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Web Site Offers New Evaluation Tools

By Nicole Wallace

Innovation Network, a nonprofit organization in Washington that helps charities assess the impact of their work, has expanded the evaluation tools that it offers online.

Visitors to the site can now gauge their organizations' efforts in eight areas, such as planning, fund raising, evaluation, and governance. After receiving answers to a series of questions about an organization's practices, the site generates a report that scores the organization and offers possible next steps the charity can take in each area.

In addition to the organizational-assessment tool, Innovation Network is introducing new versions of its Evaluation Plan Builder and Logic Model Builder, which Allison Fine, the group's executive director, says will help charities articulate what they are trying to accomplish and how they will go about doing it.

"Oftentimes, when a nonprofit writes a proposal, it'll have goals on one page, then activities on another, and maybe some general, bland statement about results somewhere else," says Ms. Fine. "The Logic Model forces you to line them up so there is a causal relationship between all of those things."

All of the new evaluation services are available free. Later this year, Innovation Network plans to offer additional online services that will help charities create surveys, questionnaires, and other means for collecting data, and then allow them to organize and analyze the information they collect online. Charities will have to pay fees to obtain those services.

Ms. Fine believes it is crucial for charities to evaluate their work rigorously so that they can take the lead in assessing their accomplishments, rather than letting foundations, government regulators, and the news media do it for them. "We're very good in the nonprofit sector at counting heads or counting beds," says Ms. Fine. "We're not so good at saying once we're done how people are different, what can they do, how they have been changed."

To get there: Go to <http://www.innonet.org>.

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