Theory, Practice & Application of the Utilization-Focused Evaluation Approach: Case Studies from Environmental Education

Environmental Evaluators Networking Forum
Washington, DC
June 9, 2009
Session Overview

❖ Introductions
❖ Review of Utilization-Focused Evaluation
❖ Case Study #1: Montana “Hooked on Fishing” Evaluation - Lisa Flowers, Boone & Crockett Club
❖ Case Study #2: Yellowstone National Park “Windows into Wonderland” Evaluation - Annelise Carleton-Hug, Trillium Associates
❖ Questions & Discussion
Evaluation:

Program Evaluation is the **systematic** collection of information about activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming.

Utilization-focused program evaluation as opposed to program evaluation in general) is evaluation **done for and with specific, intended primary users** for specific, intended uses.

(Patton, 1997/2008)
Utilization-focused evaluation is evaluation done for and with specific intended primary users for specific, intended uses. Utilization-focused evaluation begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use; therefore, evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful consideration for how everything that is done, from beginning to end, will affect use.

Use concerns how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experience the evaluation process. Therefore, the focus in utilization-focused evaluation is on intended use by intended users.
Guiding Principles for Evaluators
(American Evaluation Association, 1995)

- **Systematic Inquiry** - Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries about what is being evaluated.
- **Competence** - Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.
- **Integrity/Honesty** - Evaluators ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.
- **Respect for People** - Evaluators respect the security, dignity, and self-worth of the respondents, program participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they interact.
- **Responsibilities for General & Public Welfare** - Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare.
Standards for Evaluation

Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994)

- **Utility** - standards intended to ensure that an evaluation will serve the practical information needs of the intended users.

- **Feasibility** - standards intended to ensure that an evaluation will be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal.

- **Propriety** - standards intended to ensure that an evaluation will be conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results.

- **Accuracy** - standards intended to ensure that an evaluation will reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine worth or merit of the program being evaluated.
Features of U-FE

- Philosophy & Process of Evaluation:
  - Built in from onset

- Collaborative:
  - Involves working relationship between evaluators & primary users

- Contextual:
  - Specific to situation

Focus on intended use of results
Key Stages in U-FE

- Gain commitment to evaluation process
  - Active participants; open to change
- Identify intended users of evaluation
- Engage primary users in decisions related to evaluation
  - Evaluation Focus & questions
  - Deliverables = how will data be used?
- Identify methods & formulate Evaluation plan
- Involve users in interpreting findings, generating recommendations, disseminating results
Potential Outcomes of U-FE

- Increases utilization of evaluation
- Builds evaluation capacity
- Contributes to a culture of evaluation
Utilization-Focused Evaluation Resources


- Utilization-Focused evaluation checklist:
  Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University
  http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/ufe.pdf
• Environmental Education Evaluation: Time to Reflect, Time for Change. (Kara Shea Davis Crohn and Matt Birnbaum)
• Challenges and Opportunities for Evaluating Environmental Education Programs. (Annelise Carleton-Hug and J. William Hug)
• Blazing an evaluation pathway: lessons learned from applying utilization-focused evaluation to a conservation education program. (Alice Lisa Flowers)
• Building environmental educators’ evaluation capacity through distance education. (Lynette Fleming and Janice Easton)
• An Introduction to My Environmental Education Evaluation Resource Assistant (MEERA), a web-based resource for self-directed learning about environmental education program evaluation. (Michaela Zint)
• Environmental Education Evaluation: Reinterpreting Education as a Strategy for Meeting Mission. (Joe Heimlich)
• The Evolution of Rare Pride: Using Evaluation to Drive Adaptive Management in a Biodiversity Conservation Organization (Brett Jenks, Peter W. Vaughan, and Paul J. Butler)
• Interview with Brent Jenks, President & CEO, Rare. (Matt Birnbaum and Brett Jenks)
Utility is what evaluation is all about.

- Carol Weiss (2004)
Utilization-Focused Evaluation in Practice: An Evaluation of Yellowstone National Park’s Electronic Field Trips

Annelise Carleton-Hug                      J. William Hug

Trillium Associates
Welcome

Explore our award winning electronic field trips! Since 2001, Yellowstone has been offering eTrips to share the resources and treasures of the world’s first national park. Embark on these exciting adventures and look through new Windows Into Wonderland.

Please Register Now!

Now Showing

Getting Into Hot Water | START TRIP

17 eTrips
~ 50 minutes each
This is not the first time there has been concern about the Yellowstone pronghorn. Over the years, park staff has witnessed declines in the number of animals and has tried different management strategies to manage the population—often with unexpected results. We are here today to decide if the Yellowstone pronghorn population is in danger at the present time.
Background

- Program had never been formally evaluated
- Funding for evaluation became available during creation of final eTrip
- YNP Education staff were enthusiastic partners eager to participate in & learn from evaluation
Initial Focus Group with YNP Education Staff

- Who do you hope to reach with WIW?
- Identify Goals: What you hope to accomplish for each user group?
- What evidence would support the conclusion that you achieved your goals?
- Who are the intended users of this evaluation data?
- What do you plan to do with the evaluation data?
Windows Into Wonderland: Conceptual Map depicting Desired Outcomes

TARGET AUDIENCES
- People at a distance (who can't visit YNP):
  - Teachers
  - Middle school students
  - Homeschooled students
  - Foreign Guests (including students, teachers & other individuals)
  - Americans overseas (including military & international schools)
  - Families/Individuals
- People who are intending to or have visited YNP
  - Families/Individuals: as a pre- or post-trip activity

ACTIVITIES
- WIW Virtual Field Trips
  - Lesson Plans

SHORT TERM OUTCOMES
- Understanding of significant science concepts evidenced in YNP
- Interest in organisms, ecosystems & natural places
- Understanding the scientific process in the study of natural systems
- Enrichment of Yellowstone National Park visitor experience
- Participation in more WIW etrips

LONG TERM OUTCOMES
- Interest in preserving & protecting natural places
- Interest in spending time in natural places
- Participation in stewardship activities for local & national lands
- Future generations who value, visit, and protect national parks
Development of Evaluation Plan in collaboration with YNP Staff

- Teacher interviews
  - Defined key questions
- Classroom Observations
- Online Survey
  - Identified topical priorities
  - Assisted in question development
  - Sent out initial invitations
Key Findings

- Teacher Interviews
  - Described use of eTrips in classrooms
  - Identified barriers to implementation
  - Provided educational recommendations

- Student Observations
  - Clarified student engagement

- Online survey
  - Profiled categories of WIW users
  - Assessed satisfaction with eTrips
  - Assessed attitude toward National Parks/YNP
  - Investigated environmental concern, attitude, behavior
Teacher Feedback:

- Possible Barriers to Using WIW
  - Technology Barriers
  - Adherence to Standards
  - Length of Class Periods/Length of eTrips
  - Lack of Comfort with Technology and/or Subject Matter
  - Lack Knowledge of Program
Primary Roles of Survey Respondents

- **K-12 Educator**: 43%
- **Other**: 40%
- **University Educator**: 2%
- **Home School Educator**: 7%
- **Non-formal Educator**: 3%
- **Student**: 5%

- **Verified additional user groups:**
  - Other: not affiliated with school
  - Home Schools
  - University
Survey: Attitudinal/Behavioral Questions

- **Visiting Yellowstone National Park**
  - More interested: 30% (204)
  - No change from before viewing trip: 49% (329)
  - Less or a LOT less interested: 21% (141)
  - Total: 100% (874)

- **Spending time in local parks & natural areas**
  - More interested: 41% (273)
  - No change from before viewing trip: 30% (200)
  - Less or a LOT less interested: 29% (197)
  - Total: 100% (670)

- **Participating in indirect actions to help protect local & national lands**
  - More interested: 38% (255)
  - No change from before viewing trip: 18% (123)
  - Less or a LOT less interested: 42% (286)
  - Total: 100% (664)

- **Participating in direct actions to help protect local & national lands**
  - More interested: 32% (216)
  - No change from before viewing trip: 18% (123)
  - Less or a LOT less interested: 48% (318)
  - Total: 100% (657)

- **Survey: Attitudinal/Behavioral Questions**
  - More interested: 79%
  - No change from before viewing trip: 71%
  - Less or a LOT less interested: 56%
  - Total: 100%
I can't stress enough the value of these eTrips. They make it possible for me to introduce a different world (Yellowstone) to students who may never have the opportunity to see this special place—and then give students a basis for appreciating and understanding the worth and value of other natural places.

- elementary teacher, CO
So...what became of the evaluation?

- Final report was disseminated by key users to YNP staff (education office staff, chief and deputy chief) in hard copy form as well as an electronic version on a shared network.
- Evaluation was discussed among staff formally at training sessions, and informally.
- Ellen Petrick, YNP education specialist described the evaluation in an article: “The Unexamined Program is not Worth Giving” The Interpreter (May/June 2008, Vol. 4(3))
- Numerous requests were made for full report, originating from both field & administrative personnel from around the country.
- Conference presentations to NPS, USFS personnel, etc.
We have a much better sense of possible barriers to participation, and a detailed list of recommendations for improvement. Tables, graphs, photographs, and numerous quotes from this evaluation will be invaluable for conference presentations, future project proposals, and in-park communications. …

Despite the fact that we do not currently have funding for further eTrip development, this evaluation has provided compelling evidence of the value of this program and the means to justify future funding opportunities.

- Petrick (2008) *The Interpreter*
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