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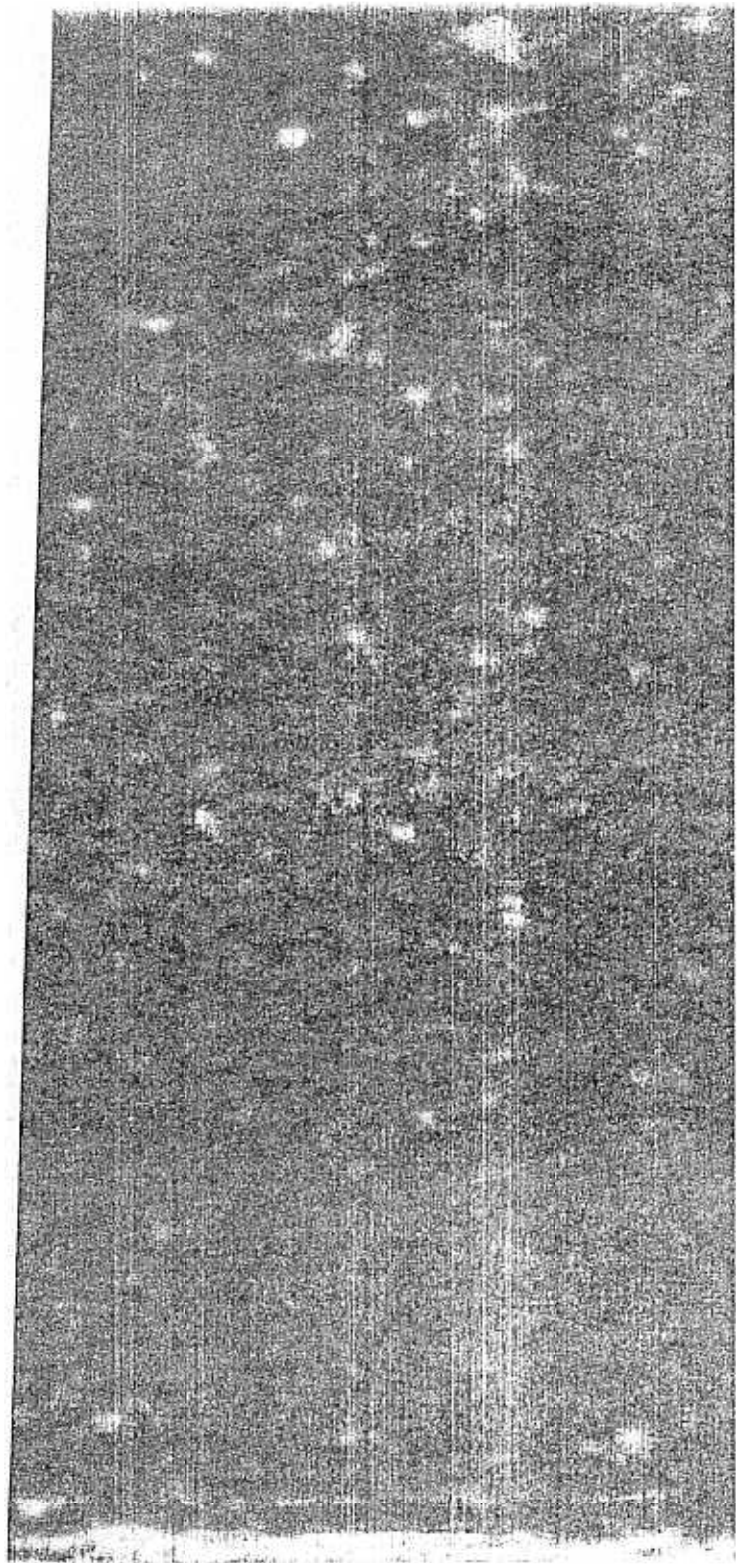
Communication and Community Participation in Program Evaluation Processes

Robert T. Trotter II, Ph.D.

Introduction

Local communities play a vital role in the potential success or failure of culturally competent substance abuse programs. At the same time, community involvement generates evaluation issues that must be accommodated during various stages in the development, maintenance, change, or closure of community-based programs (Randall-David, 1989; Nutting, 1990; Bracht, 1990; Whyte, 1990). Representative community participation is particularly vital to the success of evaluation plans for culturally competent substance abuse prevention projects in ethnically and racially diverse communities. Setting up community-oriented evaluation designs, complemented by strong communication channels that work throughout the life of a program, can strengthen a program's potential for success, while lack of local participation can move it toward unfortunate and untimely demise. This chapter discusses some of the conditions that allow evaluators to work with, rather than against, the local community in setting program goals, identifying process and outcome evaluation measures, and maintaining long term community support for a program.



There are several primary conditions that have an important impact on community-based evaluation plans. These include the cultural and sociopolitical environment within which the program and the evaluation process must coexist, the availability of local resources for conducting an evaluation, the existence of current methodological approaches that either support or hamper culturally competent evaluation in a community context, and the conditions surrounding the communication of evaluation and research findings back to the community from which they are derived.

The community's cultural and sociopolitical configuration creates a general milieu for evaluation by establishing a framework to identify the local view of substance abuse problems and problem solutions. This environment is inevitably pluralistic and may be polarized along significant dimensions that are locally important and even unique. This sociopolitical framework often identifies the areas of strongest local concern for measures of the success for substance abuse programs. This has an impact on evaluation strategies by potentially increasing or decreasing the credibility of evaluation findings, depending on whether these local priorities are measured for their impact by the evaluation process of the program. The results of a program evaluation, in turn, often have an impact on local politics inside and outside of the project, and can reconfirm or challenge the community's vision of its priorities for drug and alcohol abuse prevention programs.

The local resources for evaluation, including project personnel and community participation, can either enhance or inhibit the conduct of culturally competent evaluations. These resources dynamically interact with the evaluation strategies that are available to community-based programs. Current methodological approaches must often be adapted to local resources. The personnel skills that are available, and the fiscal resources that the program can generate to support evaluation goals, may not match ideal program evaluation needs. It is of little use to collect methodologically elegant data that cannot be analyzed due to a lack of trained evaluators and computer facilities. And, in some cases, this type of data cannot be collected in the first place because of the inevitable expense of elegance. This condition creates as many difficult circumstances as methodologically incorrect data that cannot be defended. Neither of these problematic processes results in data that support broader program goals, nor can that type of data be safely disseminated.

Finally, the public and semipublic dissemination mechanisms that provide information to different constituencies about project outcomes also play a key supporting role for program evaluation and maintenance. These and other parallel issues are explored in some detail below.

General Community Concepts and Issues

There are multiple definitions of community. In this chapter, a community is a geographically bounded set of individuals, kinship units, and social institutions that interact in a culturally congruent manner to create and maintain potentially viable living conditions for human beings. This concept of a community is similar to that of a defined environmental unit, for analytical purposes. It must be redefined for each community that is to be described and evaluated, and it can be analyzed at multiple levels of interaction. Although the concept of a global community has been proposed, the idea of community promoted here is less ambitious. It includes a small geographical area—one that is normally named by the individuals living in it, in which direct interaction among its members is possible. This is similar to the concept of community used in defining elements of community-oriented primary care programs (Strelnick, 1990), a useful construct for the development of evaluation components for community-based substance abuse prevention efforts. Under this definition, a metropolitan area could be considered a community, for one level of analysis. On the other hand, a geographically bounded neighborhood or any ethnic/racial, cultural, religious, or socioeconomic enclave could equally be defined and analyzed as a community. The concept of community contains the assumption that its members could individually or collectively interact with one another face to face, under the right circumstances, and would generally recognize each other's membership, given the correct recognition information.

The basic purpose of a community is to promote or reinforce the cultural norms of the group and to provide a framework for survival through all the processes supported by the community above the level of the individual and the family, such as general welfare of its members, protection from civil harm, mutual assistance through voluntary organizations, smooth economic transactions, and normal government functions, to name a few. This definition makes the concept of "community" a useful evaluation and analytical construct. It suggests that there can be both individual and collective measurements of the success of a substance abuse program. On an individual level, the change in a person's behavior from negative to positive (however defined) is the most common unit of measure. At the community level, changes in norms or a reduction in collective measures of negative behavior (e.g., drug arrests, drunk-driving-related accidents) are possible. In fact, there appear to be more measures of community change available for evaluation of substance abuse prevention programs than there are measures of individual change.

A community's cultural, racial, and socioeconomic circumstances are all conditions in the local environment that affect the outcomes of abuse prevention programs; thus the community concept is useful in helping evaluators construct the most appropriate boundaries for their analysis, rather than trying to measure program impacts in social groups that would not have an opportunity to be affected. The community concept allows evaluators to accommodate divergent conditions that are important in tailoring the abuse prevention program and its evaluation to clearly defined populations, value systems, and local circumstances.

The identification of a community unit involves collecting all the appropriate parameters that define the boundaries and limits of the community, both from the view of the evaluation expert and the view of the members of that community. This often involves exploring the different ways that a community can be delineated, combined with the effects these definitions have on specific assessment strategies. The primary definitions normally use geographical, demographic, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, physical, political, and environmental variables to construct community boundaries. Each combination of variables used has a somewhat different impact and may subtly determine at least some of the variables that are most appropriate for evaluating and interpreting program and individual outcomes. For example, if cultural orientation is used to define community boundaries, it is necessary to ensure that the language and the cultural meaning of the evaluation instruments match appropriately with the community, and that the evaluation be placed within an appropriate cultural framework, including measures of acculturation to the dominant and to the local culture. The actual evaluation measures that are appropriate for each of these circumstances are described in other chapters in this volume.

The following sections identify the key conditions that need to be taken into account in constructing successful programs and their associated evaluation strategies in culturally diverse communities.

Community Conditions That Affect Evaluation

Substance use and abuse take place within a changeable, often negative or conflictive sociopolitical environment. There are significant differences in the ways that laws and regulations about what can be consumed and who can be involved in alcohol and other drug consumption are interpreted and enforced in different communities. Local values and cultural variation in the ways that alcohol and other drugs are viewed can have positive or negative consequences on substance abuse program outcomes and on evaluation strategies. Many of the negative, and the positive, impacts on community-based substance abuse prevention programs are the result of conditions that are external to the project, such as local law enforcement efforts, government regulations, and the availability of corollary services. These external forces must be identified and discussed in any evaluation plan. An assessment process that ignores them does so at its own peril. For example, if drinking and driving issues are fundamental emotional and political elements in the local culture, then the success of a program may need to be measured, in part, in relation to its effect on the reduction of this problem, as well as other targeted conditions. If prescription drug abuse is a concern, then intervention programs that provide community feedback on the rehabilitation of people with medical addictions may be important.

Evaluation strategies must also take into account local sensitivities. Many ethnic/racial communities in the United States are expressing alarm over the growing evidence that drug-related problems are not uniformly distributed. Substance abuse problems appear to occur in higher levels in some ethnic communities as opposed to others, and this information has been used to stigmatize those communities. One result is that such communities are reluctant to agree to evaluation programs that would reinforce these negative views. Other epidemiological concerns are also crossing over from scientific to political concerns about substance abuse program goals. The most highly stigmatized disease in the United States, at present, appears to be AIDS. Injection drug use and sex for drugs have been directly linked to the spread of HIV in the United States, and there appears to be a difference in the levels of drug-related HIV infection encountered in different regions of the country and in different ethnic populations. This type of double stigmatization of local cultural groups creates even more concern about community participation in substance abuse program evaluations. In some cases, the rejection of program evaluation results is strongly linked to avoiding "more bad news" for ethnic/racial populations.

Each of these conditions has a direct impact on the design of the instruments intended to measure the effectiveness of a program, as sociopolitical "outcomes" of substance abuse programs are increasingly intertwined with epidemiological outcomes. Some of the strategies for incorporating these issues in program appraisals are described by Stecher and Davis (1987) in their introductory work on focusing evaluations at the correct level of analysis. Others are covered by King, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon (1987). The following sections provide other issues that must also be taken into account.

Nongovernmental Institutions and Community Programs

There are a growing number of local interest groups and voluntary organizations that target substance abuse control and rehabilitation issues. Many of these organizations are grassroots or community based and often are developed in response to a perceived lack of government (local to Federal) competence in dealing with such problems. These groups include self-help organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous or the special lobbying groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving. The presence or absence of these voluntary associations, and the level of intensity of their operations, can have a direct effect on the cultural ecology of the community. They are commonly single-issue driven, with a level of drive that is very high in some communities and virtually invisible in others. They tend to target narrow substance abuse or community outcomes, which may either reinforce or inhibit the goals of more generic abuse problem prevention and intervention programs through their singleness of purpose. The local effects of these movements need to be addressed in any comprehensive program evaluation plan. Many of these organizations are powerful or effective in some of the populations in a town but may have virtually no impact or no presence in other cultural, ethnic/racial, or socioeconomic groups. They can be particularly problematic where they do not meet the needs of a diverse community structure, favoring one socioeconomic or cultural group over others.

The Media

Many substance abuse prevention and intervention programs have some element built into them that stresses an impact on the community through public awareness campaigns. This means that culturally competent evaluation strategies need to establish a base line evaluation of media messages that are related to program goals and then to evaluate the program's impact on the number, quality, and targeted message impact on the media for each "community" that is part of the evaluation plan.

This evaluation strategy is complicated by having to deal with numerous mixed messages. Local and national media often accept or publicly promote a general societal obligation to raise community awareness of substance abuse problems and to promote the reduction of abuse risks at a community level. At the same time, advertisers have increasingly targeted women and ethnic/racial

groups with highly effective cultural marketing programs that appear to have increased alcohol and tobacco consumption. Thus, within this context, local community standards of "good taste" can encourage the media or prevent them from publicizing the full range of the impacts of drugs or alcohol on human behavior (positive or negative). Some key types of preventive or protective behaviors may be ignored through special interest pressure. Therefore, some substance abuse prevention programs tend to focus their media campaigns on impacts that do not carry a "moral" loading effect, following the general U.S. precept of separating church and state. The mixed media messages (and "blind" areas where messages are not sent) in each community create a significant challenge for culturally competent evaluation of the impact of a public awareness campaign from a single program or even a group of programs promoting a single public message.

Public Attitudes and Beliefs

Public beliefs and attitudes toward alcohol or drug use compose a critical set of baseline information that should be collected and later evaluated for substance abuse prevention or intervention programs. Much of this information should be collected during the initial needs assessments for the community and repeated at regular intervals to monitor change. It is extremely useful to know the knowledge, belief, and attitudes about abuse issues and programs represented in the community before any attempt to change those conditions. Then, these baseline data can provide a potential measure of the distance and the rate of change caused by a particular program on both individual and community variables. The baseline data must also be assessed against the potential confounding effects of other, competing or complementary, substance abuse prevention programs that exist in the community.

Stages of Community Involvement

Governmental support of abuse programs, from the local to Federal level, has created a boom-and-bust cycle that is the common denominator in ethnic/racial community substance abuse problem prevention programs. New projects are announced, funded, and allowed to die on the basis of policies and priorities that are outside of the control of local "folks." This condition is well known and is firmly embedded in any ethnic/racial community's response to new programs or changes in existing programs. There is a considerable amount of skepticism about the process. New programs are generally accepted from the viewpoint that something is better than nothing, although this assumption has all too often proved to be wrong.

If abuse prevention programs are to have a chance of being successfully adopted by communities, it is critical to provide a mechanism that results in real, rather than token, local-level involvement in the design, maintenance, and evaluation of the programs (Chekki, 1979; Archer, Kelly, & Bisch, 1984). Over the past 20 years, there have been numerous government and regulatory attempts to promote "grassroots" or community involvement in federally subsidized programs. Local communities have often adopted these provisions, only to let them disappear along with the funding for the specific program that mandated them. Nevertheless, local involvement, and more appropriately, local control of substance abuse programs are critical elements in the ethics and politics of abuse research, especially in conforming to the complex ethics of research and evaluation in racial/ethnic communities (Manson & Trimble, 1982; Beauvais & Trimble, 1991).

All the different project development and maintenance phases can be the critical times when community involvement needs to be secured for the evaluation for a culturally competent program. These phases include pre-project planning, program design, startup of program activities, general program maintenance, and program closure. This sets the standard of evaluation of the complex dynamics that exist in a culturally diverse community. Each stage of program development can be identified as having interlocking but somewhat differing assessment goals, objectives, and measurement needs. The development of the evaluation measures for each stage should include information about the probable community reaction to and need for involvement in those processes (Orlandi, 1992). The following sections provide some details about these project phases and the evaluation and community participation needs that accompany them.

're-project Planning

Substance abuse prevention programs are very often introduced into ethnic/racial communities from the outside. High-prestige universities (and not so prestigious ones) are famous for writing grants to test new prevention, evaluation, and intervention theories and methods targeting racial, ethnic, or other underserved populations without having consulted and without having been asked by the local community to create the program. Some of these programs are based on data from community needs assessments, others on more general needs statements that are nevertheless highly persuasive. These programs, when funded (as they frequently are, since they are well designed from the perspective of the funding agency), are then introduced to the community or simply opened without prior consultation. This can cause serious design flaws and may create program evaluation disasters.

Since the design and evaluation of these projects is directly affected by local circumstances, the ideal is to create a community partnership in the project from its earliest stages. New programs (and their attached evaluation components) need the acceptance of various leaders and influence groups in the community prior to their development. Too many programs are designed to address issues that are of low importance to the community (however great their impact on prevention theory). Too many projects ignore the conditions that are of the highest priority for local citizens. Incorporation of these priorities in substance abuse programs can lead to strong support by the community. This knowledge can then expedite the design of programs that meet both local and national goals, at many different levels.

For example, the imposition of "outsider programs" designed for Native-American groups in the United States has been so common that most tribes have instituted local Institutional Review Boards whose primary purpose is to protect the community from additional research and demonstration projects that are irrelevant to community needs, regardless of their potential scientific merit. New substance abuse programs must now be reviewed and accepted by local community boards, by the tribal government, and in some cases by Indian Health Service personnel, through formal review processes that vary from location to location. These new procedures make it imperative that individuals who are contemplating programs designed from the outside hold introductory meetings with local officials prior to the development of the project. These meetings are an excellent time to begin establishing the types of goals and objectives that are acceptable to the local community and can then lead to the development of highly relevant evaluation programs. This creates a mutual condition wherein it is in the best interest of the local community to allow testing additional scientific and national level priorities within the context of meeting some local goals. The combination tends to lead to a win-win condition for everyone involved.

Project Design

The second critical period for community involvement is during the project design stage. Incorporating community experts, to work in cooperation with substance abuse experts, can result in the development of a project that meets a large number of needs. The project design component must work out such local issues as a culturally appropriate governance structure, staffing that matches the cultural conditions extant in the community, and a culturally competent program design that is "localized" to meet existing conditions in that particular community.

The days when there was sufficient funding to create substance abuse prevention and intervention programs that sounded innovative and attractive but could not scientifically prove that they have measurable positive consequences (let alone a measure of their cost-effectiveness) are probably gone forever. Most community leaders recognize the need for some type of measurement of program impact, both for their own political gain (by proving to the community that the projects they support have worked) and for the long-term viability of programs (by proving to outside funding sources that the projects are worth continuing when there are no local resources to continue them).

Project development can be done within the context of community involvement or by outsiders alone. Many communities have a strong interest in having outside groups provide the initial

program development if there is not sufficient local expertise about new trends and programs. However, there are not any communities that are comfortable with a program that is entirely imposed from the outside. Therefore, they request, or demand, a participatory development process that takes into account the division of expertise that is available.

This development phase is the second point when project goals can be more clearly defined, potential impacts discussed by community representatives, local priorities recognized, and the evaluation design modified to include local and theoretical and programmatic evaluation variables and conditions. The most common local questions will revolve around the issue of, "What's in it for us?" for both the community and the project personnel.

Startup and Project Maintenance

The early startup phase of a substance abuse prevention project is the time to reconfirm all evaluation strategies and to recheck the conditions that may produce external or intervening conditions that would affect the anticipated outcomes of the prevention or intervention program. Baseline data need to be collected as early as possible. It is also the best time to reaffirm local community priorities, which may or may not have changed between the time the project was originally contemplated and its actual initiation. This is also the time to either create, or to reactivate, local community input through the use of community advisory boards, hiring of local experts, and incorporation of cultural experts in the evaluation process. These groups and conditions are described in more detail below.

Project Close-Down

Projects close down after either a brief or extended life. Minority communities are well aware of the boom-and-bust cycle of Federal, State, and local funding. This makes them reluctant to accept experimental programs, since one effect of these programs is to raise people's expectations that something will be done about a local problem. All too often when an experimental model, or startup program, shows itself to be effective, funding is eliminated on the assumption that the local community will be able to continue the program in the future. Since the conditions that made the community a target of these trial programs are often the same conditions that prevent it from maintaining programs through local resources, the close-down phase of a project often has serious negative impacts on the community.

Closing pilot and demonstration programs is often unavoidable, but it is very important that this condition be taken into account in designing both the evaluation process and involving the community leadership in the project. This involvement can lessen the negative feelings left behind by the closing (where it is inevitable) and may increase the probability of local support for the continuation of some or all of the program or its goals. If the program was unsuccessful, there is generally a need to explain its failure, based on concrete evaluation data. The involvement of local community leaders and members can help lessen the negative or long-term consequences of that single program failure. Involving community members in a program's closing can also increase the probability that outsiders will have future opportunities to help create programs in the community rather than being rejected out of hand because they were seen as having abandoned the community and avoiding a commitment to continuing the program.

Use of Local Resources for Program Evaluation

The ultimate design of community-based evaluation components of a substance abuse program depends on several elements: the goals and purposes of the program, the availability of local experts and program participants, public and private perceptions of the program, and the cultural parameters of abuse conditions in the local area. The design should also include the economics and politics of alcohol or drug use in the local area. As noted in the section above, all of these conditions make it important that the project foster local participation in the development and assessment of substance abuse prevention programs. The following sections provide an overview of the types of local expertise

at are ormally available as partners and feedback groups for aluat n programs, along with some of the areas of expertise at the groups bring to the project and its evaluation design.

ypes of Local Participants Available

Programs designed to meet the needs of multicultural communities normally have a number of individuals associated with them who can provide information that assists in meeting ongoing program development and evaluation requirements. These include the following groups of people.

Community Leaders

Community leaders can be local government officials; business, professional, and religious leaders; and nonprofit organization executives. On the other hand, many recognized community leaders are locally credible individuals who have the well-being of the defined community as their first priority, but who do not participate in government or business affairs. Part of the challenge to culturally competent evaluation strategies is to identify all of the appropriate types of leaders to be represented in the evaluation process.

These various kinds of leaders are important in several stages of project development (e.g., needs assessment, program design, monitoring program impact on the community, policy impacts of a program) and are most commonly incorporated into the project at a policy level, on community oversight boards. The basic design of the program determines the types of local experts brought into this relationship. For example, government representatives are often necessary as participants in order to secure positive interactions with local agencies that have an impact on substance abuse problems, especially if the agencies are in any type of jurisdictional conflict, which is common.

One of the important project functions of local experts is to identify local priorities through their own knowledge of the community and their community contacts and networks. Community expectations can play an important role in communication and interaction with a particular program constituency, and these experts should be well aware of the priorities and the local mechanisms for setting up positive communications with appropriate groups. Without their input, the priorities set for a program by the community may differ drastically from those set by the program staff and consultants. Identifying the similarities and differences in priorities for each contingency can be a factor in measuring either successful or unsuccessful program outcomes. These leaders are also a very important element in protecting the program from political problems.

Many people who are involved in substance abuse programs avoid getting deeply involved in politics, especially the politics of power, culture, economics, and ethnicity. Power politics goes against the egalitarian ideals of our society. This makes local politics one area of expertise that is crucial for culturally competent evaluators. Substance abuse programs are surrounded by or embedded in political issues and processes that have a direct impact on the success or failure of programs.

There are at least four types of politics that should be covered by local leaders or assessed by program evaluators for the protection of the project. The first is the power relationships that exist within the program structure itself (office politics). The second is the set of relationships that exist between the program and the people who use its services. Often these relationships are affected by ethnic and socioeconomic politics in broad ways. The political environment that surrounds the project in the broader community is the third condition that must be addressed. And the final set of political relationships is the overall policy environment (from county to Nation) that influences the program from outside the community. The project assessment plans will need to be adapted to these conditions in their design, execution, and dissemination of information within the project and between the project and outside constituencies.

Cultural Experts

Human beliefs, values, goals, and ideals vary significantly across cultural boundaries, leading to the need to develop culturally competent substance abuse programs and evaluation strategies. This, in turn, makes it essential to gain the participation of local cultural experts who can help the project develop strategies that reflect and support the diversity found within the community, yet meet the requirements for scientifically valid evaluation. These

experts can assist in helping the program match language, values, and local knowledge about the problem to larger project goals. Cultural experts have a positive community impact through their relationship to the program. They also are important in reviewing the design of evaluation strategies, especially in terms of comprehensive and culturally relevant evaluation instruments and insights into the interpretation of evaluation data. The other area in which their expertise is invaluable is providing help in dealing with local conventions regarding taboo subjects.

All cultural systems have some form of taboo knowledge: information that is wrong to share with outsiders, knowledge that is dangerous for outsiders to have, or knowledge that is considered improper for other insiders to know. The danger of outsiders having taboo knowledge is twofold. In some cases the threat is to the insider group—the information can be used to socially harm or embarrass the group members or make them feel bad. In other cases, the knowledge is dangerous to outsiders—it is of such a sensitive nature that they are put in social or even physical danger by knowing it. Each social system has built-in mechanisms for dealing with taboo knowledge, and they differ from group to group. By developing an evaluation system that includes significant participation from the community, these potentially dangerous or embarrassing issues can be handled in a culturally competent manner, within the context of the evaluation process, without harmful effects to the community or the evaluators. Even programs that must deliberately deal with these areas (e.g., drugs, sex, domestic violence) can successfully evaluate program and community impacts if they are handled appropriately.

Advisory Boards and Grassroots Involvement

Advisory boards are becoming the most common source of community involvement. They are normally composed of community leaders, cultural experts, program participants, consumers, and substance abuse specialists, and are customarily used to set policy and act as a communication bridge into various communities and constituencies. The board can be an important source of information for the development of both process and outcome evaluation instruments and tools for projects, and is very useful in providing advice about policy issues relating to the evaluation of project goals from the point of view of users or potential participants, rather than the staff.

"Hidden" Experts and Gate Keepers

In most communities, and in ethnic/racial communities in particular, some of the most influential individuals are not visible or discernible to outsiders. In some cases, communities of color deliberately shield their true leaders from the mainstream to protect them from disrespect or attack. Yet these individuals can "make or break" a program in that community. They act as hidden evaluators and gate keepers. If possible, these individuals should be identified and included as a key element in any evaluation of the community impact of a program. These people are often hard to find and are most effectively approached through other community members, such as board members. But it is more than worth the effort to incorporate them in the long-term evaluation of the impact of the program and in the dissemination of information about the program back into the community, because of their influence.

Securing Cooperation from the Community

Substance abuse prevention programs in culturally diverse communities must be a cooperative endeavor. The local community impact, including the experts described above, can be positive or negative, depending on the relationships established by the program, and the program outcomes (Archer et al., 1984). At the most generic level, the community can be asked to identify the relative level of need for a particular program (baseline data to determine how well the need is or will be met by the program). It can establish locally grounded expectations about potential program outcomes. And community involvement in program evaluation can help keep the evaluation (and the program) from incorrectly encroaching on taboo subjects, or politically sensitive or volatile issues, or from encountering unnecessary obstacles through known problems in design and communication of evaluation strategies. Program communication and evaluation needs have to be

understood in this sociopolitical context (Attneave, 1989). The issues that should be addressed through this cooperative process include the insider/outsider situation, local involvement and commitment, and some symbolic and semantic issues surrounding the relationships between local individuals, program staff members, and consultants brought in from the outside to support research and evaluation in culturally diverse communities.

Outsiders Versus Insiders ("You ain't one of us")

The sense of belonging and local identity that provide the definition, boundaries, and norms for a community also create potential opposition between insiders and outsiders. One program strategy is to incorporate sufficient local talent and commitment to either reduce or eliminate this area of potential conflict and to handle conflicts within the community, as well. Numerous projects have floundered or died on the basis of whether they are perceived as being imposed or being locally connected. Programs that were not created by recognized community members can often be the target of suspicion, regardless of either their intent or the value of the services or products produced by the project. This condition needs to be explored and taken into account in any evaluation strategy. The most common mechanism for improving community participation in programs and their evaluation components is to thoroughly involve the local experts described above in all aspects of the program and its assessment, within the context of the conditions described below.

Consultants and the "Stranger Effect"

Even though communities are often suspicious of the motives of outsiders, there is a countervailing attitude of respect for people with impressive credentials, national reputations, and associations with prestigious institutions. This condition can be used to the advantage of both the program evaluation and the community itself. Consultants and evaluation experts must establish local credibility, but once it is established, they can have a large impact on a community and a project. It is a case of hearing what "strangers" have to say with more intensity than what is said by local people, whom you have heard many times in the past. The elements that structure the acceptance of these experts can be very different, depending on the constituency evaluating the experts' appropriateness to the community. Professional credentials may be meaningless in some contexts, where only cultural competence is recognized as important. Conversely, without the appropriate credentials, some individuals are not recognized as having the ability to make crucial judgments about a program. These issues must be balanced in relation to a program's needs and its evaluation design. A mixed strategy is often best: evaluation schemes should take advantage of the stranger effect, while supporting the development of local expertise.

One of the important elements of the stranger effect is that people will often talk to these outsiders about issues that would be too politically divisive to discuss with local people. It is sometimes easier for outsiders to set up a condition of confidentiality since they do not have an association vested in local political or social factions. They can more easily gain access to evaluation data that would place a local evaluator at either an advantage or disadvantage in relation to other project personnel or the community. On the other hand, outsiders are normally kept from seeing and finding out about certain taboo subjects. The stranger effect works to the disadvantage of the evaluation process, and for these evaluation targets a trusted insider is needed to collect the information. Combined evaluation teams that take these opposing conditions into account can be particularly effective.

The Language and Politics of Research Versus Evaluation

Symbolic and semantic issues can have an important impact on the local perceptions of a project and may need to be taken into account in the design of culturally competent evaluation processes. For example, many of the terms used to designate the people who are the source of information for evaluating a project (e.g., research subjects, informants, respondents) have negative meanings in various community contexts. "Informants," relating to substance abuse programs, may be synonymous with "snitches." Subjects are people who are powerless and who are subject to conditions they may not like and do not control. Respondents are people

who have no say in determining the way they reply; they simply respond to other people's questions, whether those questions relate to them or are understandable. Program evaluation designs must work with, instead of against, these types of semantic and symbolic conditions.

At another level, there may be a major symbolic difference between research and evaluation at the community level. Some groups have had negative experiences with past research endeavors, especially those in which they perceived that the investigation had no benefit to the population being studied. In Native-American, Hispanic-American, and African-American communities, leaders often express the sentiment that they do not need anyone else coming in to "put us under a microscope"; they need programs that work. In these communities, research has taken on the symbolism of oppression—something that is done to others, often without their consent. In some cases, evaluation has also taken on these negative connotations, but not as frequently.

In most instances, evaluation is conducted in the context of trying to determine how beneficial a program or program element is, rather than assessing general community conditions. Research is thought of as primarily benefiting the researcher (who gets articles, promotions, and tenure, regardless of what happens to the community). Evaluation is thought of as providing information that can support good programs. There is a certain irony to this situation, since evaluation and research strategies are normally indistinguishable in terms of design, instrumentation, and analytical frameworks. However, the more evaluation becomes indistinguishable from research, in both language and process, the more likely that the current advantage of calling program assessment "evaluation" will disappear in the future.

On the other hand, evaluation can also run afoul of community priorities. In these cases, there are local questions about the cost of evaluating a program. The money for the evaluation process may be viewed as a resource taken directly out of the pool of money that could be spent for services. The political attitude and forces of outside evaluators may dictate that something, however ineffective, is better than nothing for a community that has nothing and can pressure the community to develop minimal or ineffective evaluation strategies. This creates a condition in which culturally competent evaluators must develop appropriate language and answers to questions about the purposes, relative worth, and the potential "outsider" uses of their endeavors, or their efforts may be destroyed. They must be able to defend evaluation as a community resource and service, rather than have it become a source of political difficulties.

Basic Do's and Don'ts for Community Evaluation

There are several rules or strategies that can help create an effective and locally credible evaluation system. These include staying neutral within the context of political and social factionalization, being useful but avoiding being used, and "delivering the goods" in ways that are locally valued. When the evaluation components of programs become involved in taking sides, their credibility is lost, even when the evaluation is accurate. There are numerous examples of local factions co-opting evaluators for their own purposes, to the detriment of the program. Even if no major divisions exist, individuals (either in the community or in the project) will commonly try to influence the design and outcome of assessment efforts to promote their own social or political careers. Others may see program evaluation as an opportunity to promote their interpersonal agendas by attempting to uncover "improper conduct" in a project. They will aspire to redefine an evaluation as a witch hunt. These are processes that must be avoided from the outset through the design of politically neutral evaluation programs. The antidote to most of such problems is to establish a clear understanding of the purposes of the evaluation program from project inception to its final conclusion. This allows the program and the evaluators to provide everyone with a consistent and neutral description of the appropriate uses and the permissible conditions for use of the evaluation data. It creates a situation where the supervision of the evaluation program is maintained at the appropriate locus of control—for the benefit of the project, not individuals or factions.

Communicating Evaluation and Program Research Findings

The overall evaluation process is not complete until the information collected is communicated to the appropriate audience. Once the community-level concerns for the construction of substance abuse programs have been accommodated, the project will begin to produce significant amounts of evaluation information based on the appropriate methodological design. These data immediately become extremely valuable to many groups. The data need to be returned to multiple constituencies for action, but in an appropriately controlled fashion.

The purpose of most substance abuse evaluation strategies is to provide information that will make the program stronger and be better at serving client needs, more influential, and more clearly worthy of local support, plus any one of a large number of other purposes. This means that dissemination of the evaluation information should be incorporated into the design of the system from the very beginning of the project in order to avoid co-option or misinterpretation of the data. This need often creates a delicate balancing act and takes considerable forethought to be handled effectively, honestly, and constructively.

Two of the most common concerns affecting local credibility of the evaluation are the avoidance of overselling the project and the problem of raising and then dashing community expectations. In many projects, there is some pressure on the evaluation process to promise more than a project can deliver, to the long-term detriment of the project. On the other hand, many communities have experience with changing local, State, and Federal priorities for programs and services. This creates skepticism, and it also creates a problem of continually inflating and then destroying people's hopes for improvement in their community. Negative program evaluations can be interpreted as placing the community at further risk of the loss of resources.

The following sections describe some of the processes, constituencies, and impacts that should be taken into account in the dissemination of culturally competent program evaluation information.

Ongoing Communication Processes

A substance abuse problem prevention program that serves an ethnically diverse clientele should maintain consistent, ongoing communication channels to each of the groups present in the community that are important to program success. This ensures early detection of potential problems (good process evaluation procedures), and helps ensure the long-term viability of a program by developing support based on mutually understood goals and defensible outcomes. This communication process is, in part, the responsibility of the evaluation team. Some of the types of communication that can result from good evaluation design include frequent updates for community leaders, ongoing media exposure, good communication mechanisms for getting information to local institutions concerned with substance abuse issues, feedback to cultural leaders, and feedback to program clients. This type of design is also valuable for communicating on a regular basis with grassroots community boards and advisory groups. Strategies for these processes are covered in some detail by Morris, Fitz-Gibbon, and Freeman (1987).

Channels and Audiences

Most of the communication channels and audiences that are important to the normal functioning and use of evaluation information are obvious, once the program is designed. However, a basic study of the literature reveals that some of these commonsense entities are strangely ignored by projects, to their detriment. Therefore, it seems reasonable to summarize them as a potential checklist for projects that are developing or changing their evaluation strategies.

A culturally competent project has many communication channels open to it to provide information about the program to appropriate constituencies. These channels may vary locally and through cultural preference or the availability of resources to individuals in these communities. They can also be mediated or constricted by language preferences and education levels. The common communication channels range in scale from community-wide channels (e.g., radio, television, newspaper) to more intimate or focused communication routes (e.g., newsletters, word

of mouth, posters). The broadest include the locally available media, print or broadcast, and well-established institutional channels that involve intergovernment and nonprofit agency boards, newsletters, and informal communication systems.

The next level of communication is to make evaluation results available to community participants, through board functions and targeted information campaigns (e.g., block programs, letters). Evaluation information can also be effectively disseminated through public forums, such as local health fairs, educational forums, and the like. Information can also be presented orally to such interest groups as local civic organizations. All of these assume that the project is providing consistent and frequent evaluation information to its own employees and board members.

These channels further assume the existence of multiple audiences for any evaluation findings: project personnel, clients, policy makers, the public, the media, and competing institutions. There is a dynamic tension created for most evaluation programs between the desire for maximum dissemination and a desire to control the way in that evaluation information will be interpreted. This creates a need for the project personnel to discuss the specific types and volume of information that should go to each audience and through each communication channel. These discussions require evaluators to explore the ethics, politics, and logistics of providing both positive and negative evaluation information to different groups, issues that are pragmatically addressed by Morris et al. (1987) and Sieber (1991) with advice that relates directly back to the design and purpose of the evaluation program in the first place.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Accommodating the needs, issues, and conditions described in this chapter should be thought of as a cyclical rather than linear process. Most of the results of an evaluation program are produced in a linear sequence, but the policy behind them, the audience for them, and the ongoing relationships between the program and the community are a dynamic and evolutionary spiral that does not have a clear beginning and end, only cycles of interaction and change. The evaluation and communication efforts that link a project to a community need to be evolutionary in order to accommodate the interactions implicit in both ongoing programs and continuing evaluation processes. Evaluation results and recommendations should be put into a repeating and changing format, rather than a linear checklist for completion. Each program element can cycle in and out of importance, according to what has been accomplished in the past and what is anticipated for the future.

This condition creates an ongoing problem for program evaluators who either need to live in a linear world (based on the culture of the program) or need to accommodate cycles of change within a product-oriented system. Viewing these issues from a nonlinear perspective creates an opportunity for designing evaluation programs that are culturally competent and that may be much more acceptable to the communities that need the types of workable substance abuse prevention programs described in this volume.

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