

From a Distance: Conducting Successful Long- Distance Evaluations



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What do we mean by multisite evaluations?



FOR THIS SESSION, MULTISITE IS BEING USED TO DESCRIBE PROGRAMS OR INTERVENTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN FUNDED BY A SHARED FUNDER THAT ARE IMPLEMENTED IN A VARIETY OF LOCATIONS AND FOCUS ON SHARED OUTCOMES/GOALS

Unique challenges of multisite evaluations



- Data Collection – getting standardized data can be difficult across different locations that are not operationalizing their project to meet goals in the same way (i.e. activities to achieve policy change vs. behavior change of participants)
- Communication across sites is always challenging
- Providing useful information for projects while satisfying the funder's evaluation needs
- Varying timelines and lifecycles of funded projects can vary across sites

Lessons learned about Data Collection...



- Invest extra time in determining data definitions up front
- Invest extra time creating data collection processes and systems to collect multisite data
- Create processes by which you routinely review collected data for accuracy (do it early and do it often)
- Think about how you might engage in multiple reviews of the data (i.e. number of reviews, different members on review teams, etc.)

Lessons Learned about Communication...



- Identify all relevant evaluation stakeholders
- Invest time up front to develop a communication plan
- Provide MANY opportunities for projects to provide feedback on plans, implementation, analysis, reporting
- If possible, create opportunities for face-to-face interaction among project participants
- Maximize technology to facilitate communication
- Disseminate in different forms and share information generously
- Build credibility

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Ways to build credibility for your expertise when you don't live where you work...



- Blog/Electronic newsletter
- Social Media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)
- Write a feature for other organizational newsletters
- Attend evaluation/applied research conferences and conferences in the fields where you do most of you work and NETWORK with others
- Create virtual communities (i.e. offer and participate in webinars, discussion forums, etc.)
- Volunteer professionally (i.e. review proposals for a funder, serve on a committee, etc.)
- Others ideas?



Resources

- New Directions in Evaluation
Issue 129 (April 2011)
- Beyond Evaluation Use Project
<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/projects/beu/>