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Section 8:
Evaluating
Strategies for
Family & Youth
Involvement

Evaluating Strategies for Family and Youth Involvement

Authentic family and youth participation takes time and resources, as well as a commitment from board members. To sustain participation as board membership changes over time, it may help to have ongoing information about what works, what does not work, and how to improve. To collect this information, boards can undertake two activities:

- Evaluation: conducting periodic evaluations of the participation process and using the information to revise bylaws, norms, recruitment materials, and other documents and processes that are creating barriers to authentic participation; and
- Board mentoring: identifying and working with another board that has more experience with engaging families and youth in authentic participation.

Evaluating Participation

Evaluating family and youth participation helps to understand whether the participation is working, both from the perspective of board members and the impact it may be having on the decisions made by the board. Two types of evaluation are important. First: evaluating the participation process, which you can do through a *process evaluation*. Second: evaluating the outcomes of having participation on your board, which you can do through an *outcome evaluation*.

Process Evaluation of Participation on Boards. A process evaluation's main purpose is to describe how participation is occurring on the board. It will help you measure the level of participation, consistency in participation, and activities where participation is occurring. Some process measures you can collect to track participation on your board include:

- What types of families, youth, and other board members are participating on the board? (gender, race, age, county of residence, perspective, etc).
- How many meetings were held and how many family, youth, and other board members attended?
- How many orientation meetings were held and who participated?
- What materials were developed to support family and youth involvement, and who received them?

- How many decisions were made with family and youth participation involved?
- What kinds of decisions have been made with family and youth participation?

Outcome Evaluation of Participation on Boards. An outcome evaluation's main purpose is to help the board understanding how participation has had an impact on the board's decisions and board members' experiences. It may examine changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and perspectives of board members. It could also ask about board members satisfaction with the participation process. Finally, outcome evaluations can track discussions leading up to the decisions made with and without family and youth participation, helping to see how their involvement may change the decisions. Some outcome measures a board can collect include:

- How have board members attitudes toward and knowledge of family and youth participation changed over time?
- Are board members, including the families and youth, satisfied with the participation occurring?
- How do the decisions made with family and youth participation differ from those made without?
- What are the issues that families and youth bring to the forefront prior to decision-making?

Designing and Implementing an Evaluation of Participation. It is best to design the evaluation at the very beginning of developing family and youth participation on your board. Having an evaluation plan in place at the beginning of youth and family participation ensures an ability to track changes throughout the time of participation. However, evaluation can be useful at anytime, and we recommend that boards that already have participation still consider evaluating their participation activities. Designing your evaluation includes identifying the purpose and your evaluation questions and then creating measurable milestones.

Practical Examples and Evaluation Questions. To help you generate the right evaluation questions consider the following key elements (Engage Youth!, 2008):

1. For what purpose(s) is the evaluation being done, i.e., what do you want to be able to decide as a result of the evaluation?
2. Who are the audiences for the information from the evaluation, e.g., board members only or other stakeholders involved with the board?

3. From what sources should the information be collected, e.g., youth, family members, all board members, other stakeholders of the board, board staff, etc?
4. How can that information be collected in a reasonable fashion, e.g., questionnaires, interviews, examining documentation, observing board meetings, conducting focus groups among key board members, etc.
5. What resources are available to collect the information?

Goals and Evaluation Questions. The first step in to define your evaluation goal. A goal is the overall purpose of the participation process.

For example, a goal for a board that deals in youth issues could be: "To ensure decisions on youth programs in Colorado are made in partnership with youth."

The next step is for the board to identify how it will know the goal is met. Identify the measure of success: do you need to ensure that each decision made by your board has a youth vote? Or is the measure of success that the board took time to discuss and consider the issues brought up by youth before making the decision.

Continuing the above example about youth participation, evaluation questions might include:

- *How many decisions were made with a youth participating as a voting board member?*
- *How many decisions were made after a discussion that included youth input?*
- *How many decisions were made that mirrored the recommendations of our youth advisory board?*
- *Did the youth involved in decision-making feel their voice was represented in the final decision?*

Other evaluation questions might include:

- Are board members satisfied with the level and type of family and youth participation?
- Have attitudes of board members changed because of the participation?
- Do all board activities incorporate youth and family input?

Defining Milestones. Your board may then identify milestones or timelines to help gauge success. Milestones need to be SMART: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound. Achievable milestones give your board room to grow. Relevant milestones help you measure your progress on the evaluation questions.

Example process milestones include:

- Recruit 5 family members from target populations to participate on board by December 31st, 2010.
- Develop orientation materials for the board by December 31st, 2010.
- Connect all family members participating on the board to mentors on the board within 2 months of joining the board.

Example outcome milestones include:

- 80% of participating family and youth members will report developing new leadership skills.
- 80% of participating family and youth members will report satisfaction with their opportunities to provide input to decision-making.
- 80% of participating board members will report satisfaction with the level of family and youth involvement on the board

Collecting Information to Answer Your Evaluation Questions: Once your board identifies milestones, the next step is to identify the types of information you need to collect to measure the milestones.

Start to identify activities to “count” on a tracking sheet (see the attachment for this chapter, Process Evaluation Tracking Sheet for an example).

Easy milestones to track might include: the number of family and youth members participating regularly, the number of orientation sessions, etc. More complicated milestones to measure may include: satisfaction of family and youth members with their participation, the leadership skills developed by family and youth participants.

Other milestones, particularly those focused on outcomes, may require a survey of board members, a facilitated discussion during a board meeting, interviews of key partners, review of board minutes or other materials, etc.

Below is a table adapted from *Engage Youth! Colorado’s Guide to Building Effective Youth-Adult Partnerships* that lists different methods of data collection, their purposes and the types of information they obtain, and the advantages and challenges of each. Since some data collection methods take more time and effort than others, it is a good idea to consider when the evaluation results are needed and what resources are available to collect the information.

Data Collection Methods

Method	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Questionnaires, surveys, checklists	When you need to quickly &/or easily learn a lot of information from people in a non-threatening way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can complete anonymously; • Inexpensive; • Easy to compare & analyze; • Can get lots of data; • Can administer to the entire board; & • Many existing sample questionnaires. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Might not get careful feedback; • Doesn't get full story; • Can be impersonal; • Wording can bias board member's responses; & • Literacy & language barriers.
Interviews	When you want to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get full range & depth of information; • Develops relationship between interviewer & interviewee; & • Can be flexible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can take much time; • Can be hard to analyze & compare; • Can be costly; & • Interviewer can bias responses.
Documentation review	When you want impressions of how program operates without interrupting the program; from review of applications, finances, memos, minutes, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get comprehensive & historical information; • Information already exists; & • Few biases about information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Info may be incomplete; • Need to be quite clear about what you're looking for; Often takes much time; & • Not flexible means to get data as data is restricted to what already exists
Observation	To gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly about processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View operations of a board as they are actually occurring; & • Can adapt to events as they occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to interpret observed behaviors; • Can be complex to analyze; • Can influence behaviors of board members; & • Can be expensive.
Focus groups	To explore a topic in depth through group discussion, e.g., about reactions to an experience or suggestion, understanding complaints, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickly & reliably get common impressions; • Can be efficient way to get range & depth of information; & • Can convey key information about board member experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be hard to analyze responses; • Need good facilitator; & • Difficult to schedule 6-8 people together.

Strategies to Respond to Evaluating Findings

Evaluation is only useful if the results help to improve your board's family and youth involvement strategies. Once your board has the results, it is important to share them with all board members including the families and youth participating on the board. Setting aside time at a board meeting to present, discuss, and act on evaluation findings is one strategy for using the information. At a minimum, it's a good idea for your agenda for this activity to include:

- A short presentation of the process and outcome evaluation findings;
- A discussion of what the findings indicate about your board's current efforts and their success;
- A discussion of what your board would like to improve upon in the future; and
- Decisions on concrete steps to take to improve.

Evaluation results are sometimes hard to hear, particularly when they include negative findings. It is important to prepare your board to accept critical information by treating the findings as an opportunity for improvement, not a judgment of their efforts. The language you use when you present evaluation findings can set this tone. Presenting evaluation results does not need to be one person's responsibility on the board. Families and youth, board members who have taken on mentorship positions, or an external evaluator may all help in the presentation of results.

Seeking Mentoring from Boards with Sustained and Successful Participation

In response to any gaps and needs identified by evaluation efforts, your board may want to seek mentoring from a board with more established family and youth members.

Throughout this guide, example materials are presented from other Colorado boards. The materials used and contact with representatives from those boards can be good resources. Additionally, boards like the Colorado Mental Health Planning and Advisory Council (MHPAC) have long-term participation strategies and reimbursement practices. Some groups, like the Collaborative Management Program, have both family participation on their Steering Committee and a subcommittee focused on family participation, called the Voice and Choice

Committee. Other groups, like the Youth Partnership for Health (YPH), are composed entirely of youth or family members.

Family and youth organizations can also be helpful, such as:

- The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), <http://www.nami.org/>
- Mental Health America (MHA), <http://www.nmha.org/>
- The Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health ~ Colorado Chapter (FFCMH~CC), <http://www.coloradofederation.org/>.

In Colorado, NAMI, MHA and MHPAC are leaders in family involvement on boards. Your board may benefit from consultation with them to learn successful strategies they have used in sustaining family involvement and crafting policies to institutionalize the effort.

Materials and Examples

- ✓ Example Process Evaluation Tracking Sheet
- ✓ Example Board Member Satisfaction Survey
- ✓ Discussion Guide on Family Involvement

Please note: The resources provided in this workbook are in no way exhaustive.