

AN EVALUATION OF THE COORDINATED COMMUNITY CAPACITY
BUILDING COMMITTEE:
EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENT, OUTCOME & PROCESS EVALUATION

By

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Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
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A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University

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ABSTRACT

In performing a comprehensive, utilization-focused evaluation of the Coordinated Community Capacity Building Committee, I achieved my personal learning goal, which was to develop an in-depth understanding of and to gain direct experience in designing, planning, and conducting a program evaluation. The evaluation consisted of three phases as follows: an evaluability assessment; an outcome evaluation; and, a process evaluation. In conducting the evaluation, I gained experience and developed skill in the following activities: assessing an evaluation's purpose, goals, and objectives; developing an evaluation framework and choosing research methods most suited to addressing those requirements; hiring, training and supervising a research assistant; planning and leading productive meetings; developing program documents, program logic, and evaluable models; utilizing qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques (e.g., developing interview guides, conducting interviews, and constructing questionnaires and checklists); performing qualitative and quantitative data analyses; and, communicating evaluation results. I also learned how to modify an evaluation plan in order to address time and budget constraints, and how to act more as a facilitator in the process, rather than trying to rigidly control it. In order to assess the practicum intervention, I engaged in a reflective process, completed a checklist, and discussed the process with my advisor. The Coordinated Community Capacity Building Committee completed the same checklist, and provided me with oral feedback. The results of these activities provided evidence that I achieved the evaluation objectives and my personal learning objectives. I have identified certain skills, however, that I would like to develop

further, including: clarifying my role as an evaluator; involving evaluation users more closely in the interpretation of findings and development of recommendations; and, developing stronger interviewing skills. In order to become a more skilled evaluator, I would also like to gain experience in evaluating service delivery programs. This will likely involve examining organizational charts, workflows, and lines of authority, more closely than I needed to do in the evaluation reported on here. I also anticipate that in future evaluations, I will need to deal with potentially difficult conflicts between front line staff and management with respect to their views of the program, and the purpose and value of the evaluation.

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I am thankful for the opportunity the Coordinated Community Capacity Building Committee provided me in allowing me to conduct the evaluation of the Committee as my practicum. I also appreciate the assistance and hard work of the Evaluation Subcommittee members who provided support and direction during the evaluation. The fact that the Committee fully participated in this process and placed trust in me as an evaluator not only contributed to the high quality of the end product, but greatly enhanced my learning as well.

This evaluation benefited greatly from the intelligent work and perseverance of my dear friend and dedicated research assistant for this project, Kusham Sharma.

I would like to thank my mother, Roberta, who continued to have faith in me and believe this project would be completed, even when I had doubts. Daily phone calls helped keep me motivated to finish. Thank you!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Health Promotion and Programs Branch - Manitoba/Saskatchewan Region of Health Canada provided a budget for an evaluation of the Coordinated Community Capacity Building Committee (to be referred to as 'the Committee' from this point on). The evaluation of this Committee's work and functioning served as my practicum intervention. Approval for both the original evaluation framework and later amendments to the framework was granted by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (See Appendix A for copies of the approval certificates.)

This is a committee funded by Health Canada and chaired by the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg. It was set up in March, 1999 to provide a resource/coordinating function to new and existing community development projects in Manitoba that currently take or are interested in taking a capacity building approach to their work. During the time period from March 5, 1999 to November, 2000, the full Committee met fifteen times and produced several outputs, including: inviting other communities to participate on the committee; writing to the Premier; developing a framework for the creation of a community development corporation; producing a preliminary discussion paper on sustainability; meeting with funders to discuss sustainability; and, planning and executing a conference to present the community capacity building model to community members and funders. The work on the conference began in late 1999, and included the development and printing of both a conference paper and a conference report. During the time period of this evaluation the Committee invested a large portion of its time and

energy in conference-related activities, and, as such, this output required a significant amount of attention in the evaluation.

The evaluation goal, as agreed upon in consultation with the Committee was this: “To record, describe, and assess the resources, objectives, activities, processes, outputs and outcomes of the Committee by reviewing documentation and collecting data from present and past Committee members, relevant stakeholders and observers.” In order to achieve the evaluation goal, nine evaluation objectives were identified and pursued (see Chapter 4). Seven of the objectives dealt with activities that were required to conduct the three phases of the evaluation as described next. Two of the objectives dealt with making recommendations about how the Committee could improve its structure and processes.

There were three phases to the evaluation as follows: an evaluability assessment; an outcome evaluation; and, a process evaluation. The evaluability assessment involved working closely in a one-day workshop with the Committee and during several follow-up meetings with an Evaluation Sub-Committee to define and clarify the Committee’s goals, objectives, and activities. This was done so that expected outcomes and indicators could then be articulated in an evaluable model, and evaluation questions could be identified. The outcome evaluation documented the outputs and outcomes of the Committee, and determined to what extent the Committee did what it said it would do, and whether it achieved the results it expected. The process evaluation determined whether the Committee was structured and functioned in such a way that it had a reasonable chance of achieving its goals and objectives.

Data were collected using the following methods: reviewing documentary material; disseminating questionnaires to conference participants and Committee

members; disseminating a checklist to Committee members; holding one workshop with the Committee and three focus groups (one with the Committee, one with community members, and one with Social Planning Council staff); conducting face-to-face interviews with relevant stakeholders and observers; conducting a media search; and, performing a content analysis of several documents.

The Utilization Enhancement Checklist (Brown & Braskamp, 1980) served as a guideline as the evaluation was planned and conducted. A utilization-focused approach (Patton, 1990) was taken in this evaluation. As such, frequent meetings were held with an Evaluation Sub-Committee of the larger Committee to seek direction and unstructured feedback on the evaluation activities.

The strategies used in the analysis and presentation of quantitative data were those that most appropriately and effectively answered the key evaluation questions. The qualitative data obtained in the questionnaires and interviews were analyzed and presented according to identified themes, using quotations to illustrate particularly poignant or interesting ideas. The quantitative data collected in the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS, and were presented primarily in the form of descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, and measures of central tendency (mostly medians). Some nonparametric tests were used to test differences between how respondents rated particular variables. The data were presented in a format that corresponded with the evaluation objectives and key evaluation questions in the evaluable model.

Several drafts of the evaluation report were provided to the Evaluation Sub-Committee for review and comment in March and April, 2002. A PowerPoint presentation of the evaluation process, findings and recommendations was made to the

Committee in April, 2002. The final evaluation report was printed and distributed to the entire Committee and Health Canada in May, 2002. A summary of the evaluation report was distributed to all evaluation and conference participants.

The evaluation of the practicum intervention was a twofold process that involved: (1) evaluating the extent to which the evaluation objectives were achieved and also my effectiveness as an evaluator; and, (2) determining the extent to which my personal learning objectives were achieved. The strategies used to make these assessments included the following: asking the Committee for structured feedback through a feedback form and in meetings; rating my performance using the Utilization Enhancement Checklist; having periodic discussions with my practicum committee and advisor; and, reflecting on the experience throughout the process by writing my thoughts in a journal. The findings of this assessment process support the conclusion that my personal learning objectives were achieved, but also suggest areas where I would like to learn more in the future. The findings show that the evaluation objectives were all achieved, but that the overall evaluation goal was not fully met. The findings also show that I functioned successfully as an evaluator, but they also point to several areas where improvements could have been made in the process, and where I could benefit from further skill development.

The goal of this practicum was for me to develop an in-depth understanding of and to gain hands-on experience in designing, planning and conducting a program evaluation. This report provides a theoretical rationale for the intervention, describes the intervention, and evaluates the intervention and my performance. The practicum report has been organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the

intervention and of the report. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of evaluation and research methods, and of successful committee functioning. Chapter 3 provides a description of population health principles, and the community capacity building approach. It also provides background information about the Committee under investigation. Chapter 4 outlines the evaluation framework, and describes the actual evaluation process. Within this chapter, explanations are provided describing why revisions were made to the evaluation process as originally conceived. Chapter 5 provides an assessment of the achievement of both the evaluation objectives, and my personal learning objectives. Several appendixes are provided at the end of this document. Most notably, a complete copy of the final evaluation report is attached (see Appendix C). This document provides more detail of the evaluation process, findings, and recommendations than that which is contained within the body of this practicum report.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Program Evaluation Research in Social Work

Gabor, Unrau and Grinnell (1998) explain that social work has “never been under greater pressure” (p.1) in the sense that public confidence is diminishing, funding is declining rapidly, and all funding sectors and the public are calling for social programs to become more accountable. These authors note further that, “We have entered a new era in which only the best social service delivery programs – which can demonstrate they provide needed, useful, and competent services for our clients – will survive” (p.1). It is within this context that program evaluation, particularly outcome evaluations of programs, has moved to center stage with the current emphasis on accountability. In order to provide the most effective social services, social workers need to engage in a quality improvement process. “Quality improvement means that we continually monitor and adjust (where necessary) our practices” (Gabor et al., 1998, pp.1-2). Evaluations provide the basic information we need in order to improve social programs, policy, and service delivery.

Most of the literature on program evaluation deals with service delivery and refers to concepts that are client-oriented. For the purposes of this research, the service-based concepts and language were translated into ideas and terms that are more relevant to an evaluation of a committee that is not involved in direct service delivery, but, rather, concerns itself with coordination and educational activities related to community development. In this research, the Committee was considered the program referred to in the program evaluation literature, and the activities the Committee engages in and

functions it performs were considered the services it provides. Manitobans were considered the clients of the Committee; the Committee was designed to serve not only those communities currently represented on the Committee, but also any other communities interested in learning about or using a community capacity building approach.

Purpose of Evaluation

Much of the literature on evaluation notes that the fundamental reason for conducting evaluations is to improve program performance and quality of services (Gabor et al., 1998; Wholey, Hatry & Newcomer, 1994). Other literature expands on that notion by explaining that other purposes can include: increasing our knowledge base; helping guide decision making; helping demonstrate accountability; and, helping assure that clients are getting what they need (Gabor et al., 1998; Rossi & Freeman, 1993).

The purposes that were most appropriate to this particular evaluation were the following: to provide accountability; to increase the knowledge base of the Committee, funders, Social Planning Council and communities; and, to guide decision making so that the Committee's performance could be improved. The information obtained in this evaluation was also intended to increase the Committee's, the Social Planning Council's, the funder's, and communities' knowledge base with respect to what works and what does not work when it comes to community capacity building coordination and educational efforts.

One way in which evaluations are used in the quality improvement process is to demonstrate accountability. Administrators are accountable to their funders for the way

in which money is spent, and funders are similarly accountable to the public. Usually, accountability will involve deciding whether money should be devoted to this or that activity and then justifying the decision by producing data to support it. "Demonstrating accountability, or providing justification of a program, is a legitimate purpose of an evaluation insofar as it involves a genuine attempt to identify a program's strengths and weaknesses" (Gabor et al., 1998, p.13). In the case of this evaluation, accountability was provided by documenting whether and how the Committee achieved its mandate. This information was also intended to help the funder make decisions about its future relationship with the Committee in terms of roles and funding levels.

Another reason for doing evaluations is to gather data in an effort to provide information that will help decision-makers modify programs, services and delivery mechanisms. This in turn serves to increase the effectiveness of the programs or services (Rossi & Freeman, 1993; Rutman, 1984). It was anticipated that the data obtained in this evaluation would help the Committee modify its activities, priorities and processes with respect to coordinating community development efforts in Manitoba.

Types of Evaluation

Gabor et al. (1998) have identified five types of evaluation that can be done to improve the delivery of social services. A needs assessment is intended to verify that a social problem exists within a specific client population to an extent that warrants the implementation of a program. An evaluability assessment can be used to develop a program model to solve the social problem believed to exist as evidenced by the needs assessment. An evaluability assessment can also be used after a program is developed and before it is evaluated, in order to determine whether a program's objectives are

conceptualized and operationalized in a way that would permit a meaningful evaluation. An outcome assessment determines to what degree the program is meeting its overall objectives. An efficiency assessment determines what type of time and resources are required to achieve successful outcomes, and whether there is a way to reduce costs and time without loss of effectiveness. A process evaluation attempts to determine the sequence of activities a program undertakes to achieve its objectives, and attempts to answer why a program is or is not effective. Different types of programs need to be evaluated using different evaluative methods, although it is possible and often necessary to incorporate all types of evaluation into one larger evaluation.

A needs assessment was not appropriate in this particular situation because the practicum intervention was an evaluation of an existing Committee which was established based on a prior needs assessment. Determining efficiency was not identified by the funder or the Committee as being a priority of this evaluation. Given that the goal identified for the evaluation was to document the resources, objectives, activities, processes, outputs and outcomes of the Committee, an evaluability assessment, outcome and process evaluation were considered the most appropriate types of evaluation to use.

Evaluability Assessment

Evaluability assessment was developed in the 1970s by Joseph Wholey and his colleagues at the Urban Institute in Washington, DC (Wholey, 1979). It began as a way to improve summative evaluations. Such evaluations are conducted after a program is stable and expected to have achieved intended effects. In the early 1970s – and to some extent still today – policy makers perceived summative evaluations as expensive wastes of time that produced little in the way of timely, useful information. Evaluators were

similarly concerned because the conditions in which they found programs – for example, unclear goals, few concrete objectives, insufficient implementation – naturally lead to reports which could do little other than highlight program deficiencies. Evaluability assessment was borne out of efforts to reconcile these problems. Rutman modified and adapted the evaluability assessment for planning useful evaluations (Rutman, 1984). An evaluability assessment determines if program goals, objectives and activities are stated in sufficiently clear and explicit terms to enable an evaluation to take place (Rutman, 1984). Often, an evaluability assessment uncovers the need to work on defining and clarifying goals, objectives, and activities (Gabor et al., 1998) in order to enhance their evaluability (Rutman, 1980). An evaluability assessment will ultimately lead to a more relevant, credible and usable evaluation, and improves the terms of reference for the evaluation (Rutman, 1980). The evaluability assessment will facilitate the establishment of evaluation priorities. The users of the evaluation are involved in the evaluation planning process, particularly in defining their information needs. They also have the opportunity to comment on the appropriateness of the measures and to influence research design (Rutman, 1984). The evaluability assessment also provides direction to programs for planning because it identifies shortcomings of the planning and management process such as poorly designed program components and vague and implausible objectives and outcomes.

The steps involved in an evaluability assessment as outlined by Rutman (1980) were tailored to suit this evaluation. The tasks performed in conducting an evaluability assessment of the Committee included: developing a draft program documents model;

determining the Committee's view of the program; developing a program logic model; and, developing an evaluable model.

During the first phase of an evaluability assessment, a *program documents model*, as originally described by Joseph Wholey (1979) and expanded upon by Rutman (1980) are developed. A program documents model has two main elements: (1) program components; and, (2) goals, objectives and effects. A program documents model outlines program components and goals and effects, but it does not draw attention to the outputs of particular program components. Outputs are the goods and services generated by program activities and are the link between program activities and the immediate outcomes (Rush & Ogborne, 1991). In a variant of Wholey's model, outputs are included in between the program components and objectives and the expected outcomes (Corbeil, 1989; Rush & Ogborne, 1991).

Program logic models are intended to show plausible linkages among the elements of a program and to highlight the underlying logic or causal reasoning. This is an important part of an evaluability assessment. A number of other purposes are served by constructing these logic models during an evaluation assessment. A logic model helps clarify program objectives and assists in identifying unintended consequences of the program (Wholey, 1983). It also aids in the identification of key issues and questions that should be pursued in the evaluation, thereby using evaluation resources efficiently and increasing the chances of utilization of results (Rush & Ogborne, 1991).

An *evaluable model* of the program is then developed based on these key evaluation issues and questions. An evaluable model is a model against which the