

Evaluation Brief #3

Stakeholder Engagement

What are stakeholders?

Stakeholders are defined as any person or organization that has a vested interest in a project or program. Potential stakeholders in public health include but are not limited to program management, staff, funding agencies, program recipients or clients, schools, universities, healthcare providers, advocacy groups, coalition members, local government, elected officials, and the general public.¹

Why is engaging stakeholders so important?

Stakeholders possess important information and experience about a program, including its history, goals, values, activities and desired outcomes. This information can assist in the development and implementation of the evaluation. They offer access to populations of interest, can assist with data collection, and expose shortcomings of the program.²

The most important reason for engaging stakeholders is that some of them (e.g., management, funders) have the most power and influence over a program, and can make decisions based on the evaluation results. These are the key stakeholders or primary users of evaluation. Without their support an evaluation may face challenges, while its results are likely to be ignored, criticized, resisted or even sabotaged.^{1,2}

It may not be feasible to engage all potential stakeholders in evaluation due to resource constraints (e.g., time, staff) or other reasons (e.g., stakeholder bias). However, it is essential to identify the key stakeholders early on and involve them throughout the evaluation process.

“There are five key variables that are absolutely critical in evaluation use. They are, in order of importance: people, people, people, people and people” – Halcolm’s Persona Grata

How to engage stakeholders?

Stakeholders can be involved at all the stages of evaluation. Their contribution is considered particularly valuable during^{1,4}:

- evaluation planning, including the development of a program logic model, evaluation questions, evaluation design, instruments and indicators;
- evaluation implementation, specifically data collection;
- interpretation and dissemination of results;
- development of recommendations.

Stakeholders are more likely to support the evaluation and its results if they have a sense of ownership over how the evaluation is conducted and a say over what will happen to the results.^{1,2}

Some common ways to obtain stakeholders’ input include³:

- Surveys/questionnaires
- Focus groups/interviews
- Formal and informal meetings (e.g., advisory committee, working group, town hall meetings, presentations)

Evaluators serve stakeholders, so without them a successful evaluation is almost unattainable.

References

1. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2012). Step 1: Engage Stakeholders. Introduction to program evaluation for public health programs: A self-study guide. Retrieved September 1, 2016 from: <http://www.cdc.gov/eval/guide/step1/>
2. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, Snelling S, Meserve A. (2016). Evaluating health promotion programs: introductory workbook. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario.
3. Patton, M. Q. (2012). Essentials of utilization-focused evaluation. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
4. Rossi, P.H., Freeman, H.E., Lipsey, M.W. (1999). Evaluation: A Systematic Approach (6th ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.