

Centre for Remote Health



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Transforming Evaluation Relationships: Evaluators as responsive and flexible mentors

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Why Transform Evaluation Relationships?

- Health disparities according to rurality and Indigeneity are long-standing and serious.
- Evaluation is a key component of closing the gap on these disparities.
- Evidence indicates that evaluation with regard to Indigenous programs and services routinely does not occur and, when it does, it is of poor quality (Hudson, 2016).
- A similar comment could be made for rural and remote settings generally.
- Both the quality and quantity of evaluation needs to increase.

The Context

- In 2016 a Fulbright Scholarship was awarded to investigate the factors under which organisations would initiate and sustain ongoing monitoring and evaluation.
- The physical context
 - Center for Behavioral Health Innovation, Antioch University New England
 - BHI works shoulder to shoulder with community partners to improve behavioral health practice and outcomes for underserved populations.
- The policy context
 - In the US, 15% to 20% of funding for programs and services is quarantined for the evaluation of those interventions.

The Study

- Exemption from IRB review and monitoring was obtained from Antioch's IRB Chair.
- 16 organizations representing health/medical care, education, state government, private philanthropy, social services, and behavioral health advocacy.
- 24 people from those organizations were purposively sampled for homogeneity with regard to their experience with ongoing monitoring and evaluation and heterogeneity with regard to the roles within the organizations.
- From the 24 people initially contacted, 18 consented to participate, and 15 were finally interviewed.

Results

- Five Superordinate themes
 - You have to want it
 - The bare necessities
 - Accessing flexible, external, expert evaluators
 - Ready, steady, go, and keep going
 - So much more than just numbers
- 20 Subthemes

Flexible, External, Expert Evaluators

"... we see the consultant as the all-knowing ... they're the expert out there so they're bringing the advice in ... because you bring in a consultant and you pay to have that consultant in ... you put value on their opinion and their advice and then maybe more likely to move forward."

Flexible, External, Expert Evaluators

- Approach
- Relationship
- Responsive communication
- Helpfulness
- Expertise
- Reputation

Approach

- Participants clearly expressed the type of approach they preferred by evaluators.



Approach

- *"flexible", "fun", "fluid", "collegial"*
- *"... very committed to these projects too ... 'we'll work with you we'll figure this out' ... when you have someone who says that to you ... I would suggest that's a theme of their work ... we'll figure this out with you ... from a standpoint of integrity."*

Relationship

- Participants greatly appreciated the ability of the evaluators to be part of the team but also to maintain a professional distance.
- Crucially, a strong underlying theme was the value of an ongoing, rather than a time-limited, relationship that changed over time from instructor to mentor.

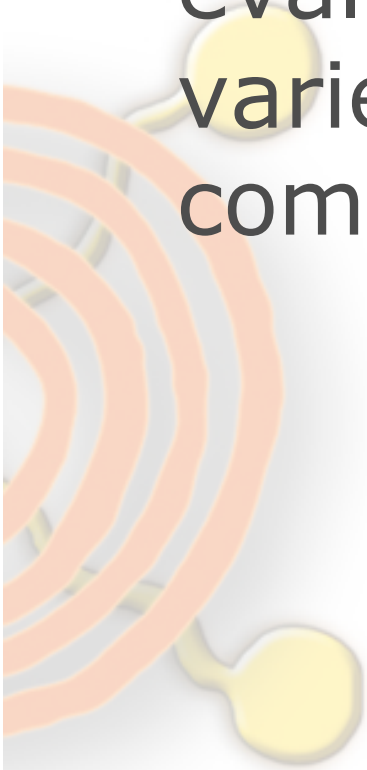
Relationship

- *"enmeshed", "arm's length"*
- *"They started right with us ... they were part of ... they felt like part of our team."*



Responsive Communication

- Communication with the evaluators was seen as critical and participants appreciated the swiftness with which evaluators responded, as well as the varied and flexible ways in which the communication occurred.



Responsive Communication

- *"... Very open and honest and regular communication. I think that was important."*
- *"Lots of email communication back and forth ... they've been up to our area which is not very common that people travel for us ... I email them all the time if I have questions ... I feel like if I ask them a question I get a really quick response ... they respond really quickly."*

Helpfulness

- Participants repeatedly emphasised the helpful impact the evaluators had on their efforts to evaluate their programs.



Helpfulness

- *"fantastic", "valuable", "beneficial"*
- *"Their evaluation and their work with us really helped us move in that direction at a faster rate of speed."*
- *"... Most recent process was stellar."*



Expertise

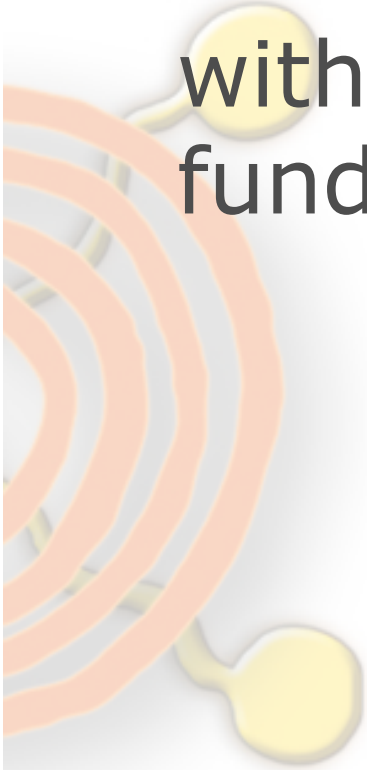
- Participants valued the extent to which the evaluators' expertise enabled them to provide assistance and support in a variety of ways from teaching about logic models and implementation science, to clarifying the data to be collected and assisting with data analysis, as well as preparing resources such as information sheets and powerpoint slides.

Expertise

- *"knowledgeable", "expert"*
- *"One of the things they've done is helping us figure out how to collect the data and what data is important to collect and what data we don't need to collect."*
- *"I would say they've really enhanced the public's and our internal knowledge about not just metrics but really understanding why, how, when you want to move towards utilizing data, sharing it ... putting it in a format that's understandable for people."*

Reputation

- Participants felt that the reputation of the evaluators, including the fact that they came from a university, added credibility to the participants' work with external stakeholders including funders and the community.



Reputation

- *"I think people have begun to recognize the importance of program evaluation and research and those guys have become leaders in that effort which is terrific."*
- *"People respect them and respect that message coming from them."*
- *"It gave credibility to our work to have it professionally evaluated."*

links with the literature



Developmental Evaluation (Patton)

- A long-term, partnering relationship in which there is constant tinkering as participants, conditions, learnings, and context change.
- Characterised by continuous progress, ongoing adaptation, and rapid responsiveness.
- Facilitating a reflective practice process in which evaluation is ongoing and feedback is immediate.

Dialogue on Learning (Rallis & Rossman)

- In this approach, the fundamental purpose of evaluation is learning.
- Service providers and evaluators develop an equitable and reciprocal relationship in which evaluators are seen as critical friends.
- Evaluation involves an action-research cycle.
- The evaluator is responsive to program needs and service providers are directly involved in the evaluation rather than having it “done to them”.

The Take Home Message

- Eliminating the long-standing health disparities according to rurality and Indigeneity is entirely possible.
- But there's a but ...



Transformation is Needed

- At a policy level
 - We need Federal policies that mandate the evaluation of any government funded program or service.
- At a pragmatic level
 - We need to transform our attitudes so that evaluation is seen as a learning process and evaluators are seen as mentors and critical friends.

Thanks!

