

RESEARCH-PRACTITIONER PARTNERSHIPS:

**What to consider in the early days
of program evaluation**

August 27, 2020

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this presentation do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation; the Administration for Children and Families; or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



Welcome and introduction to the MAST Center



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Principal Investigator, MAST Center

The MAST Center conducts research on marriage and romantic relationships in the U.S. and the healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) programs designed to strengthen these relationships. It is a partnership between Child Trends, Public Strategies, and the National Center for Family and Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University.

<https://mastresearchcenter.org/>

Purpose

This webinar is the first of a three-part series on how to build positive and productive research-practitioner relationships. Today's webinar focuses on the early stages of evaluation. We will present conversation starters and tips on the types of conversations that are important in preparing for a useful, feasible, and high quality program evaluation. The second and third webinars, which will occur in the fall, will address conversations helpful during program implementation and during dissemination of program evaluation results.

Meet the presenters

- **Mindy Herman-Stahl, Ph.D.**
Senior Researcher, Public Strategies
- **Lauren Mattox**
Project Manager, Public Strategies
- **Ryan Carlson, Ph.D.**
Associate Professor, College of Education, University of South Carolina
- **Nicole Silverio, M.A., LMHC, LMFT**
Project Director, Project Harmony, University of Central Florida Marriage and Family Research Institute

What is program evaluation?

Program evaluation is a systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and using information to answer questions about program implementation and effectiveness.

Types of program evaluation

1 **Process evaluation** examines how programs are delivered.

INCLUDES...

- Implementation evaluation
- Formative evaluation

2 **Outcome evaluation** examines if and how program activities change participant outcomes.

INCLUDES...

- Experimental or impact evaluations
- Quasi-experimental designs
- Pre-post single group designs
- Cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit

Program evaluation framework

- Utilization-focused evaluations (UFEs) are judged on the degree to which they are useful for the end users. Planning starts with questions about who will use the data and how. The findings and process are used to improve program performance. UFE values participation from multiple users and includes process and outcome evaluation.
- Developed by Michael Quinn Patton
<https://www.utilization-focusedevaluation.org/>

Getting started: Finding an evaluator

- **Internal vs. External?**
- **Factors to consider?**
- **Where to look?**
 - **Contact** Local universities or The American Evaluation Association
 - **Reference** evaluation reports (ACF website)
 - **Invite** proposals from specific evaluators
 - **Advertise** on your website and social media pages or on a partner's website/social media pages
- **Evaluate proposals and decide.**

Resource: Child Trends Brief • Five steps for selecting an evaluator: A guide for out-of-school time practitioners

https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Child_Trends-2007_10_01_RB_SelectingEvaluator.pdf

Program evaluation planning

- Why is planning ahead so important?
- Avoiding the “Uh oh, what did I get myself into?”



Getting to know you: First date

- Background and experience—affects framework/priorities
- Creating shared language-- improves communication
- When and how to communicate – helps ensure communications happen

Conversations from the field



- How did you find each other?
- What were you looking for in an evaluator vs. practitioner to partner with?
- What has worked well in prior partnerships?
- What has not worked well?

Possible deal breakers

- **Your evaluation partner**
is unwilling to communicate regularly
- **Your evaluation partner**
is prioritizing evaluation needs over participant well-being
- **Your evaluation partner**
prefers working alone from the program team, stakeholders, or participants

Evaluation purpose statement: Where to start

- With this evaluation we hope to...
- And we will use the findings to...

Getting ready: Conversation starters

- **Who** are the intended users of this evaluation?
- **What** are the primary purposes of the evaluation?
- **How** will the data be used to inform programs or practices?
- **Who** should be involved in the evaluation?
- **What** do you want to learn through the evaluation?
- **How** can the evaluation help to build organizational capacity?

Conversations from the field



- What are the most important issues for evaluators and practitioners to discuss in the early stages?
- Evaluators and practitioners generally have different trainings and priorities in their work. What are some common tension points that may arise from these differing perspectives or priorities?

Identifying and engaging stakeholders

Conversation starters

- **Who** are the key stakeholders?
- **What** will they want to know?
- **How** will they be involved?
- **How** can we get buy-in?



Identifying and engaging stakeholders

Stakeholders	Level of Involvement	Reasons for involvement	How will they use the data?	When will they need the data?
Substance abuse treatment center	Core	Will be a bi-directional referral partner	Track additional services received beyond treatment center, decisions about service provision	Quarterly
Stakeholder 2				

Conversations from the field



- In your experiences, what stakeholders have been most important to involve?
- Do you have tips for getting buy-in from stakeholders to participate in or support the evaluation?
- What are the best ways to leverage stakeholders in an evaluation?

Possible deal breakers

- You are struggling with communicating the benefits of the evaluation to your stakeholders
- Your stakeholders are reluctant to fulfill their role or are not buying in to the evaluation
- You and your evaluation partner cannot agree on stakeholders' level of involvement

Prioritizing program evaluation goals

Things to consider...

- **Importance** – Do your evaluation questions reflect what is most important to your organization, stakeholders, and funders?
- **Contribution** – Will your evaluation questions help you develop knowledge that will contribute to your organization’s service delivery and to the larger field of human services?
- **Resources** – Do you have the necessary time, staff, and financial resources to actually carry out this plan?
- **Support** – Will your organizational leaders, stakeholders, and funders support this plan?

Conversations from the field



A common issue in evaluation planning is asking too many evaluation questions. Do you have tips for narrowing down or prioritizing evaluation questions?

Possible deal breakers

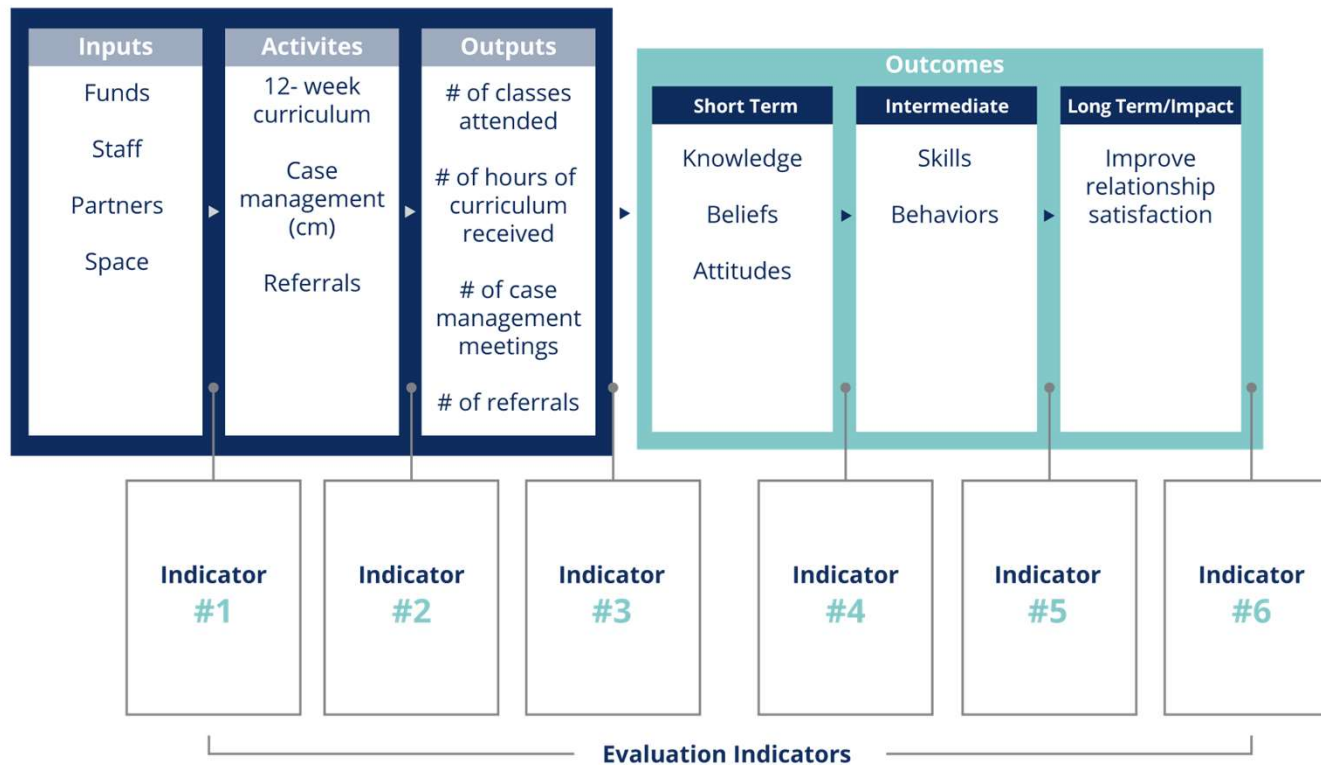
- **The evaluation will** provide data you already have or answer questions you already know
- **The evaluation will not** result in data that can actually be applied to improve program activities.
- **The evaluation will not** provide data until Year 5 of your grant

Understanding how the program works

“Road Map” to Logic Model Components

Problem Statement “What issue am I addressing?”	Is my program working to improve relationship satisfaction?		
Resources “What do I need?”	Activities “What do I do?”	Outputs “What happens immediately?”	Outcomes “What are my goals?”
Funds Staff Partners Space	12- week curriculum Case management (cm) Referrals	# of classes attended # of hours of curriculum received # of case management meetings # of referrals	Improve relationship satisfaction

Aligning program services and goals with evaluation measures



Conversations from the field



- How have logic models or similar tools helped you align the program activities and flow with the evaluation?
- What happens when program logic models and evaluations are not aligned?
- If that happens, how can it be fixed?

Possible deal breakers

- **The logic model**
does not reflect the theory of change (how the intervention will work to achieve program goals)
- **The outcome measures**
do not reflect the goals
- **The evaluation indicators**
do not align with program activities and flow

Q & A

Resources

- Administration for Children and Families, Research Reports
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/reports#block-acf-theme-opre-reports>
- American Association for Evaluation
<https://www.eval.org/>
- Better Evaluation
<https://www.betterevaluation.org/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Evaluation Plan Template
https://www.cdc.gov/tb/programs/Evaluation/Guide/PDF/Evaluation_plan_template.pdf
- Child Trends Research to Results Brief: Five Steps for Selecting and Evaluator: A Guide for Out-of-School Time Practitioners
https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Child_Trends-2007_10_01_RB_SelectingEvaluator.pdf

Resources, continued

- Child Trends, Healthy Marriage Relationship Education Outcome Evaluation Studies
<https://mastresearchcenter.org/mast-center-research/outcomes-and-outcome-domains-examined-in-hmre-evaluation-studies/>
- Michael Quinn Patton, Utilization-Focused Evaluation
<https://www.utilization-focusedevaluation.org/>
- National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/cdc-evaluation-workbook-508.pdf>
- Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation, Second Edition
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/the-program-managers-guide-to-evaluation-second-edition>
- Public Health Ontario
<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/E/2016/evaluating-hp-programs-workbook.pdf?la=en>

We hope to see you soon!

Webinar 2: September 24, 2020

Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships: Putting the Pieces Together During Implementation: addresses the timing and type of research-practitioner communication needed during program/evaluation implementation. Presenters will offer conversation starters to ensure evaluation methods and processes align with key elements of service delivery to inform practice and achieve evaluation goals.

Webinar 3: November 12, 2020

Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships: A Conversation Guide for Dissemination: addresses how researchers and practitioners collaborate to interpret and disseminate evaluation findings to key stakeholders. Presenters will offer conversation starters to ensure program evaluation findings are shared in ways that maximize their usefulness.

Thank You!



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