

NSVRC Evaluation Toolkit Case Studies

Participatory Evaluation at the Local Level

(Alexandra Panagotacos, personal communication, August 12, 2015, Updated July 2019)

Project Description

As part of her agency's school-based prevention efforts, Allison coordinates a group of student leaders. When the time came to develop outcome measures for her program, she facilitated several brainstorming sessions with these student leaders in order to get a better sense of what was happening in their communities. The information from those conversations was used in conjunction with Allison's own knowledge and skills about program evaluation to come up with a list of possible items for an evaluation tool. From there, the young people helped decide which ones to keep, which ones to modify, and which ones to remove. They also pilot tested it before she used it. When it becomes outdated, Allison intends to take it back to the group for further refinement. Allison noted that at the end of this process, these students knew what they wanted to change, why, and how they would measure it.

Approach

She also considered having the young people involved in participatory data collection through various kinds of formal observation but decided against it because she felt like it might contribute to drama in the small school she was working in and also didn't think she could control for bias among the student leaders. However, informally, she has students observe what's happening among their peers and report back to her; she uses this information in shaping program direction.

When it's time for analysis and interpretation, she will sometimes sit down with participants and with colleagues to look at the data in different ways to come up with different possible interpretations, see what's connected, and so on. They try to figure out why some things changed but not others.

Lessons Learned

Allison notes that it is helpful if the group is representative of the students who will be participating in programming. She noticed that when the group was less representative of the participants, some of the language and the concepts in the items chosen were problematic for other students. She advocated expanding her leadership group to include students who the administration did not regard as typical leaders. One such student who was failing her classes managed to pull her grades back up after data from the evaluation process helped her see that she could make a difference.

Tips

Use this case study for training and evaluation capacity building on participatory evaluation with the tools from the [NSVRC Evaluation Toolkit Training and Capacity-Building Activities Guide](#) (begins on pg. 15). The guide walks you through how to facilitate a group activity using the case study.

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