

2010 EEN Forum Notes

Session Name: Communities as Engines of Change: Achieving Quality in Environmental Policy Evaluations

Session Date/Time: June 8, 2010, 11:00AM

Notetaker: Laura Fennelly

Main Themes:

- Overarching theme of complexity is also evident in evaluation of community-based work
- Importance of strong partnerships with stakeholders
- Need for real-time evaluations, incorporation of evaluation into advocacy and policy timeline
- Importance of rigor

Detailed Notes:

INTRODUCTION: Johanna Morariu, Innovation Network

- Strong advocacy component:
 - o Policy change
 - o Leadership development
- Complexity is inherent in this work:
 - o Similar to environmental or systems/change evaluations
 - o This changes some of the ways that we do evaluations; a few principles helpful to keep in mind:
 - Evaluation must be used (need for RBM); emerging group discussing real-time evaluation to ensure best outcome
 - From inception evaluation should be based on information needs of:
 - Funder
 - Advocates doing work
 - Communities being worked in
 - Evaluators being brought into project
 - Policy makers
 - Evaluation is most useful when it is useful to decision makings (must be part of strategy process)
 - Evaluation is therefore not only on its own timeline, but also that of advocacy and policy change work
 - Need for the evaluation itself, and its findings and use to contribute to communication and alignment
 - Evaluations that seek to put a premium on communication and alignment, policy makers can be in-tuned to what advocates and community need → higher probability of achieving success
 - Partnership with stakeholders
 - Focus on participatory projects; stepping even beyond traditional “participatory” Definition (embedded evaluators)
 - Participatory loses some objectivity, but gains value in decision making
 - Inherent is role of evaluators as evaluation capacity builders (using data, dashboards, etc.)
 - Rigor cannot be lost
 - Balance between ideal level of rigor, and what level can be realistically carried out while still engaging stakeholders
 - Non-experimental design options are valid, have rigor, can be used, and are not unscientific
- Innovation Network is a non-profit consulting firm (U.S., Canada, Ireland)
 - o Fiscal partner of Center for Evaluation Innovation (set up to push the field of evaluation into these hard to measure areas)

Mary Kreger, University of California-San Francisco

- Explanation of “Found in Translation” subtitle: create partnerships, and through evaluation assist in framing issues as well as providing evaluation and a lot of data that actually drove that initiative
- How did San Francisco environmental policy initiative come about?
 - o Many organizations have focused on climate diseases in CA
 - Some have endorsed precautionary principle, encourage looking upstream at root-causes (i.e. environmental triggers in asthma)
 - Asthma epidemic in CA – 1 out of 6 children; higher prevalence in African Americans and Latinos (impacts health, ability to focus, family dynamics, etc.)
 - It was established early on that evaluation could help inform decision makers
 - o Evolution of environmental policy initiative
 - Moving from grant making focused on diseases to social determinants of health with environmental policy outcomes
 - Second round of funding provided opportunities to sharpen CAFA’s local and statewide policy objectives
 - o Basic issue was to think of environmental prevention to reduce health disparities and inequities
 - o 3 sectors defined by grassroots communities:
 - Schools
 - Housing
 - Outdoor Air
 - o Systems Change: understanding root causes enables focus on prevention and designing systems change endeavors
- Important roles of policy and evaluation
 - o Types of collaborative (overlapping)
 - Local coalitions, schools network, diesel state-level policy network, housing coalition, technical assistance, etc.
 - o Our role as evaluator was telling the story (framing issues) AND backing it up with data
 - Iceberg approach
- Creation of systems of inquiry
 - o Creating a learning environment: large burden for evaluators
 - o Must be done quickly
- Evaluation approaches (methods, tools)
 - o Many different methodologies, had to be related
 - o Measures:
 - Changes in awareness and knowledge
 - Changes in org behavior
 - Changes in interorganizational partners
 - Changes in policy (legislation, regulation, administration/procedures/innovative governance)
 - Changes in policy arenas where change sought
- Challenges:
 - o Building credibility (for communities)
 - Using the precautionary principle and data
 - o Recruiting and managing diverse collaborative members and strategic partners
 - o Matching environmental and social action scale (diversity)
- Policy Success
 - o State level
 - Diesel reduction strategies (i.e. anti-idling legislation)
 - Port pollution strategies being worked upon
 - 49% of all goods coming into country come in through Long Beach and LA (huge polluter)
 - Economic issues
 - Goal = to reduce diesel output 46% (3 year goal)

- Expansion of citizens role
 - Integrating community members into data collection
 - Must meet organizations where they are, assist in moving to the next level; relate experiences to engage members
 - Training community members and policy makers in policy work is ongoing

Rosemarie Moreken, Inter-American Foundation

- Inter-American Foundation
 - o Grassroots development organization, not strictly environmental
 - o We fund grassroots organizations' ideas; communities submit proposals
 - o Focus on building local capacity
 - o Choose indicators to match outputs and goals
 - o Receive grassroots organizations' reports every 6 months
 - o Review reports with them during their visits (data verification and discussion)
- Grassroots Development framework as a tool (model since 2000)
 - o How do we look at what we have done?
 - o How do we go about grassroots innovation?
 - o Went through phase of focusing on data → trying to work back toward that
- Indicators: Cone Premises
 - o 3 levels
 - Individual
 - Organizations and networks
 - Society
 - o Division between tangible and intangible indicators
 - o What are contributing and limiting factors for each indicator?
 - o Interaction/Capacity (despite divisions of levels, tangible vs. intangible premises, all indicators are related)

Andre Barros, Environmental Defense Network Cabo de Santo Agostinho

- About Environmental Defense Network Cabo de Santo Agostinho
 - o Cabo de Santo Agostinho: 173,500 inhabitants
 - o Network composed by local community organizations and businesses that carry out projects and actions to contribute to the strengthening of societal participation in environmental policies
 - o 10 Businesses
 - o 12 Local organizations
 - o Work of the network is coordinated by a Management Unit of specialized professionals who execute projects such as monitoring and evaluating outcomes
 - o Recipient of Inter-American Foundation grant
 - Project Objectives:
 - Develop basic leadership skills
 - Stimulate community groups in creating partnerships with business and local government to protect environment
 - Train 100 community leaders to develop and manage environmental projects with REDE and public/private partners
 - Environmental issues include industrial pollution
 - Community leaders have formed 12 NUCODEMOs which identify solutions for environmental challenges
 - Will formulate plans of action and undertake projects with the support of small donations and external resources
 - Challenge: capacity building of these groups to attend regional council meetings, have input valued
 - How has M&E helped REDE and the environmental network?

- Reduces uncertainties
- What is helpful in strengthening community orgs networks advocacy?
 - Evaluation helps orgs when they are carrying out the role in societal forums for public policies
 - Evaluation helps the stakeholders to know their reality better, helping them to have an influence

Questions:

Q: (To Mary Kreger): Can you explain the specifics of the information gathering?

A: (Mary Kreger): Local coalitions were actually funded. While some volunteers were involved, many were paid. One component was to talk to community about what was important into their neighborhood (i.e. cleaning up trash); on the ground data collection (i.e. number of streets and blocks cleared) correlated with hospital data. Some correlations were shown. We did have to do a fair amount of process data. Salience was very important in this. I also encouraged some coalitions to keep policy journals. Example of current struggle is with Walmart, who is a large creator of jobs. Some folks keep policy journals, and are very savvy about data. Organizational knowledge is something to aim for in this; knowledge must be institutionalized so that you can have core nodes of experience and knowledge.

Q: (To Mary Kreger): How communities trying to achieve policy change achieve credibility? Do you need to be affiliated with a university?

A: (Mary Kreger): Community groups do not have to be affiliated with a particular university. Policy makers always want the story, plus hard rigorous data. Someone who knows what they are doing with data must be consulted-- for example, we collaborated with local public health schools.