

Using Behavioral Insights: Strategies to Effectively Communicate Evaluation Findings

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Introduction

L&G works with the NYC Department of Education and various Community Based Organizations to evaluate their 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) grants. Evaluation is a mandatory component of all 21st CCLC grants and is intended to be a thoughtful, systematic collection and analysis of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs, for use by specific people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions. When used well, evaluation supports programs that in turn lead organizations to better deliver on their missions, better meet the needs of those they serve, and provide information that supports continuous program improvement. In our work as evaluators, L&G seeks to empower stakeholders, increase their data literacy, and build their capacity to utilize data for continuous program improvement. L&G's philosophy is that evaluation is not a one-time event and should be participatory in nature. Evaluation works best when all stakeholders understand the evaluation process, acknowledge the key findings, and take concrete action steps to implement recommendations.

Rationale

It's not easy to get stakeholders to implement evaluation findings. Stakeholders are concerned with a variety of tasks to ensure the success of their programs, often pushing evaluation of their programs behind more immediate calls for their attention. Clients and program administrators alike procrastinate, get overwhelmed by choices, and miss important details from evaluation materials. If Evaluators do not work within the needs of their clients, opportunities for program improvement are missed.



L&G has learned from Behavioral Insights. Behavioral Insights is an “inductive approach to policy making that combines insights from psychology, cognitive science, and social science with empirically-tested results to discover how humans actually make choices.” Research in this area has shown that human decision making is often imperfect and imprecise. As a result, they may not always achieve the goals they set for themselves, or in this case, their programs.

Know how decisions are made. It is important to understand how stakeholders behave and make decisions, and use this knowledge to communicate findings and recommendations in ways that make it easier for them to understand. To ensure the use of evaluation findings, L&G aims to provide information and recommendations that 21st CCLC program sites can easily utilize and are quickly feasible for them to take up.

Evaluators need new communication tactics. Our efforts focus on the communication of evaluation findings, utilizing research in how messages are perceived, habits are formed, and commitments are made. Our behaviorally informed reports, action plans, and follow-up strategies have increased stakeholder buy-in and improved the number of program sites meeting their program objectives.

Being Strategic

Our reports and advisory meetings are first grounded in the vision for the community before specifics of evaluation findings are discussed. Our stakeholders are more likely to take up an action if they can connect that action to their existing mission and values for the program.



Address Limited Attention

With the vision of the program in mind, possible action steps are simplified to eliminate potential options that are not reflective of the vision or would not suit the needs of the community.

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By focusing on a few options that already are feasible within each program's environment, our stakeholders are grounded and are more likely to develop plans to implement recommendations. These plans consist of clear action steps that simplify tasks, set manageable deadlines, and reduce barriers to implementation.

Streamline Operations

03

Using the “EAST” Framework

Easy

Simplify messages to transform complex goals into series of shorter, easier actions. This reduces the “hassle factor” associated with deciding a course of action.

Attractive

Use colors, images, and personalization to draw attention to key findings and recommendations. This makes the actions seem more appealing to complete.

Social

Use group commitment devices to help stakeholders “lock” themselves into something in advance and follow through on the action steps.

Timely

Prompt people when they're most likely to be receptive. Help them identify the barriers to action and develop a specific plan to address them.

Example: Weekly Data Report Email

Audience: Program Directors, Program Managers, School Administration, and Site Coordinators

Good morning, 21st CCLC providers

Happy last week before break!

Attached, please find this week's Youthservices.net report for the period 7/1/2019 thru 12/17/2019, as well as the **Data Glows**, and **Data Grows**, and **Reminders**.

Data Glows:

- The grant has reached 51% of its 30+ hour target!
- All schools have increased students who've already accrued 30+ hours, and all schools have students with 90+ hours

Data Grows:

- HS XYZ is a little behind on data entry. Please get all attendance data up to date before the holiday break, 12/23/2019
- PS ABC has 7 students missing demographic info. Please get all demographic info up to date before the holiday break, 12/23/2019

Reminders:

- Attendance is critical. It is a best practice to enter attendance data on a daily basis.

When sending reports via email attachment, provide a report summary in the email body. Remove all information that is not necessary for performing the action.

Long-term goals can be broken down into short-term actions. These are easier for stakeholders to understand and appear significantly more achievable.

We are more likely to do something that our attention is drawn towards. Red and green help people quickly identify successes and challenges

Networks allow positive behavior to be seen. Sending findings to a wide group of stakeholders helps establish desired outcomes and incentivize stakeholders to make improvements.

By discussing and deciding action items by group consensus, accountability is increased. Tasks are more likely to be completed when stakeholders “lock” themselves into specific tasks.

It's easier to complete tasks when there's a distinct timeline for action. Create sensible and clearly identifiable deadlines for each task.

Example: Program Objectives Fidelity Checklist

| Grant Component | Grant Proposal Activities | Implementation Status 2019 – 2020 |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increase Community Engagement | Establishment of 21 st CCLC Advisory Board | IMPLEMENTED WITH FIDELITY The 21 st CCLC Advisory Board was established. |
| | 4 annual Advisory Board meetings | ON TRACK Two advisory board meetings were held in 09/19 and 01/20. |
| | 25% of students participate in 1 service-learning activity. | REQUIRES ATTENTION No community service-learning projects have been recorded in YS.net. |

Example – Action Commitments on Meeting Agendas

| Action Commitments from Quarterly Meeting (2019-20) | Person Responsible | By When? |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|
| Follow up on virtual observation issues for school staff. | Katie – Program Manager | 6/10/20 |
| Share new 21 st CCLC Site Monitoring Tool with Site Director and School Administration | Beth - Evaluator | 6/15/20 |
| Move remaining teacher-per-session funds to school-aid-per-session in budget | Mark - Principal | 6/3/20 |
| Upload all May 2020 activity attendance data | John – Program Site Coordinator | 6/15/20 |

Key Takeaways

Incorporating behavioral insights strategies does not require an overhaul of evaluation materials. Rather, by consistently reviewing how materials are communicated, evaluators can increase the likelihood that findings and recommendations are used for program improvement. To best integrate these strategies into your work, ensure you and your organization are do the following:

Define the outcome. Identify the main takeaways from evaluation materials for various stakeholder groups. Be specific and tailor your findings to reflect the roles of the various stakeholders. Focus on defining what specific action steps need to be completed at various points throughout the evaluation period.

Understand the context. Visit the stakeholders and community involved in the evaluation and understand the context from their perspective. Use this opportunity to design communication strategies that they will be receptive to, while removing communications that can be distracting or confusing.

Build your intervention. Use the EAST framework to generate your communications strategy. This is likely to be an iterative process that returns to the two steps above. It's ok if the experience of building the intervention leads you to reconsider the feasibility of the outcome you defined.

Test, learn, adapt. Put your intervention into practice so its effects can be reliably measured. Determine whether the changes improved the saliency and take up of evaluation findings. Ask your stakeholders what is helpful and what isn't. Continuously refine to make further improvements.

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