

Focusing Sessions: A Valuable Stakeholder Engagement and Evaluation Design Tool

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Focusing session origins

- Donaldson's Program Theory-Driven Evaluation Science: Strategies and Applications (2007)
- The construction of a plausible and sensible model of how a program is supposed to work (Bickman, 1987)
- Need to develop program impact theories independently of, and isolated from, the empirical evaluation design

Focusing session value proposition

- Create common understanding and build trust
- Make program theory explicit and testable
- Provide framework for data collection and analysis
- Frame evaluation questions

Creating a community of learning

- What are the 3 attributes you would like to contribute to this evaluation study?
- How do we want to conduct the evaluation as co-creators of knowledge?
- What kind of community of learning do we want to create?

Program mapping

- Start with the long-term outcomes and work backwards (intermediate, then short-term)
- Make sure stakeholders understand the difference between an action and a change
- Work in small groups and then put the changes up on the wall and draw the arrows with the whole group

Question formulation and prioritization

- If you could get a sound answer to a question about your program that would help improve its impact, what would it be?
- What are the questions you want and need answers to? What is important to measure in this program? What are your knowledge needs?
- What are the 3 to 5 questions that you want to get answered in the next X months?
- Working together toward shared vision to create together that which we cannot create alone
- Contributing to solving complex problems = improving the quality of life on the plane

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Next steps

- Evaluators and stakeholders review plausibility of each link in the model to make sure they follow logically.
- Evaluators design an evaluation study to answer the priority questions and a budget for how much it will cost to answer each question.
- Stakeholders align evaluation planning with strategic and operational planning.

Resources

- Data2insight.com/resources
- Doview.com – one standard license is \$199 (discounts given for charities)
- <http://collectiveimpactforum.org/>
- About youth engagement curriculum at <http://powerfulvoices.org/curriculum/index.shtml>
- Deane and Harré. (2014). Program theory-driven evaluation science in a youth development context.
- McMeeking, Basile, and Cobb. (2012). An organizational model to distinguish between and integrate research and evaluation activities in a theory-based evaluation.
- Donaldson. (2003). Theory-Driven Program Evaluation in the New Millennium.