

How you Measure Matters: Values-Guided Technical Assistance Evaluation Toolkit

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Abstract

The Resource Sharing Project (RSP) offers technical assistance to help end sexual violence and support survivors. Their experience is that evaluation does not connect with the principles important to their work. This makes it difficult for those responsible for evaluation to determine whether an approach or partner supporting their evaluation work truly understands what it is they hope to achieve. This year, RSP shared an evaluation toolkit that aligns its values with evaluation practices to help support learning and healing. While underdevelopment, RSP and its evaluators navigated a wide range of issues that speak to how evaluation can be used to further promote hope and healing for survivors, and how the evaluation field can grow to support a healthier perspective on learning and accountability. This poster shares the process used to develop and refine the toolkit and poses two core questions to activate the evaluation field as allies to survivors.

Summary

In 2018, RSP co-created with an evaluation partner a toolkit for evaluating technical assistance and training. The impetus for creating the toolkit was *to align RSP values with evaluation practices to help inform and capture the impact of their work and the work of coalitions*. Along the way, we learned that the need was not simply building capacity to select, adapt, and effectively use evaluation tools for continuous improvement, but to repair and restore RSP partners and coalition members confidence in evaluators and evaluation as partners and allies in ending sexual violence. In addition to building evaluation capacity, this project took on the intention to:

- gather meaningful information about coalitions perspectives and experiences with providing or receiving technical assistance delivered through a lens of survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and anti-oppressive lenses.
- connect evaluators and non-evaluators working inside of sexual violence and support services and advocacy with evaluation frameworks that are inclusive and participatory.
- build capacity to access and understand the core principles of evaluation to allow RSP members to engage with evaluators that share their passion for healing
- offer positive and supportive experiences with evaluation.

To further field discussion about how evaluation can be used to further hope and healing for survivors and how the field can grow and change to make this possible while at the same time balancing our need for accountability to funding structures that are less aware of impact of measurement mentality on advocacy and services.

The toolkit evolved over a 12-month iterative process that included: (1) Literature reviews, (2) Focus Groups with RSP coalition members and (3) Iterative feedback cycles with *RSP Project Partners* and the *RSP Communities of Color Leadership Cohort*.

Discoveries

The following understandings emerged from the iterative learning process to inform the development of the toolkit.

- While Kirkpatrick's TA¹ model can inform much about how RSP can evaluate technical assistance it does not go far enough. Evaluation of RSP should account for two additional levels of learning:

Environment (understanding of connections between learning environments and healing) and Relationships (understanding of the dynamics that exist between learner & delivery of TA).

- For evaluation to play a meaningful role in supporting coalitions working with survivors, it needs to:
 - Credit the long-term nature of the work
 - Capture changes at the policy and systems level
 - Honor the importance of trust and relationship building
 - Track policy changes
 - Utilize language and approaches that restore power and influence to survivors
- Coalition staff with responsibility for evaluation seek capacities and tools that:
 - Validate experience over standardized instruments with a particular emphasis on storytelling
 - Considerations of ethics in evaluation including data collection, communication about findings, data ownership, and data use
 - Develop and open the pipeline of evaluation to non-academically trained perspectives, including a clear and direct process for what needs to be done and when so that anyone responsible for evaluation would know what to do and when to do it
 - Eliminate pre-determined categorization of identity
 - Deeply involve survivors in shaping the evaluation
 - Solicit meaningful information but are considered credible, not “mushy”
 - Draw on practices that allow coalitions to see how they are doing compared to how others deliver TA (going beyond the field for best practices and lessons learned)
 - Evaluators willing to show up at the table as allies, earn trust and value multiple types of expertise

The final toolkit includes seven modules (Figure 2). To date, the toolkit has been accessed over 2000 times. To expand reach of the toolkit and grow practice, we also offered a series of five webinars with coalition members. The toolkit, can be found on the Resource Sharing Project website:

<http://www.resource-sharing-project.org/evaluation-toolkit>.

Technical assistance (TA) is one of the central pillars of partnership between coalitions, local programs, and allies. TA takes on many forms including sharing information and expertise, instruction, skills training, transmission of working knowledge, and coaching. Through its TA, RSP models the values critical to addressing the questions and challenges of our partners, encourages growth and expansion of practices to support survivors, and addresses emerging needs in a changing context.

To align with this practice, evaluators need to evolve their practices and belief systems about evaluation. Even with experience in collaborative and participatory evaluation practices and a commitment to equity, evaluation team needed to navigate issues of trust, language in the field of evaluation that is distancing, and what does *value* in evaluation really mean.

What RSP and its evaluation consultants learned together through this process sparked an interest in learning from others and activating the field around the following questions:

- How can evaluation be used to further promote hope and healing for survivors?
- How can we grow the evaluation field to support a healthier perspective on learning and accountability among non-evaluators?

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