

# **FROM PROGRAM EVALUATION TO SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENTS**

© 2011 Info Power To The People, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

## **Introduction**

Info Power To The People, Inc. (IPTTP) was founded in 2004 as a social venture enterprise. We employ an entrepreneurial approach to the creation of new, productive organizational capacity that builds power in poor communities.

Our mission is to provide services and products that meet the unique needs of grassroots organizations and innovators who generate community progress ([www.ipttp.com](http://www.ipttp.com)).

Our methods integrate statistical and narrative data in an easy-to-use, cost-effective manner. This enables the management of any program to evaluate staff fidelity to the program's design in real-time, measure the value of results for stakeholders (clients, advocates and funders) and promote innovation. Our core services: Program Evaluation and Social Return On Investment (ROI) Case Study. Each converts to high-impact pitches and proposals.

## **Program Evaluation to Social ROI Case Study**

Program reports are used in a cycle of design, implementation, evaluation and refinement of organizational operations. The recent, seminal monograph, “Leap of Reason: Managing To Outcomes in an Era of Scarcity (Mario Morino, 2011) provides a comprehensive overview of effective program evaluation. It clearly delineates the connection between organizational leadership and the production of value that contributes to the common good. ( <http://www.vppartners.org/leapofreason/overview> ). We view the Social ROI Case Study as a logical extension of the organizational willingness to produce program evaluations on a cyclical basis. In order to achieve sustainability, the Social ROI Case Study is a clear indicator of effective operations and used as a magnet for money. It lays out the foundation of organizational efficiency as well as the valuation of customer/client/patient satisfaction and/or achievement.

## **The Context for an ROI Case Study: Social Venture Enterprise**

Professor Raymond Horton, Founder of the Social Enterprise Program, Columbia Business School, in his essay “Thoughts on the Meaning and Field of Social Enterprise”, (<http://www4.gsb.columbia.edu/socialenterprise/about/meaningse>), provides a comprehensive and succinct discussion of social venture enterprise:

Here's how I define [a] social enterprise: [an] organization designed to encourage behaviors and outcomes that add social value beyond what private enterprise normally provides or cares about... sometimes called the double bottom line.

The first assumption is that the market does not currently meet every social need. That is, the market fails to provide public good because of a primary concern for profit. The second assumption is that social enterprises add value. While the evidence on the second assumption is mixed, we can cite many examples where social enterprises have contributed to the public good. We must acknowledge many failures and believe those rest on the failure of non-profit management's inexperience with and distrust of business-like operations.

Social enterprises provide, or try to provide, things that society values but which are not usually provided by private enterprise. In most cases, this is because the social value of an activity is not easily captured by the price or financial return for the service or good offered. Social enterprise seeks to apply business principles and skills to create greater social value. In this sense social enterprise sounds like a very good concept, but it must not be romanticized. Success in any small business venture is hard and demands tough choices and a commitment to a clear path to success. Free enterprise and social enterprise go together, and we do not think either our economic system nor our social service network can survive without each other.

Info Power To The People, Inc. is dedicated to lowering the costs of the Social ROI Case Study so that cash-strapped, resource-limited organizations can muster materials that support investment in an effective and ongoing manner. Adaptation to diminished support for social ventures during times of chronic economic crisis is necessary and courageous. It requires the leadership to activate two forms of courage:

- Suspend the belief that benefactors with deep pockets are waiting in the wings to support the good work done by the organization; and
- Evaluate staff on the basis of transparent metrics rather than informal social dynamics.

The processes common in private enterprise can be deployed for goal achievement and documentation of the social value of non-profit programs. The results solidify the organization's positive reputation and attract investments in the form of stockholders, sales, subscriptions and, yes, donations and grants.

### **The IPTTP Social ROI Case Study: “Triangulation”**

Facing up to the scarcity and/or absence of a reliable set of quantitative data, requires triangulation which is used to obtain reasonably solid and reliable evaluation results. Triangulation is based on the assumption that a study finding is more solid if different methods lead to the same result. If an investigator uses only one method, the temptation for him/her is strong to believe in those singular findings. If an investigator uses two methods, there is a possibility that the results contradict each other. Experience shows that by using three methods to get at the answer to one question, two of the three methods will produce similar answers. If three clashing answers are produced, the investigator knows that the question needs to be reframed, methods reconsidered, or both. Here, triangulation refers to the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon:

- It can be employed in both quantitative (validation) and qualitative (inquiry) studies;
- It is a method-appropriate strategy of founding the credibility of qualitative analyses;
- It becomes an alternative to traditional criteria like reliability and validity;
- It is the preferred line in the social sciences.

“Methodological Note on Triangulation Analysis in Country Portfolio Evaluations”, GEF Evaluation Office, 18 June 2010. ([http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/CPE\\_Triangulation\\_Analysis.pdf](http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/CPE_Triangulation_Analysis.pdf))

#### **Phase One: Establish Relevance**

The evaluation uses aggregate data provided by or recommended by the client organization. Together, we establish the current state of knowledge regarding demographics, and the resources and stresses faced by members of the organization's community. A single program does not bend a trend by itself, but it can show that it is focused on building a sustainable response to acute, concentrated needs.

## **Phase Two: Design the Measurement of Achievement**

Interviews of knowledgeable persons provide insight about the community needs and strengths. The holders of community wisdom include staff and the organization's stakeholders, customers, clients, patients, etc. The result is a plan that captures statistical and narrative data through program implementation. The plan specifies the social value produced by achievement (program outcomes). The specifications are the keystones for using measurable results for organizational self-evaluation. A plan that includes measurement/projection of revenue and expenses, and adds monetization metrics to the program evaluation metrics, becomes a Social ROI Case Study.

## **Phase Three: Convert Data to Knowledge**

The program collects data. Up front development costs are kept to an absolute minimum by augmenting data that is typically collected in the organization's current operations. The additional, customized collection uses Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) forms. Narrative data are hand-written on the OMR forms by staff and/or customers/clients/patients. The method avoids an investment in technology and requires minimal investment in staff training and diversion from regular tasks. The IPTTP system integrates the story-telling with the numbers, according to the plan you designed. Our system is agile and flexible: as staff learn-by-doing and innovate, the data collection and reporting is refined.

## **Contact Information**

Please send your comments and questions to: [ipttp.info@gmail.com](mailto:ipttp.info@gmail.com)

## **The Co-Founders of IPTTP**

Victor Bloomberg is the principle designer of the company's information system. He is a second-generation social action professional, dedicated to a pedagogical approach to empowerment. The notion that all persons can learn-by-doing was most recently verified by his efforts while in the Peace Corps, working with a community of 200 persons who lived and worked in the municipal garbage dump of Encarnación, Paraguay ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoOL\\_idi5As](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoOL_idi5As)). The residents developed the concept for three businesses outside of the dump to provide sustainable employment. Victor wrote the business plan for each and reviewed the proposals for technical compliance prior to their submission to the World Bank's review process. All three proposals won in a competition and the businesses are thriving to this day.

Richard Lawrence, senior adviser to the company and President of Lawrence Enterprises, is a retired Methodist clergyman whose ministry is committed to social justice. He currently serves as Co-Chair of the San Diego Affordable Housing Coalition and as an adjunct faculty member at Springfield College (San Diego Campus) and the Western Institute for Social Research (Berkeley). He has served in the leadership of dozens of community organizations including: Chair of Negotiations for Operation Breadbasket (PUSH) – Chicago, Cummins Engine Foundation Minority Community Development Program, Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO). Rev. Lawrence participated in the Selma to Montgomery March, organized an anti-urban renewal protest with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and has served time in jail for demonstrations in Chicago with Dick Gregory and Al Raby. His review of the book, *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004) appears in the online journal, The Jonestown Report. (<http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/AboutJonestown/JonestownReport/Volume6/artlawrence.htm>).

For more biographical and contact information, please visit: [http://ipttp.com/IPTTP\\_ContactUs.html](http://ipttp.com/IPTTP_ContactUs.html)