

Building Evaluation Capacity Through Educational Workshops

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Background

The *Collaborative Research Grant Initiative: Mental Wellness in Seniors and Persons with Disabilities* (CRGI) is a five-year initiative funded by a \$3.0 million grant that was provided by the Alberta Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports in 2008 to advance applied research activity in mental health. This grant is managed by Alberta Health Services (AHS) and formerly by the Alberta Mental Health Board. One of the objectives of the CRGI is to build research capacity among service providers who serve and support seniors or adults with disabilities.

Educational Workshops are among the activities that assist in attainment of this objective. An example of these workshops are evaluation workshops designed to create a common framework from which staff at Alberta Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports can undertake evaluation work.

Methods

A series of three workshops have been created to increase knowledge of staff at Alberta Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports in the area of program evaluation.

These workshops are delivered face-to-face, by experts in the field of evaluation through direct presentation to ministry's staff. Every participant receives an information binder that includes copies of presentation slides, a handout detailing subject areas covered in the workshop and a workshop evaluation form.

Workshop Objectives

The first workshop introduced participants to the Basics of Research and Evaluation. The *learning objectives* of this workshop are to:

- Introduce participants to research and evaluation
- Describe the benefits of conducting evaluation
- Provide an overview of various types of evaluation and evaluation-related activities
- Provide an overview of research methods

Basics of Research and Evaluation workshop – some of the main concepts:

Formative evaluation: conducted in the course of program implementation or while an intervention is still being developed, formative evaluation focuses on improving or enhancing an intervention while it is still being developed.

Summative evaluation: conducted in the later stages or after completion of a program, summative evaluations focus on the overall value of a program and will provide lessons for future planning.

Quantitative studies: examine the facts or causes of phenomena which can be expressed numerically and analyzed statistically, these studies are designed to test hypotheses and determine generalizability (Bryman, 2003).

Qualitative studies: "aim to provide an in-depth understanding of people's experiences, perspectives and histories in the context of their personal circumstances or settings" (Spencer et al. 2003, p.3).

Mixed method studies: combine qualitative and quantitative methods, approaches, and concepts in a single study.

The second workshop introduces participants to the Evaluation Planning Process. The *learning objectives* of this workshop are to:

- Provide an overview of the evaluation planning process
- Describe roles and responsibilities of those involved in evaluation
- Describe how to develop logic models, evaluation frameworks, and evaluation plans

Evaluation Planning Process workshop – some of the main concepts:

Steps involved in evaluation planning: Identification and engagement of stakeholders; understanding the program to be evaluated (i.e., the purpose, overall goals, target population, anticipated outcomes and implementation status); reporting requirements and evaluation expectations; past evaluations of the program or similar programs; choosing an appropriate evaluation approach and designing appropriate evaluation questions; selecting appropriate data sources and collection methods; choosing a data analysis strategy; developing plans for vetting and disseminating findings to appropriate stakeholders.

Developing program logic models: logic models are used to describe the relationship between the elements of a program and to ensure that activities of a program link to the expected outcomes.

Developing evaluation frameworks: evaluation frameworks are used in evaluation planning. It is often in the form of a table that includes the evaluation questions along with their corresponding measures, data sources and data collection methods.

The final workshop informs participants how to Implement an Evaluation. The *learning objectives* of this workshop aim to help participants learn to:

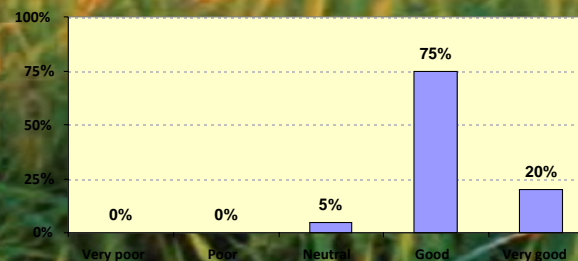
- Make effective use of literature reviews to inform evaluations
- Develop data collection instruments
- Collect and analyze data and consider ethical implications
- Report on key findings
- Disseminate evaluation results to appropriate stakeholders through evaluation reports as well as other knowledge exchange activities.

Results

Here are the preliminary evaluation results of the first of three workshops. Approximately 67% of the workshop attendees completed a feedback survey. In this survey, participants were asked to rate various aspects of the workshop using a 5-point Likert scale (1= very poor and 5=very good), and to answer three open-ended questions.

As shown in Figure 1, nearly all participants who completed the feedback survey (95%) indicated that overall, the workshop was good (75%) or very good (20%).

Figure 1: How would you rate the workshop overall?



Overall, the majority of the participants (95%) indicated that the various components of the presentation were good or very good. The majority (85%) of the participants rated the use of scenarios and examples presented in the workshop as being either good or very good. An even greater number (90%) reported that the use of background materials and handouts were good or very good.

The percentage of participants who rated their confidence in understanding program/project evaluation as "good" increased significantly, from 40% before the workshop (Figure 2a) to 85% after the workshop (Figure 2b).

Figure 2a: Confidence in understanding evaluation before the workshop

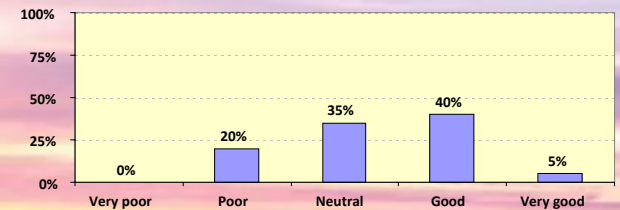
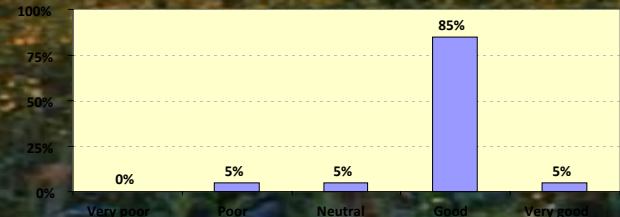


Figure 2b: Confidence in understanding evaluation after the workshop



Summary

The evaluation workshop series provides an opportunity for the staff at Alberta Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports to enhance their understanding of program evaluation. These workshops are intended as a pilot for workshops that can be specifically tailored to needs of community agencies serving seniors and persons with disabilities and can be made available to them in the future.

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Acknowledgment

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