Making Sense of Results: Unanticipated Results and Outcomes

Evaluation is a mindful and planned effort to capture the meaning and impact of our work; our results can help future practitioners in their efforts to prevent sexual violence and support survivors' healing. Evaluation also helps keep us ethical and accountable to the communities and programs we serve. The tips within this resource are meant as a starting place to begin creating an intentional evaluative practice within your coalition and while working with local community-based sexual violence programs. As part of a three-part toolkit, this resource will focus on handling unanticipated or unintended outcomes of an evaluation or evaluative process.

Throughout the planning process, remain aware of potential unanticipated effects of the process or data you collect, and talk about what they might mean for the program, staff, service participants, and other stakeholders. Early conversations with stakeholders and participants could generate a list of possible outcomes and consequences of asking questions and collecting data. This list won't hold *all* of the possibilities, but can serve as an opportunity to broaden your perspective as the evaluation planner. Flexibility and creativity are important qualities to embrace in evaluation.

If you're collecting data and discover that something isn't working, you may also discover the tweaks that are likely to fix that issue. Sometimes, we may find that a project really isn't working or at least not in the way it was intended. In this case, you will need to talk about bigger shifts or redirection in that project. This can be unsettling, but ultimately important as we continue to strive towards the best services possible for all survivors of sexual violence. As you interpret your data results, consider all the factors and what they mean as you read the data and make plans. For example, low numbers might be about new programming still ramping up rather than evidence of an unsuccessful program. Prepare for how you will explain the outcomes to your stakeholders regardless of what you uncover.

Examples of explanations and opportunities for engagement:

- You have engaged in interviewing and evaluating a local task force's meeting attendance and engagement. "Although we have not seen an increase in attendance and engagement, we did find that members are bringing topics and issues related to child sexual assault into other networks and coalitions they belong to. We may need to start capturing those efforts and findings ways to support those efforts.'"

- A recent outreach effort into the local Deaf community hasn't resulted in an increase in Deaf hotline callers or clients. "We had hoped our outreach and education efforts would make our program more approachable to Deaf survivors and significant others, however we have not yet seen an increase in services provided. We are wondering, though, if education around compassionate responses and support for a friend may have created a shift in norms within the local Deaf community. In addition to assessing the accessibility of our services, we may also need to follow-up with participants and ask more focused questions about behavior change and observations regarding victim-blaming."

In order to diminish unintended effects, it is important that the collection and sharing of data be done in a planned and thoughtful way. Data can be misleading if not provided in full context and can sometimes (intentionally or unintentionally) be manipulated out of context to paint an entirely different picture. In Kentucky, for example, interpersonal violence prevalence data was collected from 26 high schools over a five-year period. This data was used in aggregate form to determine if a primary prevention program effectively changed student bystander intervention behavior. The data measured change over time. However, this prevalence data, if taken out of context, could be misinterpreted to the detriment of the school:

- If the prevalence data for an individual school was simply shared as stand-alone data, then it could give the appearance that the school has a higher rate of interpersonal violence than other schools; or,

- Data that documented a prevalence increase in the second year (likely caused by increased education/recognition of violence) could be misinterpreted to mean that application of the prevention program actually added to the problem of violence in the school.

In either example, without the proper context, this data can be easily misused or misunderstood. Potential for misuse was considered at the time of design of the data collection process and participants were informed from the beginning how the data would and would not be used.

Remember that data are being collected from real people and have real potential consequences and benefits. Respect the privacy and time of those you are asking questions. Ensure clarity in purpose. Share with others what will be done with this information and that you are putting that information to good use by implementing appropriate changes.

Evaluation Resource Roundup

Weaponized Data: How the obsession with data has been hurting marginalized communities
By Vu Le
http://nonprofitwithballs.com/2015/05/weaponized-data-how-the-obsession-with-data-has-been-hurting-marginalized-communities/
The emphasis on data has been both good and bad. When used right, data, like fire, can be used warm and illuminate. When used wrong, it can burn whole communities.

Succeeding With - or Maybe in Spite of - Evidence-Based Practices
Blue Avocado
http://blueavocado.org/content/succeeding-or-maybe-spite-evidence-based-practices
We understand the reasoning that allows funding only for proven, evidence-based practices. But too often this requirement has become a club battering community nonprofits. Evaluator Clare Nolan explains how to "tweak" evidence-based practices to your own populations.

How Survivors Define Success: Report & Recommendations
The Full Frame Initiative
http://fullframeinitiative.org/how-do-survivors-define-success-report-recommendations/

Indigenous Peoples in Evaluation
American Evaluation Association: A Tip-a-Day for Evaluators
http://aea365.org/blog/category/indigenous-peoples-in-evaluation/

About this Resource

This publication is a collaborative project of the Resource Sharing Project Evaluation Workgroup. It is for coalitions who know service evaluation is important and struggle with the daunting task of designing and sustaining evaluation of their own efforts, as well as rape crisis systems and services. These collective thoughts aim to focus on how we can collect and showcase the great work of the anti-sexual violence movement.