youth media and technology programs are currently doing in the way of evaluation. While this picture is by no means comprehensive, several themes and issues emerge from this work that seem likely to apply to other youth media programs:

- Evaluation is a common concern among practitioners. All the practitioners we heard from are concerned about evaluation. Even those that have developed relatively complex systems for understanding the impact of their work cite areas that they are not satisfied with.

- Evaluation practices vary widely in both format and content. Current practice runs the gamut from informal feedback and simple staff review of information to highly structured data collection and analysis. There are innovative practices out there, most frequently in older, more mature programs. This is likely because they have spent more time implementing the program and reflecting on the results and therefore can think in a more sophisticated way about which outcomes to look at and what it means to measure them.

- Staff reflection is a key component of these evaluation practices. Time for staff reflection is a critical element for many practitioners.

- Youth should be more involved in the evaluation process. Many practitioners would like to find ways for young people to be more centrally involved in the process of program evaluation.

- Alumni considered worthy of further study. The most frequently articulated wish for further evaluation was follow-up with program alumni.

- Outside support necessary to put evaluation practices in place. Aside from funding earmarked specifically for program evaluation, such as NAMAC's grant program, practitioners would welcome greater support for evaluation from funders and value the support of outside parties, such as the Bowne Foundation's workshops.

A number of challenges were also identified:

- Evaluation efforts are often limited by a lack of resources. Funding, the availability of both staff time and program time, and staff's capacity to conduct relevant evaluation activities can all have an impact on what work an organization is able to do.

- Assessing multimedia projects adds complexity to youth media evaluations. The complexity of program goals, which may include the creative process itself as well as the completed project, and young people's personal development as well as the acquisition of technical and production skills, can make comprehensive evaluation difficult to attain.

- The application of evaluation data is not clearly defined. While many program staff are articulate about their evaluation activities and what they are designed to measure, they are less clear about the process of applying the information they collect.

- Audience is a complicating factor. The unique relationship between media maker and audience creates a complex evaluation challenge that is often beyond the capacity of grassroots organizations. It also creates an opportunity for more authentic assessment.

- Making evaluations useful for funders and improving programs is a difficult balance to strike. There may be several goals for evaluation itself; information that is useful in reporting to funders may not be as useful in improving program.

Potential Directions for Technical Assistance

Funders and support organizations can play a critical role in helping youth media programs develop their capacity to conduct useful self-evaluation. Some strategies that merit consideration include:

- Providing subsidized evaluation consultation to help programs create and implement evaluation plans.

- Investing in the dissemination of existing youth media and technology specific evaluation tools and techniques:
  - A set of case studies that illustrate the techniques proven effective by long-serving agencies.
  - An archive of portfolio assessments that practitioners could look to for models.
  - Peer review techniques that demonstrate how evaluation can complement the kind of self-expression and dialogue that is evident in much youth work.

- Disseminating evaluation best practices from other arenas, such as service learning, in-school programs, etc.

- Designing a set of customizable tools specific to youth media programs. These might include:
  - Surveys ideally suited for youth media producers and their audiences.
  - Rubrics for looking at participant work.
  - Tools for analyzing journals, production notes, design elements, etc.

- Promoting evaluation as a central aspect of professional development training for anyone working in the field. This could include:
  - Partnerships between intermediaries for youth media and technology programs and those in the youth development and youth work field already actively pursuing professional development systems and certification programs.
  - Training for practitioners in designing and carrying out effective evaluation, engaging young people in the process, and using new technology for evaluation and assessment.

- Promoting communities of practice where practitioners can continually share evaluation tools and techniques as they pursue their own professional development.

INTRODUCTION

Youth media, efforts to engage young people in media making and technology, have grown significantly in recent years, aided by increasingly powerful and affordable information technologies. Early youth media programs struggled through the early 1990s to acquire costly equipment from clumsy portable tube video to linear and, more recently, non-linear editing systems. Today, anyone can acquire a digital camera and a laptop editing system that rivals the $50,000 Avid systems of only a decade ago for under $2,000 in almost any electronics store. This access to the essential tools of media production has brought thousands of educators and youth producers into the spotlight. Youth media programs now offer young people opportunities to experiment with everything from web design and graphic design to animation and digital photography to video editing and music engineering. Consequently, what once may have been perceived as a marginal, alternative activity for young people has become mainstream. Programs now exist throughout the country, ranging from small youth-driven production teams to large multimedia centers. ListenUp!, a network of 72 youth media organizations across the US, illustrates the diversity of programs with its partners spread among school-based initiatives, youth activism efforts, job training programs, and media literacy projects. The National Alliance of Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC), a 23-year old national coalition of media organizations, has experienced a sharp increase in the number of agencies offering youth programming as well as groups exclusively dedicated to youth production. The Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet), a national alliance of community-based technology efforts, has grown from 52 members in 1995 to more than 1,000 members, with many of these new members dedicated to youth services.

For many programs, informal information gathering and review of participants' media products have served as the primary strategies for assessing both program effectiveness and impact on participants. However, demand for greater accountability in education, including both formal and informal settings, has risen exponentially in the last few years, exerting tremendous pressure on schools and after school program to demonstrate the impact of their programs on students' skills development and achievement. For youth media programs, this call is especially challenging because rigorous impact measurement is a relatively new concern among many of these initiatives. Founded by media makers and youth activists, these programs were established foremost to give young people opportunities to express themselves, find their voice and produce alternative works. In many cases, meeting academic or technical objectives were of secondary importance. As programs have begun to explore their sustainability in a funding climate increasingly driven by results, the need to demonstrate a range of impacts has become increasingly evident. However, youth media programs, which support young people in the pursuit of creative project-based work, find it difficult to define and to measure the impact they have on the people they serve.

In recent years, practitioners and funders have identified demonstrating impact as one of several compelling reasons to conduct a youth media program evaluation. These were articulated by practitioners who participated in a 2001 online forum facilitated by NAMAC[1] as:

---

[1] Ross, J.M. (2001). Youth making media, making movies: A report from NAMAC's online salon. *Media arts information network*, Fall 2001. Accessed online, July 2003, at: http://www.namac.org/Newsletter/fall01/youth.html.

- Demonstrating program impact to [current and potential] funders
- Strengthening programs
- Advancing the field

That group also suggested generating greater credibility for stakeholders as a goal of program evaluation.

Practitioners and funders have also cited a number of obstacles and challenges in conducting meaningful program evaluation. One, which is common to many nonprofit organizations, is simply the amount of staff time and attention evaluation activities may demand. Evaluation is often approached as an add-on, requiring additional work on the part of staff often already stretched to the limit of their capacity by core program activities. A related factor is program staff's skill and capacity to analyze and make sense of the data that is collected. Few practitioners in the field come from a research background; while passionate about giving youth voice, they have little knowledge of how best to demonstrate their impact.

The complexity of these programs and the range of ways in which it is believed that they have impact pose yet more challenges to implementing meaningful evaluations. Many programs make their primary goal the development of social and emotional skills that are not as easily measured as technical proficiency. Other areas of intended impact that programs struggle to measure include young people's personal development as it relates to academics and careers, their development of production skills, the quality of the media produced, the impact of the media products on audiences, and the outcomes in terms of social change.

To date, little information on the impact of youth media programs is available, and most of what is available tends to be anecdotal in nature, with a few case studies such as *What Works in Youth Media: Case Studies from Around the World*,[2] published by the International Youth Foundation. Kathleen Tyner articulates the impact of this lack of research:

> "This is a vexing problem for media education in the United States, a classic 'vicious circle.' Media education does not have the scale to attract research and development resources, but without research and development projects, it cannot be scaled up. Without the benefit of scale, the more idiosyncratic its implementation and the less coherent its theory base. Thus, saddled with a confusing theory base and implementation strategy, it becomes more difficult to articulate a rationale that will marshal the research and development needed to launch, establish and grow media education in a systematic way."[3]

Still less is known about the ways that programs evaluate themselves, what resources they use, how they apply what they learn, and how effective they feel their self-evaluation efforts are. It is clear, however, that organizations are increasingly engaging in evaluation activities of some sort.

---

[2] Kinkade, S. & Macy, C. (2003). *What works in youth media: case studies from around the world.* Baltimore: International Youth Foundation. Accessed online, July 2003, at: http://www.makeaconnection.org/publications.asp.
[3] Tyner, K., facilitator. (1999). New directions for media education in the United States. *Media literacy: An online salon for educators*, July 15-August 15, 1999. Accessed online, July 2003, at: http://www.namac.org/Forums/newdir.html.

Investigative Team

Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) was approached by Time Warner Foundation to undertake an investigation of how youth technology and media programs evaluate their impact. EDC's YouthLearn Initiative and Center for Children and Technology have extensive knowledge of best practices for using technology and media to foster academic enrichment, job readiness, creative self-expression, and civic engagement in youth. *The YouthLearn Initiative* works with educators and youth development professionals on ways to to create exciting technology-based learning environments that enhance knowledge, exploration, and achievement. *The Center for Children and Technology's* (CCT) mission is to foster technology designs and uses that improve children's lives in general and in the classroom in particular, supporting engaged, active learning. EDC's investigative team was comprised of educators, researchers, and media artists with expertise in delivering and evaluating youth media and technology programs.

Report Objective

The purpose of this report is to review the resources currently available to youth media programs wishing to conduct program and outcome evaluations, and to begin to identify useful directions for further exploration. In an attempt to identify real tools and techniques that could be replicated easily by the field, we have focused on those programs that have had a degree of success at implementing internal methodologies and individualized tools rather than those that use outside evaluators and evaluation tools. It is our belief that this information will help guide funders, technical assistance providers, and others in the development of additional materials and resources to support youth media practitioners in assessing their programs.

We recognize that "evaluation" means many things to many people. For this report, we tend to use "evaluation" (and often "assessment" as well) to mean the process of examining program elements for the purpose of better understanding those elements and how they interact, and/or gauging their impact on staff, participants, community, and others. "Self-evaluation" refers to programs engaging in this process through internal methods without the direct assistance of an outside evaluator.

For this report we conducted a search for research, resources, and materials related to self-evaluation of youth media programs. As part of that search, we contacted a number of national leaders in the media arts and technology fields as well as local practitioners, seeking input on relevant information and promising practices. We also used the online discussion forum of YouthLearn and other networks to request input from thousands of practitioners nationwide, inviting them to share any tools, models, or processes that they have used successfully. We conducted interviews with staff members of nine youth media programs whose evaluation strategies range from relatively informal to quite sophisticated; five of these are current Time Warner community grantees, and the remaining four are known in the field for having developed some interesting and effective self-evaluation strategies. Finally, we had conversations with a number of researchers and technical assistance providers who have worked with youth media programs in some capacity.

We conducted interviews with:

Kim Alleyne, MYTOWN, Boston, MA
Vanessa Nagy Clay, Appalachian Media Institute (AMI), AppalShop, Whitesburg, KY
Steve Goodman, Educational Video Center (EVC), New York, NY
Keith Hefner, Youth Communication, New York, NY
Andres Hernandez, Street-Level Youth Media, Chicago, Il.
Davida Ingram, Video Machete, Chicago, IL
Czerina Patel, WNYC Radio Rookies, New York, NY
Tim Sutton, Global Action Project (G.A.P.), New York, NY
Jorge Valdivia, RadioArte, Chicago, IL

Descriptions of these programs can be found in the appendix.

We asked these practitioners to discuss the self-evaluation activities at their programs and their effectiveness, how they developed these strategies, what resources they used, and what else they would like to be able to do.

Additional information was provided by staff at:

GlobalKids, New York, NY
HarlemLive, New York, NY
Phillips Community Television, Minneapolis, MN
Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC), San Francisco, CA
Boys and Girls Clubs, Boston, MA
Just Think Foundation, San Francisco, CA
Media Awareness Network, Ottawa, Ontario
OpenWorld Learning, Denver, CO
Y-Press, Indianapolis, IN
Indiana Youth Institute, Indianapolis, IN

The information from the interviews is reported below. This section is followed by an outline of the tools and resources we were able to find. Finally, we discuss the implications of what we have found and make some suggestions for further work in this area.

YOUTH MEDIA SELF-EVALUATION PRACTICES

Based on our interviews, it appears that current self-evaluation practices in youth media programs address four essential categories: impact on participants, program implementation quality, youth media products, and audience impact.

The descriptions of the range of practices we found, below, are followed by snapshots of what the organizations we contacted are actually doing.

Impact on participants

The widest variety of assessment strategies relate to participant experience and impact, most frequently the skills and knowledge participants gain and changes in their attitudes and expectations. Surveys and evaluation forms are among the most common tools for collecting feedback on participants' experiences; many programs also consider informal conversations with participants around the work to be part of the assessment process.

Tracking systems
Some programs have developed systems for tracking young people's participation in their programs. Using an intake form, they collect contact and basic demographic information, reasons for coming to the program, previous experience, and may also include participants' goals for their work in the program. The program then maintains an ongoing record of participation, often by having participants sign in to record their activities each time they visit the program. Staff may also enter such information. In this way, youth media groups establish a cumulative record of a participant's history with the program is developed.

Information gathered from participants
Programs use a range of methods for involving young people in assessing their own work and experiences. Those mentioned by programs represented in this report include:

- Pre- and post-tests to gauge participants' skills development over time. These assessments may consist of or include a demonstration component in which participants are observed completing a task or presenting a piece of work;
- Questionnaires, surveys, and evaluation forms used to gauge changes in attitudes and expectations, participants' reflections on their own experiences and skills development, and participant satisfaction with the program;
- Free-writing, in which young people record stream of consciousness thoughts about their work and about the program;
- Portfolios of participant work, which may be reviewed by staff, but which are often used as the focus of a reflective process for participants;
- Journals in which young people keep a daily record of their experiences in the program; in some cases staff may ask them to focus on particular questions or ideas;
- Internal story grading system;
- Video taped assessments, in which young people record themselves offering verbal comments on the program and their own experiences.

Information gathered from staff through formal and informal face-to-face meetings
Program staff reported getting valuable information through a variety of interactions with participants. Often these interactions take the form of informal conversations with individual participants about the work and their progress; these are often held on a regular basis, sometimes daily. Some programs treat these interactions more systematically, reviewing participants' performance in a specified set of skills areas at each meeting. Some programs conduct interviews with participants, while others say they glean useful evaluative information through the process of editorial conferencing with young producers.

Information gathered from people outside the program
Programs may engage a wide range of people from the community and beyond in assessing impact on participants and providing feedback on their work. These may include:

- *Parents*. Some programs ask parents to fill out evaluation forms that address their perceptions of the impact on their children.
- *Staff at partner schools*. Where programs collaborate with schools, school personnel may be asked to contribute to participant assessment.
- *Media experts*. Some programs invite experts in their field to advise participants and critique their work.
- *Peers*. Many programs involve young people in a peer review process. This may take the form of face-to-face conversations or written critiques.
- *Community members and others not involved in the program itself*. Some programs conduct roundtable sessions, in which young people present their work to a panel of people who have no direct connection with the program. Together, they discuss the process of making the work and what they learned from it. The audience is usually invited to ask questions and offer feedback.
- *Audiences*. Program staff say that public screenings offer opportunities for producers to present their work to a larger audience, where they are also likely to discuss the work and answer questions. Programs may also solicit feedback from audiences/consumers regarding young people's performance in specific areas.

Follow-up with former participants
A few programs collect follow-up information from alumni. This often happens informally when past participants visit the program or call to request recommendations for college or jobs. In some cases, programs are conducting or planning to conduct more extensive interviews with and surveys of past participants.

Other approaches
Other approaches to assessing participant experiences that have been mentioned throughout our interviews with program staff include rubrics, certification checklists, case studies developed by program staff, and documentation/training manuals.

Program Implementation Quality

Program staff reported two primary approaches to assessing program implementation quality:

evaluation forms or surveys, and conversations of various definitions and formats.

Evaluation forms and surveys
These may be filled out by program staff, youth participants, teachers and staff at partner sites, and program administrators, and may be administered several times over the course of a year, or just once at the end of a project.

Meetings and conversations
Staff and participant interactions take a variety of forms, and often serve both program assessment goals and participant assessment goals. Most programs hold regular staff meetings to review progress and plan upcoming activities, and most invite participants to evaluate the program in some format. Some of the specific approaches reported by program staff are:

- "Pluses and wishes" conversations with participants, in which they talk about which aspects of the program work and which they wish were different;
- On-going study groups in which staff reflect on their own practice and examine various aspects of the program;
- One-on-one debriefing sessions between a program director and staff at the end of each project;
- Interviews with teachers at partner schools; and
- Young people video taping their assessments of the process at various points throughout a project.

In addition, at least one program whose staff we spoke with uses audience [reader] response as part of their evaluation of the program.

Media Product Critique

Ongoing assessment of young people's media products is an integral part of most programs. Product critique often is approached in several ways, including presentation and reflection by the producer, peer and media expert reviews, roundtable sessions that include people from the community, and audience feedback.

Audience Impact

Program use a variety of strategies to gauge impact on audience, as well. Most use audience response as an indicator of impact. For example, audience members at screenings and other presentations may offer comments on the work. Similarly, radio audiences call in their comments, and letters to the editors of print media provide a vehicle for sharing audience feedback. In many cases, programs actively solicit feedback from audiences through facilitated discussions and surveys. One program surveys interviewees who are the subjects of published stories to learn whether they received attention from readers as a result of the story.

THEMES AND ISSUES IN SELF-EVALUATION IN YOUTH MEDIA PROGRAMS

Program staff we spoke with view collecting data that illustrates their impact as an essential element of their ongoing work. Evaluation methods range widely, however, from simple techniques that draw information about participants' experience and audience response from program activities to complex, multidimensional, evaluation-specific work, and it appears that organizations with more comprehensive evaluation strategies are often those that have a longer history. In this section we discuss the kinds of self-evaluation activities these organizations conduct, what it takes to do this work, the challenges involved, and the program areas that staff would like to be able to examine further.

Current Practices

The most common self-evaluation approaches among the organizations we learned about were questionnaires, journals, and portfolios, and debriefing sessions with participants. The staff at many of the programs we investigated said that staff meetings and conferences can also be important elements in their evaluation.

With the exception of cases where an outside evaluator was retained or technical assistance was received, the majority of evaluation activities appear to have been inherited by current staff from their predecessors or developed through informal exchange with other practitioners. Generally, practitioners reported that evaluation processes evolved over time as a result of ideas and methods offered by new staff and practices developed collaboratively through formal and informal staff discussions.

Because evaluation activities are often integrated into program activities, practitioners found it difficult to report the number of hours or proportion of staff time devoted to evaluation. However, the General Manager at RadioArte estimated that evaluation activities consumed 30 percent of staff time. A Co-Director at Street-Level felt that, ideally, 25 percent of staff time should be devoted to evaluation activities, though the current reality is closer to 10-15 percent.

Practices in individual programs

Youth Communication has developed an extensive, multidimensional set of evaluation tools and practices to achieve what Publisher/Executive Director Keith Hefner calls a "triangulation" evaluation strategy that examines involved, inter-connected outcomes looking at many different indicators for the "coherent story." They use more than 20 evaluation tools that fall into two main categories: tools that relate to the creative process, and tools that relate to the content, or product. Process tools include: review of student writing portfolios, editorial conferencing, evaluations by teen writers, alumni surveys, alignment with relevant research findings, case studies, documentation/training manuals, and expert reviews. Content tools include: reader surveys, teacher surveys, teen staff review, executive director review/critique, reader response, sales and circulation, internal story grading system, field testing, and expert reviews and contests. Hefner notes:

"Some of those tools, like student evaluations and letters to the editor, are typical feedback/response mechanisms. Many of them are anecdotal, but because we collect, in effect, thousands of anecdotes, which we can analyze for patterns, they begin to transcend the category of 'mere' anecdote and become more like data. Many of the tools we use are 'proxy' measures that help us determine whether we are engaging in practices that others have found to be related in a significant way to our overall goals."

Video Machete evaluates its projects, participants, and facilitators, with a few goals in mind, such as improving the participation and performance of young people of color, part of the organization's "ongoing commitment to diversity in the technology field." Among their evaluation tools, Video Machete uses pre- and post-assessments with participants, which may include a demonstration component, distributes program administration evaluation forms to facilitators, and distributes audience surveys. An end-of-program evaluation asks participants such questions as what they enjoyed and what they would change about the program. Audience surveys are critical, Davida Ingram, Administrative Director, notes, "because for the argument that we are using community-based media to generate reactions to work, we need feedback from the audience." Analyzing the results of these evaluation measures is a collaborative effort for the program staff, Ingram reports. Using data from these measures, the administration team then creates final reports and makes decisions in the distribution of resources accordingly.

At RadioArte, General Manager Jorge Valdivia reports that youth participants and instructors as well as program staff participate in the evaluation process. Specifically, adult producers write bi-weekly reports on the progress of student committees; program staff meet and reflect on the last session prior to each new session, with discussions covering retention, student participation, quality of work, and topics for curriculum; program staff also meet periodically with instructors; and youth participants complete evaluations of classes and instructors.

EVC's strength is evaluating what kids learn in the documentary workshop, says EVC Executive Director Steve Goodman. In addition to keeping journals and portfolios of their work, young producers participate in roundtables, where they present their work and what they have learned to a small group of students and adults both from EVC and from outside the program. Producers explain the process of conceptualizing and creating the work, and the audience offers "warm" and "cool" feedback. Public screenings offer opportunities for producers to present their work to a larger audience, where they are also likely to discuss the work and answer questions. EVC conducts an ongoing staff study group, which also plays a role in program evaluation. The group provides staff with time to reflect on their own practice and examine various aspects of the program. Recently the group has focused on curriculum and learning goals, articulating what outcomes they want from each of the program components and thinking through the implications for professional development.

Street-Level Youth Media evaluates both product and process aspects of the program, says Drop-In Director Andres Hernandez. They look at the media products developed by participants and review the process of collaboration in working groups, assessing the degree to which young people are taking leadership roles, young people's media literacy skills, and the relationships between Street-Level instructors and the staff at the schools they partner with. This evaluation practice is often informal and embedded in the actual work. Screening final projects and

discussing what worked and what did not serves as an evaluation step that's incorporated into the media-making process. Young people are also encouraged to conduct their own evaluations, video taping their assessments of the process at various points throughout a project. Other methods used by Street-Level include student journals, individual and group interviews, and pre- and post surveys. Street-Level uses staff meetings that take place at least three times a year for critical reflection, looking at student work, journals, and written and video evaluations, and talking about process and products.

Global Action Project's assessment process includes questionnaires in which young people gauge their own skill levels and "pluses and wishes"—conversations in which participants talk about what aspects of the program work and which they wish were different—as well as free-writing, and video-taped interviews. The staff meets weekly to discuss the program, and the Program Director, Tim Sutton, conducts one-on-one debriefing sessions with staff at the end of each project. Sutton says that while both methods are effective, some groups respond better to one or the other. Older participants take the video interviews seriously, for instance, while free-writing seems to work better with younger participants. Of all of these methods, he feels the "pluses and wishes" is the most useful approach: "You get to hear explicitly what kids like and don't like, and what they want." Executive Director Meghan McDermott explains that much of GAP's approach to assessment was developed several years ago when the staff engaged in an intensive process of developing a logic model, which articulated the connections between program goals, program activities, and anticipated outcomes.

Czerina Patel, Producer at Radio Rookies, considers the informal assessment of young people's work to be a natural form of evaluation. She says that responses from others present in the studio as well as on-air and written listener feedback help keep the work from getting too formulaic. Evaluation forms for both participants and mentors are among the formal assessment strategies at Radio Rookies. In addition, Patel is so involved with day-do-day activities that she gets constant informal feedback and can often predict what participants will say on the evaluation forms. When preparing to hire a new staff person, for instance, discussions with participants helped her understand the personal and professional qualities they valued and what they felt would benefit the program. Patel says she hesitates to develop additional formal strategies for gathering participant feedback in part because so much information is already required of participants, such as biographies and enrollment forms, and she doesn't want to burden them further.

Karen Toering, Managing Director of 911 Media Arts Center, says that they use a set of evaluation metrics with participants at the beginning and end of each program cycle. In their Reel Grrls project, for instance, they look at participants' competency levels in technology and literacy and their creative story-telling skills, as well as the impact of their relationships with mentors. In addition, instructors and artists reflect on their engagement in the program, looking at such issues as whether expectations were met and whether the situation was conducive to learning. They haven't yet determined how best to evaluate a new initiative now in the planning stages, Native Lens, which engages tribal youth to improve literacy, technical competency, and communication skills. It is important that the tribal elders see the program as successful, but not yet clear how they will define success.

At 911 Media, the director of each project is responsible for getting the evaluation done and synthesizing the information they collect. Karen emphasizes that it requires a particular set of skills to pull meaning from that data, and that staff need professional development to learn how to read the data they're getting. They have found their assessment work tremendously helpful in improving program, however, and included technical assistance to improve assessment of outcomes in their grant request to the Time Warner Foundation.

Evaluation at AppalShop's Appalachian Media Institute includes pre- and post-questionnaires and daily check-ins with participants, and written evaluations and interviews with teachers at the schools they work with. They are currently planning to look up past interns to do some follow-up evaluation, and they'll be working with an outside evaluator in the fall, with a grant from NAMAC, to further develop their evaluation efforts. As in other organizations we talked with, Vanessa Nagy Clay says that the information they collect is usually processed informally, with AMI's two staff people responding to the suggestions they receive as appropriate.

MYTOWN has several evaluation activities in place. Kim Alleyne, manager of information and research practices, reports that new youth participants complete an intake form, with questions about Boston and public speaking. They also write out a goals statement for their participation in the program. After two or three weeks, the youth guide director meets individually with the youth guides to discuss their strengths and challenges, and reviews their performance in five competency areas (communication, leadership, critical thinking, cultural competence, and work readiness). At the midpoint and conclusion of the program, the director and youth guides fill out evaluation forms, reflecting on their performance and on the program. In addition, youth take time to reflect and give feedback after each event, either in written form or through discussion, and tourists also evaluate their guide's performance in the areas of content, delivery, etc.

In addition to collecting information from program participants and staff, Y-Press also surveys interviewees who are the subjects of published stories to get their feedback and to learn whether they received attention from readers as a result of the story. They have a 25-35 percent response rate. Obtaining evaluations from anyone who is not actively involved in the program is challenging, but proactive steps like this allow Y-Press and other organizations to generate the responses they are seeking to inform their evaluation strategy.

Phillips Community Television evaluation forms probe program impacts on behavior. The form, which addresses questions to both participants and their parents, requests both self-reflection on the part of the participant as well as a parent's perspective on the degree of change in a participant's behavior on such points as drug use, delinquency, and self-confidence, and along points that are more easily quantified, such as academic performance. The Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC) uses evaluation forms that ask participants to rate aspects of the program on a scale from 1 to 10 and to explain their choices, which allows program staff to learn what is behind the numbers. Administering a follow-up survey a few months after the conclusion of the program to find out how participants are using what they learned gives BAVC a valuable window on their program's impact.

Staff preparation and resources

While organizations may expect new hires to have some evaluation experience, most program staff have limited if any formal preparation for undertaking evaluation work. As Andres Hernandez points out, staff at Street-Level Youth Media are artists, not trained instructors, and, therefore, are unlikely to have formal experience with evaluation. Nonetheless, many of the organizations we talked with have not established an explicit approach to preparing staff to conduct evaluation activities. For many of them, both gathering and processing information are informal activities embedded in the program.

Several organizations did report some degree of staff preparation. Staff at both EVC and the Global Action Project have participated in evaluation trainings funded by the Bowne Foundation, and several organizations have received technical assistance grants from NAMAC. Youth Communication has assembled a Training Manual for staff, with components addressing evaluation practices. Because this is a living document, with amendments and edits being entered continuously, this organization cites the manual—and the process of updating the manual—as an important resource for professional development. Hefner feels that "the act of committing" their reflections on their work to this text is itself a valuable step in their evaluation process.

In seeking useful tools to measure their impact, program staff have drawn on a variety of resources for evaluation materials. Kim Alleyne of MYTOWN reported using materials from the Private Industry Council, the Corporation for National Service, the Service Learning 2000 Center, and Project STAR (Support and Training for Assessing Results). Andres Hernandez reported that one of Street-Level's funders, Girls Best Friend, makes evaluation materials available, and Street-Level has used materials from the Ms. Foundation for Women, as well. In both of these instances, the materials were developed with a focus on girls, but Hernandez says they could easily be adapted for general purposes. Street-Level has also acquired materials from CTCNet and staff have attended evaluation workshop conducted by the Department of Human Services.

Besides these instances, one of the youth programs that we heard from consulted service providers such as Innovation Network, CYFERnet (Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network), etc. to help them develop their evaluation tools.

A number of practitioners felt that at least some aspect of their evaluation work could be implemented by other programs. Steve Goodman, for instance, said that EVC's portfolio assessment could be adapted by other organizations, and nearly all the other practitioners that we interviewed said that self-evaluation strategies used at their programs could be used by other organizations. Youth Communications was an exception. Keith Hefner believes that the organization's "super-reflective practice," a comprehensive evaluation system that is deeply ingrained in the program activities, would be difficult to replicate without the kind of staff and resources that they have.

Challenges

The staff we talked with cited a number of challenges in conducting self-evaluation, many echoing

the participants in the NAMAC forum mentioned earlier in this report.

Defining Outcomes
The often interwoven and multidimensional outcomes sought by the programs, for instance, complicate data collection and analysis. Keith Hefner at Youth Communication said: "We've also tried to determine whether there are simple 'outcomes' that we could measure. We've always been envious of teen pregnancy prevention programs, for example, because they have one obvious and easy way to measure outcome. Our work with teens is holistic in the extreme, so pinning down a single outcome that would be meaningful to us does not work."

Davida Ingram of Video Machete also reported that the complexity of their program goals presented challenges. It is a "constellation of skills [we're] offering to participants, so we want to make sure we can articulate the results." For example, they seek to provide leadership skills, opportunities for creative expression, job opportunities, and expanded opportunities for college. Video Machete commented that they tend to get positive evaluations about their work, but they need to hear constructive criticism.

The development of the evaluation tools themselves presents challenges for many organizations. For instance, Kim Alleyne of MYTOWN reported that it can be hard to "ask questions that get at what you want." Moreover, they would like to be able to use tools besides forms to help prove to funders that they're doing evaluation. Alleyne complained that youth participants "get fed up with forms," but that they need to use them with enough frequency to obtain feedback "while it's fresh."

Establishing Validity
Keith Hefner says that staff at Youth Communication have also struggled with the question of scientific validity of their evaluation methods:

"We've thought long and hard about summative evaluation tools we might develop—that is, tools that might help us get scientifically valid measurements of relevant outcomes—and have concluded that there is probably no way to get scientifically satisfying measures of the impact of our work, at least for a reasonable cost. The simplest problems, such as randomized control groups, or teasing out the effects of intervening variables, are phenomenally complex and would defeat any attempt to determine with sound, scientific accuracy the impact of our work on the teens in our program. For example, motivation is a major factor we use when choosing teens for our program. We would never select a 'randomized' group."

Peter Levine of CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) shares Hefner's view. In Community Commons, a local youth technology project he has helped develop for the Prince George County school system, they have very limited resources and, consequently, have written off the notion that they could ever evaluate the program with any scientific accuracy. Like many similar efforts detailed in this report, youth join the Commons with a strong desire to participate and a general willingness to learn more about technology or media. Randomized groups would force the Commons and other programs to ignore youth who are truly interested in the programming. At the same time, Levine notes that some experimentation with randomly selected groups has been beneficial in demonstrating impact in other areas, such as voting and service learning, and could help inform the youth media and technology field of certain

inherent program benefits.

Allocating Time and Resources

Finding the time and resources to develop, implement, and continuously improve their evaluation practices is a challenge for many youth programs. Alleyne, for one, explained that it was difficult to find the time, especially when it meant detracting from program time for the youth and staff. Tim Sutton, who estimates that he has spent almost 100 percent of his time in the last two months on evaluation and reporting activities, echoed this concern. He said: "I understand the need for reports, to try to show skills development and trajectories of youth dynamics, show what happened for the year. But I get bogged down with evaluation stuff and don't get to program and vision."

Jorge Valdivia of RadioArte reported that the small size of the staff, and, therefore, the limits on staff time and capacity, presented challenges in prioritizing and completing evaluation. Indeed, many of the practitioners reported that finding the time to conduct evaluation activities can be challenging in light of their competing priorities.

Steve Goodman at EVC raised the question of how impact is defined, especially in the long term. If a young person becomes a documentary maker, he says, you can draw an obvious connection. But, he wonders, how does one understand impact when an EVC grad goes to work in an unrelated field? How does one measure the long-term impact of a shift in the way a participant looks at television, for instance, and how is this interpreted when there are any number of other influences in young people's lives?

Valdivia suggested that organizations, including his own, can easily "forget to involve youth in the decision-making process" and in program evaluation. Having an evaluation process in place that depends on youth input helps them meet this important challenge and goal. However, Alleyne raised a caution on this issue: one-to-one conferences and self-assessment forms may be new to youth participants. It could be the first time that they have had a private meeting and been asked to reflect on their work. As she noted, self-assessment is a skill that needs to be learned along with all the other programmatic goals.

Evaluation work in development

Many of the programs contacted for this report stated plans for improving the quality of their evaluation efforts. For example, RadioArte is working on a model for peer-to-peer review, a programming advisory committee, which they hope to implement in the next year or so. A number of respondents also reported engaging or seeking funding to engage an outside evaluator.

EVC is currently implementing three new evaluation activities. In one, a staffer who found it difficult to find the time to keep an extensive journal began jotting notes on file cards about critical events in her documentary workshop. She then went through the cards to see what themes emerged. This process has led EVC staff to think differently about how explicit they are about the kind of language professional video makers use in talking about and critiquing their work. With some support from a Bowne Foundation fellowship, the staffer plans to write up the process and her experiences with it. Goodman says that the support of an outside agency has been critical in enabling the staffer to pursue this effort.

EVC also received an evaluation technical assistance grant from NAMAC, which has enabled them to engage a group of graduate students to track down youth who have participated in EVC programs over the last 20 years and find out what impact it had from the participants' perspective. Goodman says that this information is of great interest to funders, but prior to the NAMAC grant, was difficult to communicate. He and his staff generally learn about participants' lives after EVC only if one of them needs a recommendation for college or a job.

Finally, EVC has plans to document key moments in the documentary workshop on video. The final product will include preliminary interviews with staff about their plans and expectations for the workshop, taped workshop sessions, debriefing discussions with both staff and students, and samples of student work.

This year, staff at Street-Level Youth Media will develop a logic model for each of their projects, which will be used as a benchmarking and assessment tool. They have received a significant grant to support professional development in the organization, and program evaluation and assessment will be one of the areas of focus.

While technology has greatly enhanced their program design, few agencies appear to be experimenting with applications of technology in the implementation of evaluation. Street-Level has been working for several years on an electronic assessment tool that would allow them to track participants' attendance and participation and obtain ongoing feedback from participants as well as provide an environment for staff to share curriculum and assessment tools. To date, no funders have been willing to invest in what is admittedly a costly experiment. At the same time, many broader youth-serving agencies have had limited success at using online tools to track participation and satisfaction.

Additional evaluation interests

Most of those interviewed voiced a desire to know more about the impact that their programs have on youth participants and expressed interest in building their evaluation capacity in relation to broader organizational goals. Davida Ingram of Video Machete reported that they have "never tracked comprehensively how their program has changed participants' views of the world and views of their communities." She expressed interest in doing a longitudinal study, over two years or so, to track how their participants use the skills they learn and how the program otherwise influences them. Several of the other people we interviewed were also interested in tracking youth impacts in the longer term, obtaining long-range data to better understand the effects of their work and to demonstrate the impact of their programs to funders.

Steve Goodman and AppalShop's Vanessa Nagy Clay would both like to explore the impact of media products on audiences and on communities. Goodman says: "The underlying belief is that if you make a tape about a social problem and screen it in a school and discuss it, then people's attitudes will change." EVC looked at this a few years ago (with the help of Bill Tally at CCT), and they found that tapes appeared to have the greatest impact in schools with good teachers and where audience members followed screenings and discussions by doing their own research and making media. Clay would like to go a step further and look at how the response of the community

affects young producers.

Jorge Valdivia at RadioArte recognizes the connection between effective evaluation and a well-trained staff. He would like to be able to offer the team time management and 'quality' management workshops—either one or a series of professional development events, with an evaluation component. Overall, he expressed interest in capacity-building activities that would increase the staff capacity to provide effective youth development programs. Andres Hernandez would also like to involve program participants themselves in action research projects.

Kim Alleyne from MYTOWN also wishes for support and other models for evaluation—and not to feel alone in doing this work. Tim Sutton feels that evaluation work at G.A.P. could benefit from the participation of an outside observer, someone who is not engaged in the day-to-day activities of G.A.P.'s programs, and who is not directly involved with participants. Other interests that came out of our conversations include developing evaluation strategies that are integrated into programs, better assessment of what media skills young people need and whether they are learning them effectively, assessing the accessibility of program sites and resources, and strategies for reducing the sense of isolation some staff feel in trying to address evaluation issues in their programs.

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER MEETING

On September 9, 2003, EDC held a meeting of youth media stakeholders to respond to an early draft of this report and broaden the discussion around effective self-evaluation methods. The one day session, held at Time Warner headquarters in New York, explored the inherent elements that make youth media powerful, promising approaches to self-evaluation, the critical factors of self-evaluation in youth media, and recommendations for responding to the challenges outlined in the discussion and this report. The following is a summary of that discussion, emphasizing those aspects of the conversation outside of those already detailed in this report. A list of attendees can be found in appendix B.

I. Time Warner Foundation goals

Time Warner Foundation staff articulated the principles at the center of their commitment to strengthening the youth media field. The Foundation sees youth media as a vehicle in the development of 21st century skills, particularly communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, and, as such, ideally suited to match the Foundation's current funding commitments. Specifically, the Foundation's current work is intended: (1) To ensure that young people gain skills, especially those 21st century skills; (2) To produce relevant materials useful to the youth media field as well as the broader youth development arena; and (3) To share best practices. The Foundation recognizes that many programs struggle to convey their effectiveness at skill development and other goals, and, consequently, they need help in the development of sound self-evaluation methods. The ability to articulate program impacts is seen as an essential capacity, separate from external evaluation or research.

The Foundation also voiced the need to assess the use of technology as a tool, both in program and in evaluation. Programs need common sense, easy to apply advice on how to integrate self-evaluation into programs. At the same time, Foundation staff encouraged grantees and experts in the field to push back against those assessment and evaluation approaches that are not useful or feasible with resources at hand. Embedded, thoughtful evaluation methods will ultimately help organizations be truly responsive to participants and accountable to stakeholders.

I. What is unique about youth media?

To begin the discussion, participants were asked to talk about the elements of youth media that they felt were unique. Despite a belief that there are highly valuable outcomes related to involvement in youth media, participants in the meeting were hesitant to define specific elements as unique; rather, the group suggested that youth media is unique in its particular combination of elements, a convergence of historical trajectories, which are also found in other approaches to youth development and to media arts and media literacy.

Specifically, participants identified several salient and powerful qualities that they attributed to the field of youth media, including:

The nature of the work

Youth media programs
- Are forms of youth development.
- Are inherently engaging and motivating to youth.
- Provide tools for project-based learning activities.
- Promote engaged teaching and learning.
- Make adult relationships central to the learning experience.
- Create works (ie, media products) that are transportable to different environments and contexts.
- Produce works that are immediately consumable by authors and audiences.
- Develop products that have the potential to impact audience and community.

Impact on Youth

Youth media programs
- Provide a vehicle for journalistic/investigative work and storytelling.
- Help youth become critical about media and develop media literacy skills.
- Offer young people an opportunity to create an image of themselves that counters those of mainstream media.
- Encourage teamwork and collaboration.
- Help young people become involved in their communities.
- Require a connection to audience that enhances connections to the community.

Elements Worth Measuring

- Product/portfolio
- Program
- Youth development
- Youth Impact: cognitive, behavioral, affective
- Audience impact: cognitive, behavioral, affective
- Life after leaving program

While not intended as a comprehensive portrait of the field, the discussion did help illustrate those key aspects of programs that practitioners value and focus their energy on, and began to highlight impact factors that might be addressed in program evaluation.

II. Potential approaches to effective self-assessment

According to meeting attendees, evaluation should be more important to the organization than to the funder so that it is truly driven by program goals. In addition, evaluation should apply what we already know about youth media in the way that it involves young people in a process, has a clear

purpose, and often encourages dialogue with a community or audience. It was noted that for self-evaluation to be effective, youth media agencies needed to ask "how and when" do program activities lead to skills development, suggesting a theory of change model to identify long-range goals and assumptions. Based on such a model, goals could be matched to related program activities and tracked. The next steps in this process would be to identify what counts as evidence and to whom and decide how data should be analyzed.

The general consensus amongst attendees was that good evaluation relies on good data-collection and analysis. In order to gauge impact on participants, for instance, groups must first collect good data about participants and their backgrounds to build a baseline. Furthermore, attendees suggested that sound evaluation of impact on participants should have pre- and post-testing embedded in the program to measure change over time. Attendees also discussed portfolio assessment – through which they can chart a participant's progress in the creative process, noting changes over time in story or structure – as a useful strategy for gauging impact on youth producers. Individualized portfolio assessment gives youth participants the chance to address the specifics of what they have learned and how. (In addition, portfolios offer the option of engaging outside researchers to conduct more rigorous assessments using rubrics to "score" participants' work.)

It would also be worth exploring assessment models used in the education field by classroom teachers.

Attendees noted that evidence of skill can be found in many places, though in some cases a researcher's eye may be needed to identify it. With training, agency staff could learn to identify data, processes, and tools that already exist in their programs, and then develop strategies for gathering additional evidence.

Attendees also highlighted a range of models for the collection of program information. For their own program improvement, though, they believed that it would be necessary for each program to create their own model for self-assessment, tailored to their expected outcomes.

Effective program evaluation requires that staff buy into the process. Program staff can play a critical role in data collection and analysis, though they may need training in effective observation and data collection. It also might be necessary to find opportunities for staff to work with outside researchers, especially for analysis and interpretation.

Attendees noted that it was also critical to think about how evaluation methods relate to the program from a youth participant's perspective. Too often, program participants say that seemingly disconnected data collection isolates them from the evaluation process and that they desire a more participatory approach.

Ultimately, attendees agreed that self-evaluation ought to be contained, user-friendly, accessible, and cheap and should model what many youth media groups attempt to teach youth – to ask the uncomfortable questions and, ultimately, hold the subjects (in this case the youth media programs) accountable.

III. *Additional questions and comments*

This discussion raised a number of challenging questions that could inform a deeper exploration of program and evaluation methodology. Those gathered agreed that part of the task ahead involves broadening funders' perspectives on youth media, and that impact research is the surest way of convincing funders that youth media programs are a sound investment. Funders and other stakeholders will surely want to know about those aspects of youth media that extend youth development, and those tools that show, specifically, what skills and knowledge youth acquire.

Inherent to the design of youth media is the ability to craft program content that links to a range of other community building efforts. Beyond basic skill development, other potential goals might include links to community development, workforce development, and college preparation. At the same time, it will be worthwhile to show how technology functions as both a core competency and a means to capture skill development or collect data.

Participants suggested that rigorous research in the form of randomized and/or quasi-experimental studies, while expensive and well beyond the capacity of individual programs, is needed to demonstrate the impact of the youth media field.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In our scan of evaluation tools and plans, we found a variety of materials including evaluation guides, reports and research papers, toolkits, surveys, questionnaires, rubrics, and certification checklists. These materials range from simple to complex, open-ended to highly circumscribed. In addition, the practitioners we heard from reported using portfolios and journals, tracking participation, competencies, and web site traffic, and carrying out other forms of monitoring and evaluation, such as participant interviews, in the course of their work.

General Program Assessment

With the increasing emphasis on assessment and evaluation in the human services field, more service providers and individual organizations are creating and sharing resources, including evaluation process plans and tools. These tools are not necessarily designed for youth media and technology programs, or even youth programs, but they provide information, methods, and tools that are applicable in some cases.

Evaluation Guides

A host of service providers, grantmakers, and other nonprofit organizations have produced general and specialized evaluation guides for practitioners. These guides provide background information and steps to implementing an evaluation plan. Depending on the user's preference and needs, s/he can read through a guide from front to back, or just reference particular sections. Evaluation guides are especially useful for walking practitioners through the process of designing tools and implementing an evaluation process. They tend to be more hands-on and applied than reports/research papers, but they offer more support and explanation, particularly with regard to assembling an integrated suite of tools, than individual instruments.

Among the organizations that have produced evaluations guides are:

> **Administration for Children & Families** published *The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation*. http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/core/pubs_reports/prog_mgr.html

> **Authenticity Consulting** provides evaluation workshops and guidebooks for non-profit organizations, which includes the *Basic Guide to Program Evaluation* by Carter McNamara. http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/fnl_eval.htm

> The **Distance Learning Resource Network** published a "sourcebook for evaluators" entitled *Assessing the Impact of Technology in Teaching and Learning*. http://www.dlrn.org/star/TechSbk.pdf

> **Girls Incorporated** has developed *Assess for Success*, a needs assessment and evaluation guide for its programs. http://www.girlsinc.org/ic/

> The **W.K. Kellogg Foundation** has produced two books for non-profits to assist in their evaluation efforts; one is the very comprehensive *Evaluation Handbook*, and the second is

the *Logic Model Development Guide*.
http://www.wkkf.org/Programming/Overview.aspx?CID=281

The **National Science Foundation/EHR** published a *User-Friendly Handbook for Mixed Method Evaluations*, which features an overview of evaluation methods and information on designing and reporting mixed method evaluations.
http://www.nsf.gov/pubsys/ods/getpub.cfm?nsf97153

United Way of America produced *Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach*, a "step-by-step manual for health, human services, and youth-and family-serving agencies" on evaluation techniques.
http://national.unitedway.org/outcomes/resources/mpo/contents.cfm

Reports/Research Papers/Articles

In our research, we discovered a wide variety of reports, papers, articles, and other publications related to evaluation. Investigations into different issues, analysis of trends and developments, commentaries, and profiles all shed light on what is working in program evaluation. While such publications can inform practice, they are often less directly applicable to the day-to-day evaluation activities carried out by practitioners in the field.

Several organizations produce reports and other publications related to evaluation. Again, most of these pertain to evaluation more broadly, not just within the arena of youth media and technology programs, though they may be relevant to practitioners working in these programs.

Examples:

The **Brookings Institution** recently published a paper that they commissioned on *The Growth in After-School Programs and Their Impact*.
http://www.brookings.org/views/papers/sawhill/20030225.htm

Evaluation Forum seeks to build outcome-based planning and evaluation capacity in community agencies; information on their training, publications, and technical assistance is available online. http://evaluationforum.com

George Lucas Educational Foundation (see also "Other Resources") has developed reports and tools for assessing students and offers resources for professional development.
http://www.glef.org

Harvard Family Research Project, through their Out-of-School Time Learning and Development Project, has an extensive body of research on the effectiveness of out-of-school time programming.
http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~hfrp/projects/afterschool/about.html

Independent Sector has collected information on measurement tools and publications and with The Urban Institute produced the 2001 report *Outcome Measurement in Nonprofit*

Organizations. http://www.independentsector.org/pathfinder/impact/public/index.html

The **National Institute of Out-of-School Time** (NIOST), part of the Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College, has been analyzing the effectiveness of after school programs and the youth development field for twenty years.
http://www.niost.org/publications/index.html

Toolkits

Evaluation toolkits comprise a collection of information, tools, and resources that organizations can work with to develop customized evaluation plans and instruments. While we did not find a toolkit specifically designed for youth media and technology programs, typically the contents of such toolkits are easily adapted. Some of these include steps for carrying out early phases of an evaluation plan, such as needs assessment, as well as sample tools and additional resources.

Examples:

America Connects Consortium (ACC) has developed a toolkit to assist community technology centers in evaluating their programs, staff, and clients.
http://www.americaconnects.net/toolkit/

Benton Foundation provides links to other reports and websites that may prove useful in designing an evaluation; and in conjunction with EDC/Center for Children and Technology has produced the *E-Rate Student Evaluation Toolkit: A Work-in-Progress*.
http://www2.edc.org/cct/publications_classroom_summary.asp?numPubId=106

Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet) has assembled an *Evaluation Toolkit* containing a variety of resources for CTCs. http://www.ctcnet.org/evalkit.doc

Innovation Network is a nonprofit organization that seeks to build the evaluation capacity of nonprofits, featuring a workstation for designing program evaluation plans and tools.
http://www.innonet.org/workstation/about.cfm

Other Resources

A number of other relevant tools and materials have been developed to help strengthen youth programs or advance evaluation and assessment. The following are worth noting: documentation and reports on evaluation projects, training modules, checklists for designing and implementing evaluation, and resource libraries.

Examples:

The Evaluation Support Services Website at **Western Michigan University's Evaluation Center** is a clearinghouse of valuable evaluation resources.
http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/ess.html

George Lucas Educational Foundation, Instructional Module: Assessment (see above)
http://www.glef.org/assessment/index.html

Ryakuga Community Communication Needs, Skills, and Resources Assessments, originally designed for the **Youth for Social Justice Network**, is a collection of links regularly updated to help community organizations develop effective community resources.
http://www.ryakuga.org/tutorials/map.html

Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers Resources offers links to evaluation resources, publications, and organizations. http://washingtongrantmakers.org/

Specific Instruments

This section is a catalog of the different types of instruments utilized in evaluation activities. Some of these instruments are used exclusively for participant assessment or for program assessment, and a few instruments may be used for both purposes.

Surveys

We use the term, survey, to refer to any type of questionnaire, feedback or evaluation form that solicits personal responses from a particular group to a standardized set of questions. The possible range of survey tools is as diverse as the people working in the field. By their very nature, surveys are simple to create and amend. Practitioners may elect to use multiple-choice questions, questions that ask respondents to use a rating scale, a series of open-ended questions, or a combination. Surveys may be short with general questions, or long with very detailed questions. The orientation of these questions is highly variable too. Some of the survey tools that we received are clearly focused on measuring the degree of change in a participant's skills and behavior over the course of their involvement in the program. Whereas such tools are explicitly oriented to identifying outcomes, other surveys do not probe as deeply into the effect of the program on the participant, focusing more on how participants feel about various aspects of a program. These surveys, as part of a suite of evaluation tools, can serve organizational needs in a variety of ways, and vary according to the purposes for which they are designed.

Rubrics

A set of guidelines developed to help practitioners rate participants' performance and/or products is known as a rubric. Although individual rubrics vary in terms of the specificity of their guidelines and their ease of use, they typically provide a helpful narrative description of the qualities associated with a certain level of performance/achievement. For this and other reasons, rubrics can be especially useful for assessing participant performance in youth media and technology programs, since the goals are often qualitative in nature.

Certification Checklists

In order to assess the skills of a participant, programs may employ a checklist of specific skills or competencies—to certify that s/he achieved a certain level of proficiency in the program.

Certification programs are often more oriented to the development of technical skills; however, different forms of certification/certification by different names may be a feature of other programs. Certification checklists might be most applicable as part of the evaluation work of youth media and technology programs that prioritize technical training and workforce development.

Other Methods

In addition to the materials that we collected, organizations use other tools and methods as part of their evaluation processes. These methods include interviews, participant tracking on a variety of measures, portfolios, journals, peer review, and online tools, among others.

Interviews

Organizations may create a list of questions to pose in an oral interview with participants, instructors, and stakeholders in the community. Having a pre-set list of questions allows organizations to be deliberative in choosing questions that best fulfill their evaluation needs, and to prepare different staff members to serve as interviewers. For better documentation, interviews are sometimes audio- or video-taped. Organizations may conduct individual or group interviews with all program participants or just a sample. As a complement to surveys or other instruments, interviews can help program staff fill in the gaps and ask follow-up questions resulting from information obtained through other methods.

Participant Tracking

A number of organizations have systems for tracking the elements of participants' involvement in their programs. These might include basic identifying and demographic information, which sessions or classes participants attend and how often, what technologies they use, and what activities they do.

Portfolios

Portfolios comprise the collected works—which may include online and/or offline materials, writing, art, music, and other work products—of an individual participant. Portfolios can come in all kinds of shapes and sizes; there is no set form. Therefore, the contents and design of a portfolio may be determined entirely by an individual participant, or outlined by an instructor. Using portfolios as an assessment tool gives participants an opportunity to compile and present their work as a whole, showcasing their accomplishments over the course of the program.

Journals

Many organizations make a practice of using journals with participants. Journals can be kept by individual participants or they can be collaborative. They can be very open-ended, a place for creative work and free writing, or they can be used for responding to specific questions that an instructor poses to the group. Integrating journal activities into program sessions ensures that time is set aside for reflection, and, for the purposes of evaluation, can yield valuable information on the engagement and learning experiences of participants, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of

the program.

Peer Review

Increasingly, youth-serving organizations are recognizing the value of involving youth in participant assessment, not just program assessment. A few organizations that we heard from are developing or already have a system for peer review, or peer leadership, in place. This often takes the form of oral or written critiques on another participant's performance and/or product. Implementing a system of peer review gives participants another perspective on their work and engages youth as mentors.

Online Tools

The advent of Internet tools, such as Web site tracking software, online surveys, and other interactive functions, lets organizations with a Web presence quickly and easily collect data, poll their readership, and solicit qualitative feedback on the content produced in the program.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this research, we have obtained a snapshot of what some youth media and technology programs are currently doing in the way of evaluation. While this picture is by no means comprehensive, several themes and issues emerge from this work that seems likely to apply to other youth media programs:

- Evaluation is a common concern among practitioners. All the practitioners we heard from are concerned about evaluation. Even those that have developed relatively complex systems for understanding the impact of their work cite areas that they are not satisfied with.

- Evaluation practices vary widely in both format and content. Current practice runs the gamut from informal feedback and simple staff review of information to highly structured data collection and analysis. There are innovative practices out there, most frequently in older, more mature programs. This is likely because they have spent more time implementing the program and reflecting on the results and therefore can think in a more sophisticated way about which outcomes to look at and what it means to measure them.

- Staff reflection is a key component of these evaluation practices.

- Youth should be more involved in the evaluation process. Many practitioners would like to find ways for young people to be more centrally involved in the process of program evaluation.

- Alumni are considered worthy of further study. The most frequently articulated wish for further evaluation was for follow-up with program alumni.

- Outside support is necessary to put evaluation practices in place. Aside from funding earmarked specifically for program evaluation, such as NAMAC's grant program, practitioners would welcome greater support for evaluation from funders and value the support of outside parties, such as the Bowne Foundation's workshops.

Various challenges have also been identified:

- Evaluation efforts are often limited by a lack of resources. Funding, the availability of both staff time and program time, and staff's capacity to conduct relevant evaluation activities can all have an impact on what work an organization is able to do.

- There are limits to a staff's ability to conduct evaluations. Even when evaluation tools are employed regularly and with some degree of commitment, staff may not be prepared to process the data so that it yields insights into program impacts/outcomes.

- Assessing multimedia projects adds complexity to youth media evaluations. The complexity of programs' goals, which may include the creative process itself as well as the completed project, and young people's personal development as well as the acquisition of technical and production skills, can make comprehensive evaluation difficult to attain.

- The application of evaluation data is not clearly defined. While many program staff are articulate about their evaluation activities and what they are designed to measure, they are less clear about the process of applying the information they collect.

- Audience is a complicating factor. The unique relationship between media maker and audience creates a complex evaluation challenge that is often beyond the capacity of grassroots organizations.

- Making evaluations useful both for funders and for improving programs is a difficult balance to strike. There may be several goals for evaluation itself; information that is useful in reporting to funders may not be as useful in improving program.

In order for staff to conduct meaningful program assessment, they need a well constructed plan that addresses the program's particular goals, methods, and communities; includes specific strategies for collecting and analyzing data and making use of the resulting information; and takes into account the resources available, such as staff time and capacity.

Despite the range of programs working to give voice to youth, it is still a challenge to view the work as emerging from a single "field." Historically, various groups have organized around unique camps, with media artists, educators, literacy advocates, and activists not always seeing their work as in any way common. This division may in fact have hampered the field's progress and prevented the sharing of best practices, including effective evaluation techniques. Youth development and creative self-expression may be the two central activities that seem to drive the work, but groups differ considerably on what degree they focus in one direction or another. Some artistically driven agencies are focused exclusively on the creation of unique artworks and forego a broader youth development objectives. Some technology initiatives are focused heavily on skill development but fail to promote deeper information literacy.

It would be useful to identify evaluation methods and tools that can in fact unite these diverse youth voice efforts and promote the collection of a broad range of impact measurements that reflect the true depth of the field. The success of the field, and the ability to disseminate best practices developed over a 30-plus year history of programming, is dependent on sound evaluation of impact. This sharing of evaluation techniques is the first step in building lasting media driven program options for the wider youth development field.

Clearly defining youth impact is imperative as the field advances. For funders like the Time Warner Foundation, as well as projects like YouthLearn and CCT, the development of 21st Century Skills is directly tied to hands-on media making experiences and experiential learning. Programs like those reviewed in this report may in fact be the ideal environments for building these skills, but without results to define their impact, the programs cannot advance and access the resources necessary to sustain the work.

While there is as yet no robust body of research in the youth media field to guide program evaluation, there may be something to be learned from other fields related to the various elements of youth media. There is substantial research conducted by such organizations as the Academy for

Educational Development around youth development, identifying factors that contribute to positive impact, for example. In-school multimedia assessments may also prove useful to youth media programs. SRI conducted a performance assessment for the Challenge 2000 Multimedia project to measure students' development of communication and design skills, for instance. EDC's Center for Children and Technology is also developing an assessment tool to help teachers evaluate students' multimedia work not just on content, as is most common in schools, but on production values and audience awareness, as well. Such tools and approaches may be adaptable by youth media program staff to help them assess more deeply what young people are learning.

The lack of further research into the legitimacy of youth media and technology programs limits both their ability to design quality evaluation processes and to illustrate present needs to funders and other stakeholders. The authors believe the field would be well served by:

- Basic research on the impact of youth media and technology programs.

- Research that examines how evaluation information is used. This issue is central to the question of evaluation in youth programs, and further inquiry into the evaluation processes followed by organizations is warranted in order to fully ascertain the capacity and needs of the field.

- Analysis of which organic or integrated self-evaluation processes are most effective in youth media programs.

- Research that investigates the possibility of a return on investment that results from shifting resources from direct service to evaluation, with the overall goal of promoting greater sustainability within the field.

From our cursory scan of leading evaluation efforts, it seems that most youth media programs could also benefit substantially from access to technical assistance, resources, and recommended practices around developing a coherent, effective evaluation strategy. Some models of assistance that might be worth considering include:

- Providing subsidized evaluation consultation to help programs create and implement evaluation plans.

- Designing a set of 'customizable' tools specific to youth media programs. These might include:

  o Surveys ideally suited for youth media producers and their audiences
  o Rubrics for looking at student work
  o Tools for analyzing journals, production notes, design elements, etc.

- Investing in the dissemination of existing youth media and technology specific evaluation tools and techniques, including:

  o Case studies that illustrate the techniques proven effective by long-serving

agencies.
- o An archive of portfolio assessments that practitioners could look to for models.
- o Peer review techniques that demonstrate how evaluation can complement the kind of self-expression and dialogue that is evident in the best youth work.
- o Channels for the dissemination of evaluation best practices in other arenas, such as service learning, in-school programs, etc.

- Promoting evaluation as a central aspect of professional development training for anyone working in the field. This could include:

  - o Partnerships between intermediaries for youth media and technology programs and those in the youth development and youth work field already actively pursuing professional development systems and certification programs.
  - o Training for practitioners in designing and carrying out effective evaluation, engaging young people in the process, and using new technology for evaluation and assessment.

- Promoting communities of practice where practitioners can continually share evaluation tools and techniques as they pursue their own professional development.

It is not our intent to promote a single solution for the field or advocate for a standardized evaluation approach. Rather, we believe the field will be best served by individual organizations building on-going evaluation processes responsive to their needs while continually allowing for self-reflection and program improvement. Above all, the assessment challenge for any group is to be clear about their programmatic intent and implement a process of evaluation with benchmarks that are tied to their intended program goals and objectives. Regardless of their focus, programs that integrate self-evaluation into all aspects of their programming have been the most successful at communicating, both internally and externally, progress toward their stated goals. They are also able to use the knowledge gained in the evaluation process to refine their work and thereby advance the field.

Appendix A:

INTERVIEWEE ORGANIZATIONS

The Appalachian Media Institute was initiated by Appalshop in 1988 in response to the growing economic and social crises facing young people and their communities in Central Appalachia. Through an intensive summer documentary institute, workshops in area schools and a new after school media program, AMI encourages young people to use audio, video and new media production and distribution tools to explore critical issues about themselves and their Eastern Kentucky communities. AMI's mission is to build the confidence and creative capacity of youth through technical and leadership training with professional artists and media makers; encourage youth to see the arts as a viable vehicle for initiating positive change in their communities and beyond; increase youths' educational performance and post secondary attendance; and create opportunities for intergenerational dialogue through the production and distribution of youth-produced media. They strive to help young people see that, rather than leave the region, they can play a vital role in the future of their communities.

Educational Video Center (**EVC**) teaches documentary video production and media analysis to young people, educators, and community organizers. Its mission is "dedicated to the creative and community-based use of video and multi-media as a means to develop the literacy, research, public speaking and work preparation skills of at-risk youth." EVC began in 1984 and now offers a high school documentary workshop, Youth Organizers TV (YO-TV), and a teacher development program.

Global Action Project (G.A.P.) is a media arts organization that provides training in video production and new media technologies for youth both locally and internationally. Global Action Project conducts short term and long-term video training projects both in New York City (Urban Voices) and internationally (Global Voices). G.A.P. media trainings combine best practices in leadership development with an arts-based approach that incorporates interactive games, role-playing, art, poetry, and photography. The workshops promote diversity, critical thinking, media literacy, youth empowerment, social and political awareness and activism. Through these workshops, youth learn how to use their media to become peer educators about the issues that concern them. They design screening workshops that engage audiences in an activity that provokes dialogue and action.

MYTOWN (Multicultural Youth Tour of What's Now) is a nonprofit that "uses history as a youth development and community building strategy." Youth participants research their local and personal history and then present their findings through slideshows, historical walking tours, and other interactive activities for the wider community.

RadioArte, a youth initiative of the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, is a youth-run, bilingual community radio station. This organization provides free training and practical experience in radio broadcasting to older youth in the Chicago area. Serving around one hundred students annually, the program aims to train youth to express themselves through a variety of individual and collaborative learning activities, culminating in on-air production.

Radio Rookies is a WNYC program that trains young people to use words and sounds to tell true stories about themselves, their families, their communities and the world. Central to their approach is the belief that young people are spoken about in the media, but they are not often enough given the chance to speak for themselves. Through a series of twelve-week workshops, each held in a new neighborhood, Radio Rookies gives teenagers the tools to become radio journalists, and allows them to learn from professionals how to develop a story, conduct interviews and edit and produce a polished radio feature that can air on WNYC. The program gives WNYC's more than 1 million weekly listeners the opportunity to hear fresh and intimate perspectives on New York City and on its youth, while also helping teenagers gain the skills, confidence and determination necessary to get their voices on the airwaves.

Street-Level Youth Media involves professional media artists in familiarizing urban youth, ages 8-22, with multiple media technologies and the art making process, stressing teamwork, creativity, self-esteem and critical thinking. Street-Level's mission is to educate Chicago's inner-city youth in media arts and emerging technologies for use in self-expression, communication and social change. Using video production, computer art and the Internet, Street-Level's young people address community issues, access advanced communication technology and gain inclusion in our information-based society. Drop-In programs at neighborhood multimedia labs provide access to computers, the Internet, video production and editing facilities. Special Projects offers media making employment opportunities in collaboration with recognized cultural institutions throughout Chicago and the US. In-School programs model integrated arts curriculum in Chicago's public schools.

Video Machete is a Chicago-based, inter-generational, collective of cultural workers. Machete members are activists, students, media artists- both youth and adult- who are all committed to cultivating images, ideas, and words that transform our communities, raise consciousness, and generate collective analysis and action. They use multi-media, video production, and alternative press to explore and document the stories and perspectives of communities that are erased and distorted by mainstream media. Video Machete is committed to producing cultural work that addresses real change in communities and society.

Youth Communication, a writing and publishing program for young people, pursues its mission "to help teens acquire the skills and information and develop the attitudes they need to make thoughtful choices about their lives." Their "major goal [is to] help teens achieve a sense of self-efficacy, or even more broadly, self-actualization." Youth Communication has twenty years of experience running youth programs.

911 Media Arts Center, in Seattle, is considered Washington State's premier Media Arts Center. Their mission is "to support the expressive use of innovative media tools by providing the access, training and environment needed to create/exhibit works of enduring merit and artistic excellence" Their programs for young people include the Young Producers Project, which engages young people in developing critical viewing skills as well as production, and Reel Grrls, in partnership with the Metrocenter YMCA and KCTS.

Appendix B:

STAKEHOLDER MEETING ATTENDEES - SEPTEMBER 9, 2003

Louisa Anderson, Associate Project Director, Center for Children and Technology, EDC

Luis Castro, Director, Time Warner Foundation

Vanessa Clay, Youth Media Trainer, Appalachian Media Institute, Appalshop

JoEllen Fisherkeller, Associate Professor, Culture and Communication/Education, New York University

Steven Goodman, Executive Director, Educational Video Center

Keith Hefner, Executive Director, Youth Communication

Margaret Honey, Vice President and Director, Center for Children and Technology, EDC

Laura Jeffers, Senior Research Associate, Center for Children and Technology, EDC

Anna Lefer, Program Officer, Open Society Institute

Peter Levine, Deputy Director, CIRCLE, University of Maryland, School of Public Affairs

Meghan McDermott, Executive Director, Global Action Project

Czerina Patel, Producer, Radio Rookies

Bill Penuel, Senior Education Researcher, Center for Technology in Learning, SRI International

Wendy Rivenburgh, Research Associate, The YouthLearn Initiative, EDC

Michele Sacconaghi, Executive Director, Time Warner Foundation

Pam Stevens, Vice President, Youth & Education, Time Warner Foundation

Tony Streit, Director, The YouthLearn Initiative, EDC

Karen Toering, Managing Director, 911 Media Center

Kathleen Tyner, Hi-Beam Consulting and NAMAC

Steve Wright, Program Director, Salesforce.com Foundation