**SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT INPUT**

**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)**

On the pages that follow we present participant input (see text in blue below) gathered during the workshop in response to the three workshop “exercises,” with input organized using the format of the appropriate worksheet.

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

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

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

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

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**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? |
| Approach doesn’t match culture  Evaluation anxiety  Loose understanding of program theory and/or goal of evaluation  Evaluation requirements determined by non-evaluator  Conflicting goals for evaluation  Need for consensus  Lack of buy-in especially for middle of organization  Politics and hidden agendas  Management doesn’t know what evaluation is and/or does not support evaluation  Organizational chaos  Evaluator called in at the end of project  Lack of funding  Lack of continuity – staff turnover  Asked to rubber stamp – spotty contact |
| **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? |
| Unclear roles, responsibilities, expectations  Competing evaluation priorities  Unrealistic timeline  Delays or lack of staff availability  IRBs – multiple  Research or evaluation? issues  Confidentiality and privacy  Communication especially across sites or long distance  Handling ad hoc requests for information in middle of evaluation  Negotiate organizational information sharing  Target population? Definition of unclear and access to limited  Inconsistent data collection methods  Multiple languages  Availability of data and changes in availability of data between evaluation plan and implementation  Designing data collection that is not too burdensome  Technology glitches |

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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? |
| Cleaning and merging data  Tracking participants over time |
| **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? |
| Lack of construct scales  Missing data  Scale of data  No crosswalks  Too much data  Data are not useful  Forgetting critical fields, e.g., demographics, key questions  Small sample size |
| **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? |
| Not generalizable  Not matched to audience  Unable to meet expectations of various stakeholders  Stakeholders do not like the results  Politically charged  Evaluation not aligned to client’s expectations  Nobody reads it  Nothing happens  Maintaining relationships regardless of results |
| **6. Other Types of Evaluation Challenges:**  [no additional categories of challenges suggested] |

**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?** |
| Needing consensus in flat organizational structure or a network of organizations – no clear decision making | * Involve stakeholders in design and analysis | * Start working with them earlier * Agree on a decision making criteria * Have 1 “go-to” person as group delegate * Find champions to help navigate |
| Tension between giving caveats and giving complex results to a mass audience, media need/want to have clear message but findings complex | * Ask media contacts to coach you in speaking their language; write a draft for them and have them look at it and critique it; collaborative writing with media contacts | * Talk to media contacts when they are not in crisis or a hurry (e.g., have lunch, develop relationships) * Develop press release in advance * Keep eye open for a “pocketful of nuggets” for interim results * Timely release of information – “feeding” information |
| Research or evaluation? Competing demands | * Provide training in evaluation to “demystify” evaluation and outline differences between evaluation and research * If an ongoing need (e.g., pressure to publish), chunk work and plan for publications * IRB restrictions * Negotiate assignment of work * Recruit graduate post-docs or work study students to assist | * Evaluation capacity building for the organizatino |
| Program staff turnover bringing in new manager with new agenda | * Agree to redesign per new manager’s suggestion   OR   * Communicate consequences of a redesign * Broaden conversation beyond new manager to evaluation team members and/or stakeholders who can support your position regarding original design * Focus on the reasons behind the new manager’s suggestion to re-design to see if what the person wants to accomplish can actually be done within current design plans and resources (e.g., add a new but limited component) | * Debrief new person right away stressing rationale for planned approach and consensus already built with evaluation stakeholders * Build in a succession plan to address possible turnover plan (e.g., have a second-level manager involved who understands how design decisions were reached) * Work with evaluation stakeholders upfront to achieve their buy-in and ensure their support down the line for the design chosen |

**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?

* Early engagement of stakeholders – broad definition of stakeholders – everyone needs clear understanding of roles; involve throughout the process; foster collaborative approach as an evaluator
* Communicate often and early; assume problems will happen so have regular meetings
* Educate, build evaluation capacity to have informed consumers of evaluation
* Establish clear protocols for data collection
* Train everyone involved
* Institute and monitor data quality control procedures, data cleaning protocol, codebook
* Relationship building; dealing with conflict early
* Ensure logic model, evaluation questions, data collection protocol, analysis plan, and reporting are in sync to obtain useful data
* Develop risk strategy upfront, as well as developing mitigation strategies and identifying triggers that will suggest things are going off track (warning signs, such as key stakeholders not attending meetings); know who is person to whom problems will be escalated and build relationship in advance
* Figure out your audience before developing findings presentations
* Use meetings to present results to encourage discussion of options and build buy-in for action
* Develop action plan with stakeholders to figure out who will do what by when in terms of actions that arise from findings
* Seek feedback from clients, stakeholders on how to improve evaluation finding dissemination
* Pilot testing data collection instruments and procedures and making adjustments prior to full data collection