Participatory Approaches to Evaluation

Lori Bakken, MS, PhD
Professor, School of Human Ecology, Civil Society and Community Studies
Evaluation Specialist, Division of Extension
Learning Objectives

1. Describe participatory approaches and how they differ from other approaches to evaluation.
2. Determine how to identify and engage stakeholders in the evaluation process.
3. Articulate at least three challenges and three benefits of participatory evaluation approaches.
Collaborative, Participatory, and Empowerment Evaluation

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVED APPROACHES
Participatory Approaches

Definition: “the process by which those doing the work contribute to understanding and improving it” (Fawcett and colleagues, 2003).

A “sliding scale” (O’Sullivan, 2012)
Major Paradigms in Evaluation

- Pragmatist
- Constructivist
- Post positivist
- Transformative
- Social Accountability, fiscal control, and social inquiry

Mertens & Wilson, 2012, pp. 40-41
Partnerships

Cooperation
- Shared information and mutual support

Coordination
- Common tasks and Compatible goals

Collaboration
- Integrated strategies and collective purpose

Coadunation
- Unified Structure & Combined Cultures

The Continuum of Strategic Alliance Integration (Gajda, 2004, p.69)
Stakeholders as partners in evaluation

Identify them

Who are typical stakeholders in an evaluation and what stake do they have in it?

Build relationships

What relationships with stakeholders must be understood, established or built before they can engage in evaluation (if they wish)?

Engage in evaluation process

How do we engage with stakeholders in an evaluation process?
Creating Effective Partnerships

Broom & Klein, 1999, pp. 134-135 in Mertens, p. 93

- Build a relationship of high mutual equity
- Check out your assumptions about other people
- Seek to increase other people’s equity before increasing yours
- Get clear about what you want and ask for it
- Discuss and negotiate, discuss and negotiate
Stakeholder Involvement
Approaches to Evaluation

Collaborative (O’Sullivan)
Participatory (Cousins)
Empowerment (Fetterman)
Transformative (Mertens)

Stakeholder Engagement

Role of Evaluator

Leader
Facilitator
Supporter
Characteristics of Participatory Evaluation Approaches

- Stakeholder diversity and involvement
- Shared power and control
- Shared responsibility
- Context specificity
- Learning centric
- Mixed methodologies
CAE Principles
Cousins, Whitmore, Shulha, Hudib & Gilbert (2015)

- Clarify Motivation for Collaboration
- Foster Meaningful Relationships
- Develop a Shared Understanding of the Program
- Promote Appropriate Participatory Process
- Monitor and Respond to Resource Availability
- Monitor Evaluation Progress and Quality
- Follow Through to Realize Use
- Promote Evaluative Thinking

Evaluator Responsibilities
Culturally Responsive Evaluation

Cultural competence (AEA, 2011)

- Acknowledge the complexity of cultural identity
- Recognize the dynamics of power [and privilege]
- Recognize and eliminate bias in social relations
- Employ culturally congruent epistemologies, theories, and methods
- Continue self-assessments

Photograph by David Lee
Culturally Responsive Evaluation

Being responsive to culture (CDC, 2014)

- **Engage stakeholders** and keep them involved throughout the evaluation process.
- Be aware of **personal culture and biases**.
- Highlight **community strengths and assets**, including the talents and expertise of the members.
- Consider how **aspects of culture** might influence an evaluation’s design and implementation.
- Ensure that **multiple perspectives** are represented when determining what counts as credible evidence.
- Recognize **potential cultural implications** during data collection, analysis, and interpretation.
- Tailor the dissemination of evaluation results to **stakeholder needs**.
- **Promote use of evaluation** information for community benefit.

How do we identify key stakeholders?
Stakeholder Theory
Mitchell et al., 1997

Power to Influence

ISSUE

Urgency to Address

Legitimate Stake
Stakeholder Needs for Information
Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2011

- Influence or make policy
- Make operational decisions
- Provide input or evaluation
- To react
- For interest only
How and when do we engage stakeholders?
Transformative Evaluation Process

1. **Understand Context, Clarify Object, Identify Stakeholders and issues of oppression & discrimination**
2. **Build relationships that energize strengths, recognize power differences & build trust**
3. **Determine scope, purpose, questions, resources, and goals**
4. **Select approach and methods for inquiry**
5. **Perform Inquiry & Co-create understanding**
6. **Involve Stakeholders**
7. **Use Findings**
8. **Report Findings**
9. **Transformative Change**
10. **Monitor**
Challenges of Participatory Approaches

Limited access to stakeholders
Power differentials
Insufficient time and resources
Stakeholders’ desire and willingness to be involved
Competing priorities
Misalignment with funders

Photograph by David Lee
Benefits of Participatory Approaches

- Capacity building
- Utilization
- Grass-roots action
- Sustainable efforts
- Stakeholder appropriate
- Resources
- Relationship building
- Inclusion
- Social Justice

Photograph by David Lee
Questions?