Evaluation and continuous improvement

CCPH Service Learning Institute
Suzanne B Cashman
June, 2005
“Good evaluation” is nothing more than “good thinking”

It is the systematic collection of information about activities, characteristics and outcomes of programs, personnel, and products to use to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness and make decisions.

*Patton, 1997*
Why Evaluate?

- Reduce uncertainties
- Measure program achievement
- Improve effectiveness
- Demonstrate accountability
- Make programmatic decisions
- Build constituency
# Comparison of Academic Research and Practical Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Academic Research</th>
<th>Practical Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Controlled</td>
<td>Context sensitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>Sophisticated</td>
<td>Simpler</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Test hypotheses**
- **Improve program/practice**
Evaluation should:

- Strengthen projects
- Use multiple approaches
- Address real issues
- Create a participatory process
- Allow for flexibility
- Build capacity

WKKellogg Foundation, 1998
Guiding Principles

✓ Ongoing process
✓ Means, not an end
✓ Collaboration based on trust and respect
✓ Sensitive to cultural, socioeconomic, ethnic, lifestyle, life-span pluralisms
✓ Allow for combination of methodologies
✓ Remain flexible
✓ Build capacity
Stakeholders

- People who have a “stake” in what will be learned from an evaluation and what will be done with the knowledge

- They include:
  - People who manage or work in the program/organization
  - People who are served or affected by the program, or who work in partnership with the program
  - People who are in a position to do or to decide something about the program

_CDC, 1998_
Who are the Stakeholders?

Students
Administrators
Faculty
Accrediting agencies
Funders

Service Beneficiaries
Program staff
Community partners
Community at large
Stakeholders

- Stakeholders’ information needs and intended uses serve to focus the evaluation
- Variety of stakeholders may mean:
  - more than one focus (policy implications vs documentation of local activities)
  - varied levels of involvement
Institutionalization

- Institutionalized Practice
  - Routine
  - Widespread
  - Legitimized
  - Expected
  - Supported
  - Permanent
  - Resilient

- Marginalized Practice
  - Occasional
  - Isolated
  - Unaccepted
  - Uncertain
  - Weak
  - Temporary
  - At-Risk

Kramer, 2000
Components of Service-Learning Institutionalization

- Clear definition and purpose
- Long-term vision
- Tied to institutional mission
- Seen as vehicle for accomplishing other institutional goals
- Strong faculty involvement, buy-in, support
- Seen as legitimate scholarly pursuit
- Students assume active role
- Community members have a significant, respected, valued role
Components of Service-Learning Institutionalization (cont’d)

- A coordinating entity exists
- A policy making entity exists
- Adequate and appropriate staffing
- Sufficient funding
- Valued by administration
- Ongoing assessment; continuous improvement
- Seen as valuable component of departments’ programs

Bell et al, 2000
Closing the Loop

Collaborate with stakeholders for meaningful:

- Communication of results (process and outcome)
- Decisions based on results
- New assessment plans emerging from results
- Reflection on the assessment process
References