Blue-Print Evaluation

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Abstract:

This research attempts to cover the principles for conducting an evaluation whether it is a small or a large project. An understanding of the theory and background to evaluation is beneficial in order to better plan, design and conduct an evaluation programme. Above all there is no substitute for having a clear purpose for an evaluation, defining the right question is a prerequisite.

Although indicators identify what you will look at to determine whether evaluation criteria are met, they do not specify how indicator data will be collected. You must still decide which evaluation method(s) to use. For example, if we are interested in knowing whether a community campaign was successful in influencing how community members view their relationship with the environment, we may select attitudes toward recycling as the indicator of change. But how can we measure attitudes toward the environment? Could we use a questionnaire? Might personal interviews be appropriate? What other methods could we use?

Introduction

When designing evaluation tools and selecting evaluation methods, it is useful to consider the cultural contexts of the communities in which programs operate. Here are some guiding questions to consider ensuring that evaluation methods and tools are culturally appropriate:

✶ Are data collection methods relevant and culturally sensitive to the population being evaluated?

✶ Have you considered how different methods may or may not work in various cultures? Have you explored how different groups prefer to share information (e.g., orally, in writing, one-on-one, in groups, through the arts).

✶ Do the instruments consider potential language barriers that may inhibit some people from understanding the evaluation questions?

✶ Do the instruments consider the cultural context of the respondents?

✶ Are multiple methods being used, so that information can be analyzed in a variety of ways?

(Zeldin & et.al, 2000:12).

The effort that is put into the design of any piece of evaluation will pay rich dividends, however, defining the right question is always the key starting point. There are degrees of correctness of definition but this should always be something that is measurable and possible within the time frame in which you are working. Each evaluation will have its own combination of costs and benefits (American Evaluation Association, 1999:8), and estimating them is all part of the work of an evaluation.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires are simple and effective tools for collecting information from a large number of
people. Compared with other ways of collecting information, questionnaires are relatively inex-
pensive to administer. They can be used to gather information about the community-building
process itself (process evaluation) or the results it produced (outcome evaluation) (Sabo, 2003:11).

Utility of Questionnaires

When using questionnaires to evaluate your community-building process, you typically ask
questions about how the work of the team was accomplished. For example, you could ask
participants in a community event to provide ideas for how the event could be improved in the
future. An end-of-event questionnaire could be used to gather such information (Ibid).

Questionnaires can also be used to collect information about the outcomes of a community-
building effort. Questions would focus on how the community is different as a result of what was
done. For example, a questionnaire might be used to find out whether community members have
changed their opinions about a particular issue as a result of the team’s efforts. Questionnaires
can also be used to find out what community members are doing differently as a result of the
community-building efforts (Ibid).

Types of Questions

Questionnaires can contain either forced-choice or open-ended questions. Forced-choice questions have a limited number of responses from which a respondent may choose. Respondents are frequently asked to check or circle their desired responses. One advantage of forced-choice questions is that they are typically easier to analyze than open-ended questions (American Evaluation Asociation, 1999:33)

Hints for Constructing Questionnaires

First, revisit the evaluation questions you developed earlier and decide whether a questionnaire is the best way to gather the information you need. If so, decide on the specific group of people to whom the questionnaire will be administered.

Next, referring to the evaluation questions, begin developing items for the questionnaire. Evaluation questions tend to be more general than the items or individual questions that may appear on a questionnaire. Therefore, it may take more than one item to answer a particular evaluation question. Group the questions by topic or format. (For example, you may want to put all the forced-choice questions together.) Put demographic questions about where participants live, their age, or gender at the end (Rennekamp, 1999:10).

Leave lots of "white space" in the margins and between questions. The goal is to make the questionnaire looks like it is easy to complete. Also, strive to achieve a vertical flow in how the respondent must answer the questions. That is, minimize left-to-right movement of a pen or pencil across the page (Ibid:11).

Administering Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be administered via mail, telephone, or computer; in face-to-face interviews; or in a group. Each method has distinct advantages and disadvantages. For example, mail administration allows for broad reach but often produces low response rates. Web-based questionnaires can be programmed to automatically summarize the results but can only be completed by people who have access to the Internet. Face-to-face or telephone interviews often produce more complete information, but they are time consuming to conduct. Administering paper-and-pencil questionnaires in a group setting often results in high response rates, but respondents often hurry through the questionnaire and provide less detailed information (Ibid).
data. Open-ended questions are best analyzed by looking for themes in the information provided respondents (Lofquist 1989:23).

Analyzing the Responses

Analyze forced-choice questions by calculating the percentage of respondents who selected a particular response. Means are also appropriate for some numeric

Focus Groups

Group interviews are another way to collect information from many people. Most people are familiar with focus groups**.** A focus group is a small-group gathering conducted specifically to collect information from the group members. During a focus group discussion, between 6 and 12 people, who are similar in one or more ways, are guided through a facilitated discussion on a clearly defined topic (Krueger and Casey, 2000:70).

The goal of any focus group is to promote self-disclosure among participants. Because a group, rather than an individual, is asked to respond to questions, dialogue tends to take on a life of its own. Participants “piggy-back” on the comments of others and add a richness to the dialogue that could not be achieved through a one-on-one interview(Ibid).

Clarifying Expectations

The first step in planning a focus group is to clarify its purpose. What kinds of information do you hope to gain from your focus group discussion? Do you want input about how an activity or event could be improved, or are you more interested in the activity’s impact on the community? What specific information is needed? Your answers to these questions will help you decide whom to invite to participate in the focus group discussion (Ibid).

Selecting Participants

Members of a focus group should have some characteristic in common. For example, the information you need to collect might suggest that you need to conduct a focus group composed of middle-school girls. Even though participants in a focus group are similar in one or two desired characteristics, the group must also include enough diversity in other characteristics to provide an accurate portrayal of the group’s collective opinion. For example, the group might be

composed of middle-school girls who represent the racial, ethnic, and economic diversity of
the middle school's population(Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick, 1997:6).

Getting People to Attend

Occasionally, people avoid using focus groups because they are afraid that the people they invite
won't show up. To ensure high attendance rates, begin by making personal contact with the
people you wish to invite. This is often done through a telephone call or personal visit. For those
who agree to attend, send a personal letter that confirms their participation and communicates
the relevant details of the event. Then make a reminder phone contact the day before the event
(Ibid).

What Happens at the Focus Group Interview?

Focus group interviews typically last no longer than 90 minutes and often take less time. In many
instances, the actual "interview" are preceded by a snack or light meal. Focus groups can be conducted around a large table or with participants seated in a circle of chairs. Participants are typically given name tags. A moderator welcomes the group and asks a series of 6 to 10 open-ended questions, and an assistant moderator or recorder takes notes. The discussion is often tape recorded for later playback or transcription. It is important, however, to let participants know that they are being recorded (Ibid:12).

Developing Questions for Focus Groups

An important step in preparing for the focus group interview is the development of a set of ques-
tions that encourage participants to respond and collect the information needed. Good questions
sound conversational and natural. They are usually short, open-ended, and one-dimensional

(i.e., they ask for only one piece of information at a time). Begin with an introductory question that will get people talking and make them feel comfortable. Gradually move into the topic you want them to discuss with a transition question that is followed by several key questions covering the major areas of interest(Ibid:22)

The specific order in which the questions are asked is called the questioning route. A good questioning route has an easy beginning, flows logically and naturally from one question to another, and moves from the general to the specific. It is important to estimate the time required
to exhaust the discussion on each question. These time estimates can be used to help manage the focus group discussion(Ibid).

Moderating Focus Groups

Effective moderating requires preparation, mental discipline, and skill in facilitating group interaction. But first, moderators must believe that all participants have something to contribute to the discussion regardless of their education level, experience, or background. Moderators must listen attentively, with sensitivity, and try to understand the perspective of each participant.
Lack of respect is quickly transmitted to participants and results in reduced contributions (Fetterman.1996:23:16).

Tips for Conducting Good Interviews

The researcher concluded that the following should be followed:-

✶ Use active listening skills—listen more, talk less.

✶ Maintain eye contact and use body language that says you are interested and nonjudgmental.

✶ Keep a neutral demeanor and try not to let your own opinions show.

✶ Probe when appropriate. Follow up with "Why? Say more about this" … or "Please elaborate."

Data Analysis

Data analysis consists of indexing, managing, and interpreting the pieces of information that

are
collected during the interview. Begin by coding or labeling the notes (or transcripts) of the ses-
sion according to content. For example, all references to the publicity surrounding a
community
event could be labeled with the same code. Next, use scissors or word-processing software to
collate the coded text into each category. Each category should be in a separate pile or section
of
the document. Finally, write a summary statement that is true of each extract or piece of text in
the pile or group. These statements often become key themes that are communicated in your
evaluation report (Ibid:26).

Key-Informant Interviews

A key informant is someone who, because of his or her unique position in a community, can
pro-
vide you with important information about your community-building effort. Some key
informants
have first-hand knowledge of the community-building effort and can provide you with their
own
assessment of what is occurring. Others have access to information that would be difficult for
you to obtain without their participation. In such cases, key informants pass along that informa-
tion to you, often with an interpretation of what the data might mean. The use of key
informants
is a relatively simple and inexpensive means of collecting information(Worthen, B., J.
Sanders, and J. Fitzpatrick,1997:9).

Identifying Key Informants

Every community-building effort has a unique set of key informants. Key informants can
be teach-
ers, elected officials, youth, community leaders, agency staff, parents, and even funders. Begin
by asking the question, "Who in my community is in a position to provide me with information
about how the community-building effort is working?" Then make a list of the key informants
relevant to your community-building effort (Ibid).

Next, decide who among the members of your project team would be the most appropriate
person (or persons) to interview the key informants. Some members of the team might have
better access to particular informants than others. Those team members should then make an
appointment to conduct a face-to-face or telephone interview with each key informant assigned
to them. If the key informant will need to gather any information from his or her records before
the interview, it is good to state that in advance (Ibid:11).

Questions

The researcher recommends that before the interview, know what type of information you want from the key informant you are interviewing. Take some time before the interview to write down the questions you plan to ask. one approach is to write some key questions to cover each of the important topics, then a couple of potential follow-up questions for each key question. Ask factual questions about a particular topic first, then the opinion questions. Be sure to write open-ended rather than "yes–no" questions. The goal is to be specific with questioning while allowing enough flexibility for open discussion.

Interviewing

Interviews should be structured, yet conversational. Begin by making the key informant comfort-
able. Tell him or her purpose of the interview and provide assurance that the information will only be used for making judgments about the community-building effort. Because of the nature of the information key informants provide, it is often difficult to ensure their anonymity. In many
cases, the key informant is the only person who could have provided a particular piece of infor-
mation. (That is why they are key informants!) Make sure the key informant is comfortable with
the way you plan to use the information you collect (Rennekamp, 1999:22).

Maintain a neutral attitude throughout the interview. Don't try to defend your community-building
project or argue with the key informant's assessment of a situation. Be prepared to probe or use follow-up questions to gather additional information that might clarify why the key informant sees the situation as he or she does. Be sure to take detailed notes—they are essential to accurate analysis (Ibid).

Data Analysis

Responses from the key informants are typically reviewed and analyzed to identify key themes as well as divergent viewpoints. This analysis may be best accomplished by a meeting of all interviewers in which everyone shares information from his or her interview(s). (Ibid)

Observation

The aim of observation is to document behavior through watching and listening. Through observation it is possible to see what people are doing, when they do it, where they do it, and how they are doing it. You can use observation to gather information about the community-building process itself (i.e., process evaluation) or the results it produced (i.e., outcome evaluation)(Ibid :24).

Although the benefits of observations are multifold, the presence of the observer may influence the behavior of those being observed. The consistency of data collected can also vary if more than one observer is gathering data(Ibid:30).

Observing Process

Using observation to evaluate your community-building process might be as simple as having an impartial observer sits in on a planning meeting of your community-building group. In such a role, the observer may simply take notes about how the group goes about its work. Results are then used to improve how the planning group functions (Ibid).

Observing Outcomes

When the goal of an evaluation project is to document results of a community-building effort, observation is frequently used to determine whether people have changed their behavior as a direct consequence of the group's actions. In such cases, observation has some clear and distinct advantages over asking people to self-report their behavior through questionnaires or interviews

(Break well & Miiiward, 1995:30).

Unstructured Versus Structured Observation

Observation can be either unstructured or structured in nature. In unstructured observation, observers are generally not asked to look for specific things, nor are they asked to record their observations in any particular manner(Ibid:35).

Structured observation involves the systematic collection of specific pieces of information. Structured observation frequently involves the use of checklists, forms, or observation schedules upon which observers record what they see. Observers receive training on how to recognize what they are looking for as well as how to record what they observe (Ibid).

Behaviors Versus Traces

Sometime observers can record the presence of an actual behavior. For example, an observer may be asked to record how many different active-listening techniques are used in a mock peer counseling session. Other times, observers look for something called traces of behavior, such as graffiti or litter on the roadside (Ibid : 37) .

Guidelines for Observing Events

Identify the Purpose of the Observation

Rennekamp, R., and C. Jacobs. (2004:11) determine the focus of the observation, including who will be observed, what will be observed, and the duration of the observation. For example, an observation of a racism workshop could include documentation of the number of youth present, which youth participated, how the youth participated, and the methods the facilitator used to solicit equal participation.

Design an Observation Guide

Once you identify the purpose of the observation, the observation guide should be developed to address key observation questions and goals. These goals can include interactions between individuals or groups of people, activities, and topics discussed (Ibid).

Train Observer

Determine what type of documentation is appropriate for each component of the observation form. If possible, have all observers observe the same situation and fill out their forms separately,
then compare their responses. Discuss the observers' differences in level of detail and content. This analysis will help create a common understanding of what level and type of information should be collected(W. K. Kellogg Foundation.2000:5).

What to Observe

✶ The setting: What is the physical environment like? What kinds of behavior do the setting encourage, permit, discourage, or prevent?
✶ The participants: Who is in the scene? How many people are there, and what are their roles? What brings these people together? Who is allowed there?
✶ Activities and interactions: What is going on? Is there a definable sequence of activities? How do people interact with the activity and one another?
✶ Frequency and duration: When did the activity begin? How long does it last? Is the activity recurring or unique? How typical of such situations is the one being observed? (Ibid).

SAMPLE OBSERVATION GUIDE

Name of observer____
Date___________
Event____
_
Location____
_
Number of youth present
____
Number of adult present ____
Number of staff present
____

ENERAL DIMENSIONS	ES	O	OMMENTS AND ETAILS
o youth lead the activity?			
oes the session structure low r broad group input?			
the space comfortable and ell lit?			
o youth feel comfortable in e space?			
re the walls or space corated any way?			
information presented in a riety of modes (visual, oral, scussion based)?			

Youth–Adult Interaction

Please check one box for the following qualities of youth–adult interaction

UALITIES OF NTERACTION	ES	O	OMMENTS
uidelines or ground rules are t at the beginning of activity			
outh ask questions.			
aff or adults avoid the use jargon or technical terms d stop to explain when uth don't understand.			
outh share from their own periences.			
aff and/or adults share from eir own experiences			

UALITIES OF INTERACTION	ES	O	NEVEN	COMMENTS
l youth participate in scussion				
dults and youth appear to spect each other's opinions d perspectives				
fforts are made to equalize put (i.e., adults or other uth solicit the participation quiet youth and adults).				
ody language of youth seems gaged and energized.				
rticipation crosses racial, ltural, and gender oundaries.				

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الخلاصة

هذا البحث يحاول أن يغطي المبادئ لعمل التقويم فيما إذا كان المشروع صغيراً أم كبيراً . إن فهم النظرية والخلفية للتقويم هو مفيد لخطة جيدة أو تصميم تقويم برنامج. من أعلاه نجد أنه لا بديل لامتلاك غرض واضح للتقويم فتوضيح السؤال الصحيح هو شرط أساس .

بالرغم أن أصحاب الإشارة يحددون ما الذي ننظر إليه وما هي معايير التقويم ، فهم لا يحددون ما هي البيانات التي سوف تجمع ؛بل يجب تحديد طرائق التقويم المعدّة للاستخدام ، مثلاً إذا كنا متلهفين لمعرفة فيما إذا كانت حملة المجتمع ناجحة في التأثير على أعضاء المجتمع، وكيف يرون علاقتهم بالبيئة، نحن يجب أن نختار موقف باتجاه مادة التغيير، ولكن كيف نقيس الموقف باتجاه البيئة ، هل نستطيع استخدام الاستبيان ؟ هل المقابلات الشخصية ملائمة ؟ وما هي الطرق التي سوف نستخدمها ؟