**Implementing Evaluations – Strategies for Success**

**American Evaluation Association 2011 Conference**

**Skill-Building Workshop 764, Capistrano A, Friday, November 4, 2011 (4:30-6:00 pm)**

Below we present a general outline of the one-and-a-half hour session. The workshop consists of three “exercises,” each with its own worksheet (included in this packet). Each worksheet includes instructions to guide those of you who wish to jot down your thoughts before the session begins.

**Worksheet 1. Critical Areas to consider when implementing an evaluation** **(30 minutes)**

a. Review of ***Session Objectives*** – 5 minutes

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Recognize 5 Critical Areas that should be considered when implementing an evaluation.
2. Anticipate and trouble-shoot the kinds of challenges that may crop up during an evaluation.
3. Identify 9 Best Practices that can inform evaluation planning to help ensure that an evaluation runs smoothly and achieves desired results.

b. Participants list and discuss evaluation challenges, grouping them in the 5 Critical Areas on Worksheet 1 – 25 minutes

**Worksheet 2. Taking charge of your evaluation (30 minutes)**

a. Participants select two of the challenges identified on Worksheet 1 to think about more carefully.  
(1 minute) – Column A

b. Participants then identify strategies to address the two potential challenges, asking themselves: What would they do if the challenge cropped up while the evaluation was in progress? How could they counter its effects? (14 minutes) – Column B

b. For the same two challenges participants then try to think about what they might have done during planning to avoid the problems in the first place: What processes and procedures could they have built into their evaluation plans as preventive measures? (15 minutes) – Column C

**Worksheet 3. Developing evaluation Best Practices (20 minutes)**

Participants review and discuss their lists of strategies to address challenges during either planning for or implementation of an evaluation. (20 minutes) Recorder for the group writes down on a whiteboard or flipchart:

* Any strategies that come up more than once and/or in more than one category
* Any other broad “super-strategies” participants can think of that are able to address multiple challenges at once

**Wrap-Up (10 minutes)**

Concluding thoughts. Participant questions and comments.

Materials for *Learning and Growing Through Evaluation* developed in conjunction with CDC’s National Asthma Control Program are available on the CDC Asthma Program website at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/program_eval/guide.htm>

**Worksheet 1. Critical Areas to Consider When Implementing an Evaluation**

***Objective.*** *This exercise will help you think about the 5 Critical Areas in an evaluation where we must pay close attention in order to keep an evaluation on track and running smoothly; and to ensure the information needs that underpin the evaluation are addressed.* Steps in completing Worksheet 1 are:

1. Write down one or more difficulties that an evaluation might face in each of the areas below.
2. Can you think of any challenges that don’t fit into one of these categories? If so, write down the challenge(s) under Category 6 (Other).

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| **1. Evaluation Context.** Programs, and hence program evaluations, exist within an organizational hierarchy and are embedded within a community that can influence their conduct and their ultimate success. What challenges can arise from this fact? |
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| **2. Evaluation Logistics.** An evaluation needs to be managed like any other project. Without good management (and, at times, despite good management!) what logistical challenges can occur? |
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| **3. Data Collection.** Whether you are collecting new data through surveys, interviews, or focus groups; whether you are systematically reviewing archival data (such as medical records); or whether you are compiling and analyzing surveillance data and other types of data from existing sources … evaluation challenges can arise. What might some of these be? |
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| **4. Data Analysis.** Nothing is more frustrating than approaching the end of an evaluation only to discover that the data collected cannot be analyzed or do not meet the information needs of program staff and stakeholders. What might cause this to happen? |
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| **5. Dissemination of Evaluation Findings.** Evaluation findings that are not acceptable, not believable, or come too late to meet a given information need will be unlikely to inform programmatic decision-making. What might cause this? |
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| **6. Other Types of Evaluation Challenges:** |

**Worksheet 2. Taking Charge of Your Evaluation – What Can We Do If …?**

***Objective.*** *This exercise will help you think about ways to address challenges that could occur during the conduct of an evaluation.* Imagine you are conducting an evaluation – or think about one you were involved in at some time in the past. Then work through the steps below as you fill in the worksheet.

1. Reviewing your answers on Worksheet 1, choose 2 different challenges that could occur during the evaluation. Write one challenge in each row of Column A. Try to pick challenges that fall into 2 different Critical Area categories.
2. For each challenge you’ve identified, think about what you would do if the challenge occurred while the evaluation was in progress. Write down one or two of your ideas in Column B.
3. Then think about what you might have done before the evaluation began to prevent the difficulty from occurring in the first place. Write down one or two of your ideas in Column C.

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| **A. Challenge** | **B. What should we do if this happens during an evaluation?** | **C. What might we have done to prevent it from happening?** |
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**Worksheet 3. Identifying Evaluation Best Practices – Strategies for Success in Implementing Evaluations**

***Objective.*** *This exercise will help you learn how you and the members of your evaluation team can* ***take control*** *of your evaluation and help ensure its success by adopting 9 Best Practices.* Although there are many possible challenges in conducting evaluations, there are just a few proven strategies that together can help address many of those challenges. If you carefully incorporate these into your evaluation planning process and document them in your evaluation plan, the chances are greater that your evaluation will proceed smoothly and produce the kinds of results you’re hoping for.

1. Discuss the strategies you came up with on Worksheet 2 with other members of your evaluation team. Also listen to other strategies your team members put forward.
2. As the discussion progresses, write down any strategies proposed that could be candidates for Best Practices. These could be strategies that surfaced frequently during your discussions – or strategies you think could address multiple challenges at once.
3. Together with other members of your evaluation team, develop a list of these “strategies for success,” which can become a basis for establishing evaluation Best Practices for your program.

We have identified 9 Best Practices or “strategies for success” in implementing evaluations. How many can you and your team members come up with?