The Collaborative Approach to Evaluation Principles in Practice: Illustrations from a Statewide Evaluation System for a Preventive Family Intervention

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
World Class. Face to Face.

IMPACT Research Lab
IMproving Prevention through ACTion

Kathryn E. Bruzios, Brittany Cooper, Laura G. Hill, & Louise Parker
Department of Human Development, Prevention Science
Washington State University Extension

The Strengthening Families Program for Parents & Youth 10-14 (SFP 10-14)

- SFP 10-14 is a 7-week evidence-based family skills training program for youth ages 10-14 and their parents.
- In randomized controlled trials, SFP 10-14 has been proven to:
  - ☑ Delay the onset of adolescent substance use
  - ☑ Lower levels of aggression in youth
  - ☑ Increase resistance to peer pressure
  - ☑ Reduce youth conduct problems
  - ☑ Improve parenting skills (e.g., setting appropriate limits while showing love and support)

(Spoth et al. 2011; Spoth et al., 2008)
http://www.extension.iastate.edu/sfp10-14/

Developing a State-Wide Evaluation System

- Since 2001, campus-based faculty have offered low cost evaluation services to community-based organizations implementing SFP 10-14 across the state.
- After completing a 7-week program, practitioners submit pre/post parent and youth evaluation data to the Evaluation Team at WSU via online Qualtrics surveys.
- Under supervision of faculty, graduate students analyze short-term outcomes and implementation statistics to generate a template-based report.
  - Our current focus is on developing evaluation training materials and protocols to enhance accessibility, standardization, and quality assurance of the evaluation data collection and input processes.
- Over the course of 20 years, we have processed evaluations...
  - From over 700 instances of SFP 10-14
  - Serving over 9,500 youths and parents
  - From 2 states and 51 counties

Collaborative Approaches to Evaluation (CAE)

- A central feature of CAE includes active, ongoing engagement between evaluators and program implementers.
- Collaborative models of evaluation build capacity to conduct local program evaluations through practitioner-evaluator partnerships
- CAE recognizes that different programs and different stakeholders will engage in different levels of collaboration based on their needs, readiness, resources, and capacity (O'Sullivan, 2012)
- Shulha and colleagues (2016) introduced 8 evidence-based, interconnected principles to serve as a guide for CAE along with contributing factors that impact each principle.

Principles to Guide Collaborative Approaches to Evaluation: Clarify Motivation for Collaboration; Foster Meaningful Relationships; Develop a Shared Understanding of the Program; Promote Appropriate Participatory Processes; Monitor and Respond to the Resource Availability; Monitor Evaluation Progress and Quality; Promote Evaluative Thinking; Follow Through to Realize Use

Notes: This figure is from Shulha and colleagues (2016). For more information see:
Shulha, L. M., Whitmore, E., Cousins, J. B., Gilbert, N., & al Hudib, H. (2016). Introducing evidence-based principles to guide collaborative approaches to evaluation: Results of an empirical process. *American Journal of Evaluation, 37*(2), 193-215.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214015615230

Collaborative Approaches to Evaluation: Principles Illustrated by Examples from SFP 10-14

Clarify Motivation for Collaboration

Encourages the development of a thorough understanding of the justification for the collaborative approach
Contributing Factors: evaluation purpose; evaluation and stakeholder expectations; information and process needs

Evaluation purpose
Illustration: Our primary goals for the evaluation were 1) that it be low cost, voluntary, useful, and easy to implement; 2) that instruments used to assess outcomes be reliable and valid; 3) that results could be compared to a benchmark; 4) that it would help us assess program cost, quality, and reach; and 5) that the evaluation be standardized across the main state agencies funding SFP 10-14, to minimize the paperwork burden placed on practitioners and participants.

Foster Meaningful Relationships

Inspires the conscious development of quality working relationships between evaluators and program stakeholders and among stakeholders, including open and frequent communication
Contributing Factors: respect, trust, transparency; structured and sustained interactivity; cultural competency

Respect, trust, transparency
Illustration: County-based Extension faculty established rapport with many of the organizations who were implementing SFP 10-14. These relationships of trust increased the acceptability of the evaluation, and informed the development of meaningful, user-friendly measurement tools, reports and related technical assistance and support through the university-based website.

Develop a Shared Understanding of the Program

*Promotes the explication of the program logic situated within context*
Contributing Factors: program logic; organizational context

This is an area that the SFP 10-14 evaluation could improve upon. For example, evaluators could share a logic model during the facilitator training to enhance understanding of the program logic.

Promote Appropriate Participatory Processes

Encourages deliberate reflection on the form that the collaborative process will take in practice regarding specific roles and responsibilities for the range of stakeholders identified for participation
Contributing Factors: control of decision making; diversity of stakeholders; depth of participation
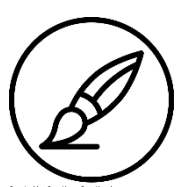
Control of decision making
Illustration: We created an interagency team in collaboration with the state substance abuse prevention agency, inviting people from all state agencies/groups that were interested in SFP 10-14. The informal group began meeting quarterly in 2003 to discuss trainings, evaluation findings and to set strategic goals for disseminating SFP 10-14. Over time, the main agencies funding the program agreed that facilitators could use our evaluation to satisfy their reporting requirements. This cut down on facilitators' paperwork and at the same time centralized data collection, so that we were able to get a more complete picture of the program's reach and short-term outcomes.

### Monitor and Respond to the Resource Availability

Warrants serious attention to the extent to which stakeholder evaluation team members are unencumbered by competing demands from their regular professional roles
Contributing Factors: time; budget; personnel
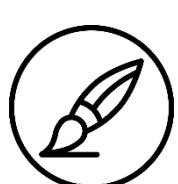
Budget
Illustration: Budget cuts and high staff turnover during the Great Recession resulted in fewer opportunities for relationship building and collaborative evaluation.
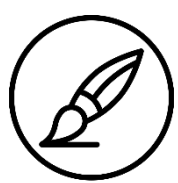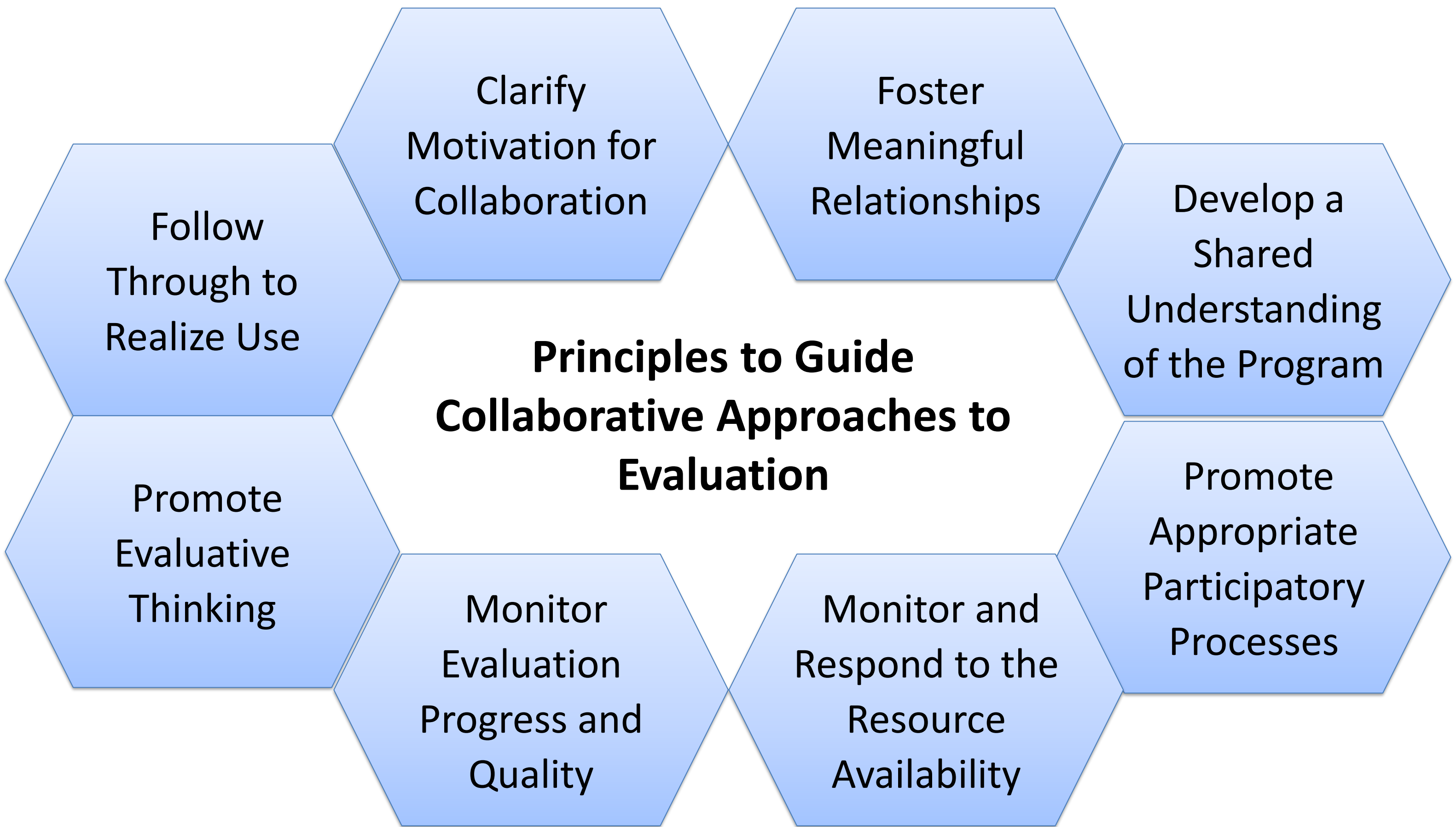
Time
Illustration: Short-term gains assessed by the evaluation may not translate into long-term changes in family functioning, but long-term follow-up of participants in community-based programs is not typically realistic or feasible in terms of available funding.

Monitor Evaluation Progress and Quality

Underscores the critical importance of data quality assurance and the maintenance of professional standards of evaluation practice
Contributing Factors: evaluation design; data collection
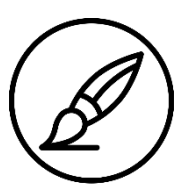
Evaluation design
Illustration: Aggregate state evaluation has been used to compare our implementation data with those from other clinical trials and community-based implementations (Cantu et al., 2010); with parent outcome effect sizes from the original clinical trial (Hill & Betz, 2005); and with statewide data on family risk and protective factors from students in the same age groups (Hill et al., 2010; Hill et al., 2013).

Promote Evaluative Thinking

Inspires the active and conscious development of an organizational cultural appreciation for evaluation and its power to leverage social change
Contributing Factors: inquiry orientation; focus on learning

Focus on learning
Illustration: Practitioners observed implementation issues and suggested potential studies to researchers. For example, a facilitator questioned whether siblings attending the program together with parents (versus one child participant) had any impact on program outcomes; this issue was addressed in an undergraduate student's thesis (Laughter & Hill, 2010).

Follow Through to Realize Use

Promotes the conscious consideration of the potential for learning, capacity building and other practical and transformative consequences of the evaluation. Implicated are evaluation processes and findings
Contributing Factors: practical outcomes; transformative outcomes

Practical outcomes
Illustration: The system's capacity to collect and report longitudinal data enables tracking of outcomes over time and gives communities the ability to compare local outcomes to statewide averages.

Contact: Kathryn.Bruzios@wsu.edu