Lessons Learned about Participatory Evaluation: The Project DIRECT Experience

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Overview

- Nature of the health intervention
- Nature of the evaluation
- Eight lessons learned about conducting participatory evaluation
- CDC-funded demonstration project

- Individual-, organizational- and community-level activities

- Programs for health promotion, community outreach and diabetes care

- Overseen by NC Dept of Health and Human Services

- Wake County Dept of Health in partnership with Southeast Raleigh community carry out project
Evaluation of Project DIRECT

- Population-based household survey and health exam
- Qualitative Assessment (in-depth interviews and focus groups)
  - Context
  - Process
  - Impact
Participatory Evaluation Approach

- Community has a long history of involvement
- CDC collaborated with Project DIRECT Executive Committee to develop the evaluation RFP
- An Advisory Council was established
- Advisory Council provided guidance throughout
Evaluation scored a 2.1 Quality Rating based on AHRQ’s Community-Based Participatory Research Index

Integrate the external evaluation plans into the intervention planning process
External Evaluation Plans

- Basis for project implementation and internal evaluation
- Internal evaluation capacity and local knowledge
- Source for ongoing feedback and continuous adjustments
- Supportive relationship with the community
- Understanding of what we are measuring, the context in which it is happening and why we are measuring it
Lesson 2

Clearly identify expectations, roles, and responsibilities
Expectations, Roles and Responsibilities

- Clearly identify roles and expectations
- Be alert to and flexible about issues
- Community wanted and expected a fuller community participatory evaluation
- Early discussions minimize potential conflict and support community empowerment
Incorporate a plan for disseminating the findings
Dissemination Plan

- Recognize the ownership of the knowledge gained
- Involve all relevant parties
- Ensure that evaluation results reach the intended audiences
- Form a Publications and Presentations Committee or Group
Be flexible and have frequent, open dialogue
Open Dialogue

- Open and honest
- Active listening coupled with flexibility
- Regular contact
- Advisory Council liaisons
- Tailored communication
Lesson 5

Select an evaluation team with skills in community–based participatory approaches
Evaluation Team

- Process and interpersonal skills for working with people of various personalities and backgrounds
- Ability to demonstrate respect and appreciation for people’s efforts and inputs
- Willingness to provide feedback to participants
- Skills in negotiation and conflict resolution
Lesson 6

Allow for the additional time and resources that participatory evaluation requires.
Time and Resources

- Time to build capacity and relationships
- Time, effort and energy on the part of the community
- Staff time to coordinate with partners
- Calendar time
- Staff time to address comments
Lesson 7

Acknowledge the value the community brings to the evaluation
Acknowledge the Value

- “Scientific” vs. “Community” contributions
- Community compensation
- Unique and equally valued contributions
- Reflection of equality of value
Lesson 8

Recognize that a participatory approach strengthens an evaluation
Strength of Participatory Approach

- Development of community and cultural relevancy of the data collection approach

- Interpretation of the results of the qualitative and quantitative assessment
“One of the negative connotations often associated with evaluation is that it is something done to people. One is evaluated. Participatory evaluation, in contrast, is a process controlled by the people in the program or community. It is something they undertake as a formal, reflective process for their own development and empowerment.”

M.Q. Patton, Qualitative Evaluation Methods, (2nd ed,)