

## Community and Participatory Evaluation and Research

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My evaluation philosophy is grounded in my preceding experience and by growing national consensus on community-based participatory research, whether the community is defined as organizations, populations, or systems. The primary purpose of evaluation is to support and replicate deliberate advances. Evaluation information empowers communities and their organizations to develop and renew themselves. Evaluation is a participatory and collaborative process, thus continuous feedback of evaluation results should be routinely provided to all participants. Evaluation helps direct the participants' attention to powerful variables that stand a chance of making a difference. Posing questions, in itself, will change what project participants think about and decide to do. Evaluation is a constantly emergent process. As we all become smarter, my questions will become more sophisticated and my data needs more precise. Each stage of evaluation is related to each stage in the development of the program, thus initial methods of evaluation should be "pilot" in nature. External evaluation reports not only project outcomes but preceding inputs and outputs such as management buy-in, organizational readiness and resistance to change, cultural and political change, learning and reporting changes, technology change, investments and commitments over time, resolving internal control over the required resources, changing incentives and disincentives, standardization of practices and reporting, assets and values realignments, and capacity and sustainability development.

Based on this philosophy, responsible evaluators must:

- Engage the active and close involvement of project and community actors
- Seek local consensus on what measures and methods are appropriate for local objectives
- Avoid over-reliance on "remote" and archival data collection techniques
- Develop a "theory of action" to explain each system initiative separately and a "meta-theory of action" to explain what actions worked and/or failed to work across multiple systems and sites
- Share and test emergent methods, insights, models, and findings with project participants; report equally on the whole, the parts, and the contexts in which organizational life occurs; protect personal confidentiality and proprietary business interests.