



Becky Stewart, M.P.P.

Chief Practice Officer, The Improve Group

Becky came to evaluation from the field of community development because she appreciated the role evaluation can play in making the world a better place. Her passion shows up in her work at The Improve Group, where she listens empathetically, encourages authentic community engagement, and proposes creative solutions as she advises consultants.

Expertise

Equity-focused evaluation

Becky constructively challenges The Improve Group to continuously work toward equitable evaluation. She co-created The Improve Group's community-responsive approach and helps the organization document successful equity-focused evaluation practices for future projects. Becky leverages nearly 20 years' experience in evaluation and considers equity-focused practices to be critical tools for a high-quality, effective practice. Becky encourages and facilitates continuous learning and sharing to strengthen how we work with communities and how we work with each other. She helps bring ideas from our field, partners, and the communities with which we work into our practice.

Consulting

Becky oversees The Improve Group's work with clients, ensuring responsiveness and quality while helping teams adapt when challenges arise. With the experience of scores of projects spanning geographies and fields, she can help colleagues hold onto the core purpose and goals in projects as teams adapt to circumstances and community context. When project challenges emerge, consultants value Becky's calm demeanor and collaborative approach to problem-solving. Becky's 8 years at a nonprofit community development organization before joining The Improve Group help her empathize with the opportunities and challenges nonprofit clients face with evaluation.

Evaluation in community settings

Becky is an expert in designing community-based evaluations that incorporate cultural nuance and value community wisdom. She practices cultural humility and authentic partnership in her work with communities. In addition to co-creating The Improve Group's community-responsive approach, Becky initiated the development of Image Grouping. This data collection tool uses images to better engage participants amid common challenges such as mixed/unknown literacy levels, lack of memory, and positive bias. Becky has also presented to various audiences about community-responsive evaluation.

Leadership

Becky plays a coaching role on many Improve Group projects, lending her deep evaluation and project management expertise to support project leads to troubleshoot, maintain quality, and effectively manage teams. She stays closely connected to The Improve Group's consulting team, ensuring they have opportunities for professional development and to do work that matters to them. Becky also participates in The Improve Group's internal Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force.

Professional Experience

The Improve Group | St. Paul, MN | Chief Practice Officer | 2013-present | Plans and coordinates the daily practice of the organization's work with clients to make the most of information, navigate complexity, and ensure clients' investments of time and money lead to meaningful, sustained impact. Project experience includes:

Leading engagement to gather input from those seeking to sell food products in Minnesota to inform the Minnesota Department of Agriculture in considering food licensing re-structuring.

Facilitating strategic planning for Hearth Connection, a homelessness and long-term supportive housing nonprofit. Becky and her team worked with a core group of staff and board members to plan the full staff and board workshop engagement process.

Contributing to the design of a Public Participation and Community Engagement evaluation toolkit for federal agencies. The Improve Group's toolkit won the President's Management Agenda Learning Agenda Challenge.

Providing culturally sensitive support to co-develop the State of Wisconsin Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives Task Force's final report on root causes of the crisis and recommendations for change.

Leading an equity-focused evaluation of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC) Northwest's service model. Becky and her team partnered with an Indigenous evaluation firm to examine the extent to which JVC Northwest's volunteer placement model supports partnerships of mutual respect and reciprocity.

Partnering with Mercy Corps' Global Citizen Corps to assess the impact the program had on attitudes about community leadership among youth participants in Palestine, Iraq, Indonesia, Pakistan, and the U.S.

Evaluating the Suburban Ramsey Family Collaborative's \$8 million Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative to highlight how schools' unique approaches to prevent youth violence and substance abuse are effectively addressing school safety and student mental health.

The Improve Group | St. Paul, MN | Research and Evaluation Director | 2004-2013 | Designed and managed research and evaluation projects and coordinated work of teams.

Handloom Weavers Development Society | Balaramapuram, Kerala, India | Consultant | 2006 | Updated pilot pictorial diary tool to support participatory evaluation of the Society's efforts to understand its impact on participating households, particularly women, and identify areas for additional attention.

University of Minnesota Extension Community Vitality Office | St. Paul, MN | Research Assistant | 2006 | Conducted case studies of communities that had catalyzed community leadership, in order to educate and inspire broader audiences.

Project for Pride in Living | Minneapolis, MN | Executive Project Manager, Grant Writer, and Development Project Coordinator | 1996-2004 | Managed capital campaign, public policy initiative, and strategic planning process to strengthen organization as it provided transformative affordable housing and career readiness services.

Education

Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota | Master of Public Policy in Community and Economic Development

University of St. Thomas | Mini-MBA in Nonprofit Management

Macalester College | Bachelor of Arts in Political Science (major) and History (minor)

Select Presentations & Trainings

"Employee ownership: Embracing the new economy while empowering cooperative voices and engaging new perspectives" | American Evaluation Association annual conference | 2024

"Involving Youth in Evaluation" | American Evaluation Association annual conference | 2018

"Equitable Organizations" | American Evaluation Association annual conference | 2018

"Evaluation Planning for Funders" | Minnesota International NGO Network IDEA Summit | 2017

“Performance Measurement and Program Evaluation” | New Sector Alliance Fellows | 2015

“Data Management with Remote Fieldwork” | American Evaluation Association annual conference, coffee break | 2014-15

“Community Responsive Evaluation” | Minnesota International NGO Network IDEA Summit | 2015

“Image Grouping” | American Evaluation Association annual conference | Multiple years since 2012

Instructional Experience

Co-lecturer of Program Evaluation | Humphrey School of Public Affairs | 2015

Certification

Technology of Participation Facilitation Methods | Institute of Cultural Affairs in the U.S.A.

Professional Affiliations

American Evaluation Association

Minnesota Evaluation Association

Twin Cities Research Group