

“Evaluation in the Trenches”

Canadian Evaluation Society – Ontario Chapter

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Overview of the Session

- The Context for my Comments
- Challenges & Successes in 6 Categories:
 - Formative, Process, Outcome, Summative, Economic, Overall
- Opportunities
- Group Discussion & Input
 - Ideas to address the challenges



The Context – My Perspective

- Consultation (through The Health Communication Unit, U of T) to host agencies (public health, health centres, NGOs, coalitions):
 - planning an evaluation for a single intervention
 - planning a broad program slate so looking for evidence of effectiveness of current & potential initiatives
- Direct Evaluator for projects (usually related to a grant or large program review)
- Lead consultant to the Canadian Best Practices Initiative to populate the CDP & HP Portal

Successes & Challenges

■ Formative Evaluation

■ Successes

- More typical with Health Communication campaigns

■ Challenges

- Often no clear, segmented population for the program so not easy to check in with them during development
- Not often any time built into a critical path for this work
- Don't often think this step is necessary with an existing program

■ Others?

Successes & Challenges

■ Process Evaluation

■ Successes

- Lots of experience in this type of evaluation – mostly tracking

■ Challenges

- Much of the information gathered is never used to improve the program; only for reporting
- Information is not often linked to any objectives
- Those collecting the data do not often understand why it is important or how it will be used

■ Others?

Successes & Challenges

■ Outcome Evaluation

■ Successes

- There is an increasing number of relevant examples from which to choose

■ Challenges

- Strong outcome objectives are often not in place
- Timeframe for data collection is often limited to the immediate end of the program
- Increasing number of programs aimed at population health level (e.g., policy change); not as many evaluation examples

■ Others?

Successes & Challenges

■ Summative Evaluation

■ Successes

- Often undertaken when dissemination is undertaken (e.g., a conference, publication, full report) or justification

■ Challenges

- This approach is rarely considered
- Requires time for integrated thinking and synthesis which is also a skill not often nurtured
- Little opportunity for dissemination externally and even internally between programs

■ Others?

Successes & Challenges

■ Economic Evaluation

■ Successes

- Increasingly being asked for this info, especially by funders

■ Challenges

- Often not considered beyond unit cost for service
- Outcomes not available often
- Very limited skills in this area (not only organizationally but perhaps more broadly in the industry)
- Very few relevant examples to draw on

■ Others?

Successes & Challenges

■ Overall

■ Successes

- More & more evaluations being done, summarized & shared
- Some examples of relatively new approaches – PAR, developmental evaluation, social media

■ Challenges

- \$ for evaluation is often seen as “taking away” from the program resources
- Technical support varies greatly – program staff, health promotion consultant internally, provincial resource centre, internal epi or evaluation expert, paid consultant
- Increasing focus on population health outcomes, including policy change
- Programmers are trying to balance “prove and improve”
- Despite more “best practices” available, not a lot of uptake

■ Others?

Over to you ...

- In groups, take one type of evaluation and offer up any potential ways to address the Challenges identified.
- Methods to address could be individual, organizational, local, regional, provincial or beyond
- Select 1-2 to share with the larger group

