

Participatory evaluation approaches

Introduction to participatory evaluation approaches

WHY CONSIDER PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION?

Participatory evaluation approaches may be appropriate in circumstances that involve the recipients of a service or the subjects of the evaluation in its design or process, such as evaluations of activities within the Queensland Child Protection Reform Program.

As the name suggests, **Participatory Evaluation** refers to any approach that involves the stakeholders to a programme or policy in specific aspects of the evaluation process (Guijt, 2014).

The underlying rationale is that involving stakeholders in evaluation creates better evaluation that is more relevant and represents a more ethical way of working.

The term covers a range of different types of participation, by different stakeholders and may be at any of the different stages of an evaluation. It also need not be qualitative participation only, or at all (e.g. where stakeholders are involved in the collection or interpretation of quantitative data).

This fact sheet is intended to assist those planning to conduct participatory evaluation on a program or intervention (or who might commission a participatory evaluation) to choose an approach.

It is not a comprehensive consideration; rather it provides brief details in order to encourage evaluators to seek further information on approaches that appear to be the most appropriate for their needs.

Suggestions and links to further information are provided.

1. Choosing a participatory evaluation approach

Guijt (2014) advises that the purpose for involving stakeholders and the nature of their participation should be carefully considered prior to commencing to ensure the most effective process is followed.

The choice of a participatory approach should be underpinned by clear ideas of whose needs the evaluation is intended to serve and how stakeholders can be involved in a meaningful way.

In this respect, Guijt categorises types of participation and the meaning of these in a table (reproduced in Table 1).

Guijt (2014) also discusses the potential benefits and specific considerations for using participatory approaches and these are well worth consulting prior to planning for participatory evaluation.

In particular, she addresses the issue of ensuring that participation is not tokenistic, and alerts evaluators to the need to consider ethical issues at the outset.

This fact sheet briefly introduces the following participatory approaches:

- Action learning and participatory action research (PAR)
- Beneficiary assessment
- Collaborative outcomes reporting (COR)
- Most significant change (MSC).

Another approach to evaluation that can be, but is not always, participatory in nature is realist evaluation.

Realist evaluation will be the subject of a dedicated fact sheet in the near future, and is therefore not included in this fact sheet.



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Table 1: Types of participation by program stakeholders in impact evaluation (adapted from Guijt, 2014, p. 5)

Type of participation	What participation means to commissioners of impact evaluation	What participation means to programme participants	Levels of participation
Nominal – for children and their caregivers	Legitimation – to show that they are doing something about stakeholder involvement	Inclusion – to gain access to potential benefits	To show that participants' input in impact evaluation is possible and how it can be done <i>e.g. data collected from a sample of children and their caregivers</i>
Instrumental – for (and with) children and their caregivers	Efficiency – to make projects more relevant and cost-effective, limit funders' input and draw on community contributions	Cost – time spent on project-related labour and other activities, but potentially benefitting from more relevant projects or programmes via policy/practice change	As a means of achieving cost-effectiveness and of drawing on and building local capacities <i>e.g. training children as data collectors; data collection by children from children</i>
Representative – with (and by) children and their caregivers	Sustainability and fairness – to avoid creating dependency and to reduce inequitable benefits	Leverage – to influence and shape the intervention and its management	To give people a voice in determining their own development <i>e.g. children's and caregivers' representatives are consulted about the evaluation design and invited to comment on findings, help identify lessons learned and determine appropriate action steps</i>
Transformative – by children and their caregivers	Empowerment – to enable people to make their own decisions, work out what to do and take action	Empowerment – to be able to decide and act for themselves	Participation is both a means and an end – a continuing dynamic <i>e.g. children and their caregivers identify key evaluation questions, and help to design and organise data collection methods, analyse data and identify recommendations or action steps</i>

2. Specific participatory approaches

Action Learning and Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Although neither Action Learning nor PAR *per se* are included on the BetterEvaluation site as approaches, they are included here as possible ways of conducting evaluation. They have the advantage of being participation-orientated approaches to group/individual learning that have a goal of solving real-world problems of relevance and meaning to the learner(s).

Both approaches are underpinned by a cycle of interactive

steps and involve reflection with the purpose of improving or changing action or learning, which then becomes the basis of the next iteration, as shown in Figure 1.

An example of the use of PAR in Australia is the Reconnect program offered by the Department of Social Services. This early intervention, community-based set of services assist young people aged 12-18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

A publication on the experiences of using PAR in Reconnect (Boyle, 2012) is available from:
https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/s/o6_2012/research_in_action.pdf

EVALUATION FACT SHEET

Participatory evaluation approaches

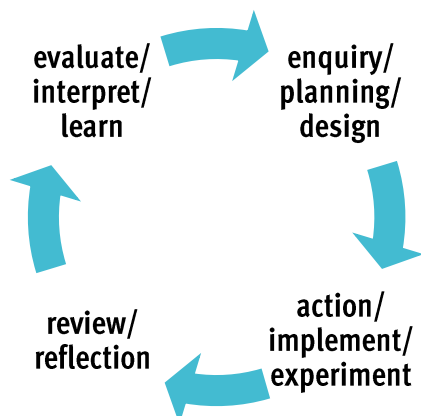


Figure 1: The Action Learning Cycle, which can start at any of the four stages

Beneficiary Assessment

Beneficiary Assessment is a qualitative approach that "assesses the value of an intervention as perceived by the (intended) beneficiaries, thereby aiming to give voice to their priorities and concerns", see http://betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/beneficiary_assessment.

It has been used in the design and evaluation of community and other development programs. Inquiry techniques in Beneficiary Assessment are aimed at revealing the values and beliefs that people place on aspects of their lives in order to allow for intervention and development that is responsive to need (Salmen, 2002).

It is also aimed at encouraging recipients to be part of the design, implementation and monitoring processes to the extent of ability, and to build capacity in these skills in communities. Techniques used include interviews, observation (researchers make visits in order to observe), and participant observation (where the researcher is, or becomes, part of the community for a period of time and undertakes the observations at the same time).

Collaborative Outcomes Reporting (COR)

This approach uses contribution analysis in a participatory way to conduct impact evaluation. In COR, evaluators use mixed methods to build a performance story to present the evidence for how a program has contributed to the outcomes or impact against the program logic. Stakeholders can be involved in the process at any stage. A process of review is then conducted on the performance story and reviewers are drawn from technical experts and program stakeholders. This process can be represented as below (see Figure 2).

BetterEvaluation describes this approach as one that is applicable

STRENGTHS OF BENEFICIARY ASSESSMENT

- Sensitivity to local conditions
- Primacy of context and values
- Gives a strong voice to recipients
- Offers the opportunity to build community capacity
- When done well, it provides good information that can guide decision making of program/intervention managers and funders

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN USING BENEFICIARY ASSESSMENT

- Relationships with each of the groups involved in the intervention/program (community/recipients, program staff, funders) that is being evaluated are critical to good data in this approach
- It is time consuming and resource intensive
- Qualitative data collection and analytical skills are critical to discerning the findings in this approach.

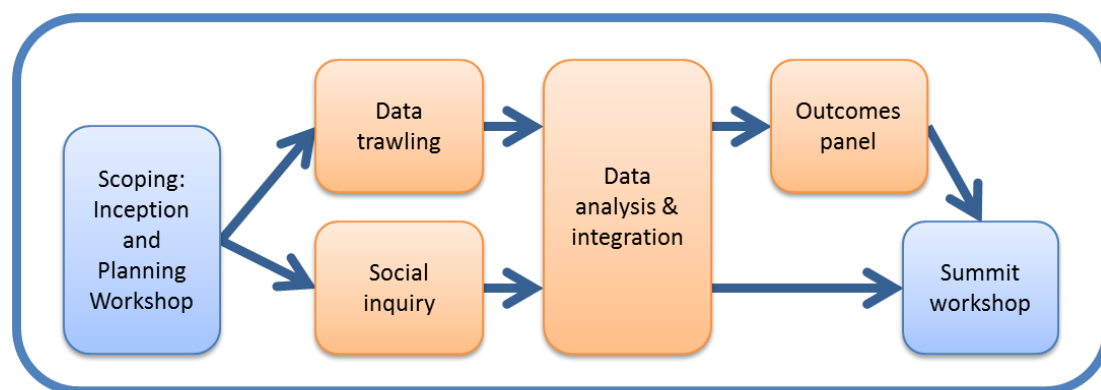
across multiple sectors and scales of evaluation. It can be used when the outcomes of the evaluation are not well specified at the beginning or where outcomes are emergent, complicated or complex. As with Beneficiary Assessment, relationships with stakeholders are critical to the quality of the data, and good skills in managing and facilitating stakeholder participation is vital. A detailed set of tips and traps for use of COR can be found on BetterEvaluation at:

<http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/cort>

In relation to performance stories in the Australian context, Roughley and Dart (2009) have written a very practical step-by-step user's guide to developing a performance story report. The full document has been published by the Commonwealth Government and is available for free download from:

<http://nrmonline.nrm.gov.au/downloads/mql:2162/content>

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Scope → Discover → Interpret → Recommend

Figure 2: The Process of Collaborative Outcomes Reporting as an evaluation approach

Source: <http://www.betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/cort>

Most Significant Change (MSC)

This approach involves gathering personal stories about change (for example, change as a result of participating in a program), and then determining which of the reported changes is the most significant, and why.

There are three basic steps in MSC:

1. Deciding the type of stories to be collected.
2. Collecting the stories and determining which are most significant.
3. Sharing and discussing the stories with stakeholders.

The stories are collected by asking a simple question such as: *'During the last month, in your opinion, what was the most significant change that took place for participants in the program?'* In reviewing the stories, evaluators and evaluation stakeholders learn about what different participants value, and the different ways 'success' can be defined.

It is not a quick option. The full MSC process involves analysis of stories and sharing with both contributors and stakeholders, and this analysis process needs to be repeated through several cycles.

While MSC can provide some information about impact, it is not considered sufficient for an impact evaluation as it tends to focus on extreme stories rather than normal experiences (i.e. it should be complemented by other, more appropriate methods in a full impact evaluation).

However, it can be a useful technique for understanding how and when change can come about, which can inform the development of theory of change and logic models.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Australian Institute of Family Studies (2015). *Participatory action research*. Available from: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/participatory-action-research>

Davies, R. & Dart, J. (2005). *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique: A guide to its use*. Available from: <http://www.mande.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2005/MSCGuide.pdf>

Guijt, I. (2014). *Participatory approaches. Methodological Briefs: Impact Evaluation 5*. Florence: UNICEF.

Roughley, A. & Dart, J. (2009). *Developing a performance story report: user guide*. Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra. Available from: <http://nrmonline.nrm.gov.au/downloads/mql:2162/content>

Salmen, L. F. World Bank, Social Development. (2002). *Beneficiary assessment an approach described*. Available from: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPCENG/143333-1116505682469/20509250/BAAPProach.pdf>