

Is translating the questionnaire good enough?

We at the University of Wisconsin are being asked to be more inclusive in our workforce, program participants, clientele, customers, educational partners and program content. A University of Wisconsin system-wide 10 year plan, *Plan 2008*, is bringing new understanding and urgency to the notions of diversity and pluralism. The same challenges that face extension programmers – to be more inclusive - face us in evaluation. Our 3rd annual Program Impacts workshop, funded by the Chancellor's office, to provide professional development for Extension faculty and staff in evaluation and accountability, will focus this year on multicultural evaluation.

But, what does this really mean? How can we ensure that evaluation is inclusive and culturally fair? Leaders in the field tell us that until we understand our own biases, prejudices and cultural assumptions, we will build those into our evaluations and the results we communicate. Thus, an important first place to start is to explore and understand our own personal biases and unearned privileges. We can continue by answering any number of questions. For each question, we may ask whose voices are included and heard?

- Who defines what will be evaluated? What is the purpose of the evaluation? (e.g., to support the status quo, to provide information for success stories and public relations reports, to increase knowledge, to support social change)
- Who defines the program theory? Are multiple theories operating? What are the theories of the different program constituencies? Pay attention to possible cultural differences, assumptions and prejudices in the way program theories are described, both in the content (the theory itself) and how it is laid out (e.g. my colleague, Kalyani Rai at UW-Milwaukee, challenges the cultural appropriateness of the United Way logic model for the Hmong and other minority populations)
- What questions will be asked? What variables will be examined?
- What language are we using as we describe the various groups involved. Bob Covert cautions us to be careful of explicit wording (e.g., use of derogatory terms in describing people) and subtle language (e.g., use of “those people” to describe program participants)
- Which program stakeholders are included and when during the evaluation? In her definition of inclusive evaluation, Mertens (1999) argues that the inclusion of voices that have been absent, mis-represented, or marginalized is necessary for a rigorous evaluation. Are we and how do we ensure the inclusion of the traditionally underrepresented? What barriers do we erect that exclude certain people?
- What methods and measures will be used? A host of issues arise when we think about methods and measures related to language and preferred modes of

communication, validity of instrumentation, and cultural differences (by gender, class, ability, race, age, language, sexual orientation, religion, immigrant status). Translating a questionnaire from English to Spanish may make it readable but does not verify that the content is appropriate. Are we adapting tools and methods to the minority culture or 'including' the minority culture in the evaluation?

- Who forms the sample? Who will information be collected from? Is the sample representative of the cultural diversity of the population?
- Who will be involved in the analysis and interpretation of the information?
- How will results be shared? Are certain groups likely to be missed? Will the results be viewed differently by different cultural groups?
- Are multicultural issues raised and addressed at all stages of the evaluation process?

We know that what the evaluation finds out is influenced by what it looks at, how it is conducted and who is involved. Our results are influenced by what programs we choose to evaluate, who is involved, the design and methods we choose, the questions we ask and how we ask them, the assumptions we make, the analysis, interpretation and how we communicate the results. As we conduct evaluation ourselves and/or build evaluation capacity in others, the challenges are great:

- ✧ in-depth knowledge of how to facilitate participation of marginalized groups
- ✧ resources to cover expenses for providing meaningful participation
- ✧ patience to handle added complexity of insuring that those with the least power can meaningfully participate and the resulting information is used to inform policy making

Are we adapting or transforming? Are we evaluating the right things, in the right ways? Are we bringing the right voices into the conversation? Are we using evaluation for change and social betterment? "Accepting the challenge of inclusion suggests the need to think differently about the design, implementation and communication of the results of our evaluations." (Mertens, 1999:11).

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The reference citation for this document is: Taylor-Powell, Ellen. (March 2001) Is translating the questionnaire good enough? Hear It From The Board, An E-Forum of Extension Education Evaluation -TIG, American Evaluation Association. Available at:
http://danr.ucop.edu/eee-aea/AEA_HearItFromTheBoardMarch2001.pdf