Successful Evaluations –

Lessons Learned Along The Way

Michael Shain, Ph.D.

The AIM Institute

We'll talk about. . . .

- Evaluation versus Research
- Know the proposal/project
- Know the project director (PD)
- Get connected with key personnel
- Evaluation "operations"
- Data, Data, Data
- Resources

Research vs Evaluation

"You cannot prove causality; you can only prove synchronicity."

Barry Kibel
Pacific Institute

	Research	Evaluation
Purpose	**To make a contribution to a body of knowledge**	**To assess service/program merit or functioning**
Audience	**▪External** **▪Results often generalizeable**	**▪Internal** **▪Results mostly site-specific**
Process	**▪Question** **▪Design** **▪Hypothesis** **▪Collect data** **▪Analyze** **▪Interpret**	**▪Engage stakeholders** **▪Program description** **▪Focus design** **▪Collect evidence** **▪Justify** **▪Ensure use**
Standards & Skills Requirements	**▪Validity** **▪Qual/Quant methods** **▪Research design** **▪Ethics review**	**▪Utility** **Feasibility** **Propriety** **Accuracy** **▪Qual/Quant methods** **▪Evaluation design**

Evaluation vs Research

- "Petri Dish" vs "Real Life"
- "Experimental Design" vs "Quasi-Experimental Design" vs "Eclectic"
- "RCTs" vs "Matched Groups" vs "Convenience Sampling"
- "Causality" vs Trends/Patterns

Know the Proposal/Project

- Logic Model
- Partners
- Activities/Services/Strategies/Etc.
- The "Geography" – community, school(s), businesses, agencies, etc.
- "Iron out" all the questions ASAP

Know the Project Director

- Communication/Operational Style
- Expectations
- Decide early who is responsible for what and who does what
- Define conflict resolution process

Get Connected with Key Personnel

- Who is the "real" decision maker(s)?
- The key information sources
- Identify the "worker bees" ASAP
- Avoid going "Native"!

Evaluation "Operations"

- Establish firm timelines/deadlines
- Attend partner meetings
- Use technology whenever possible
- "Boots on the ground" – walkabouts, site visits, etc.
- Blend Qual and Quant for full picture

Data, Data, Data

- What is currently available?
- Triangulation (both qual & quant)
- Confidentiality (IRB)
- Multiple Sources
- "Real – World"

The Ultimate Question: "So What?"

1. What important points do these data reveal?
2. What patterns or trends show up? Can they be explained?
3. How do data from various sources compare or contrast?
4. Do any correlations seem important?
5. What actions are indicated?

Food for Thought?

- How do I currently gather & analyze data?
- How could I revise my process to be more effective?
- What is my first step?
- Who are my "sounding boards"?

Resources

- Evaluation Institute – www.wmich.edu/evalctr
- American Evaluation Association – www.eval.org
- Evaluation Theory, Models, & Applications (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield)
- Utilization-Focused Evaluation (Patton)

Michael Shain, Ph.D.
Director of Evaluation Services
The AIM Institute
(402) 345-5025, x139
mike@aiminstitute.org