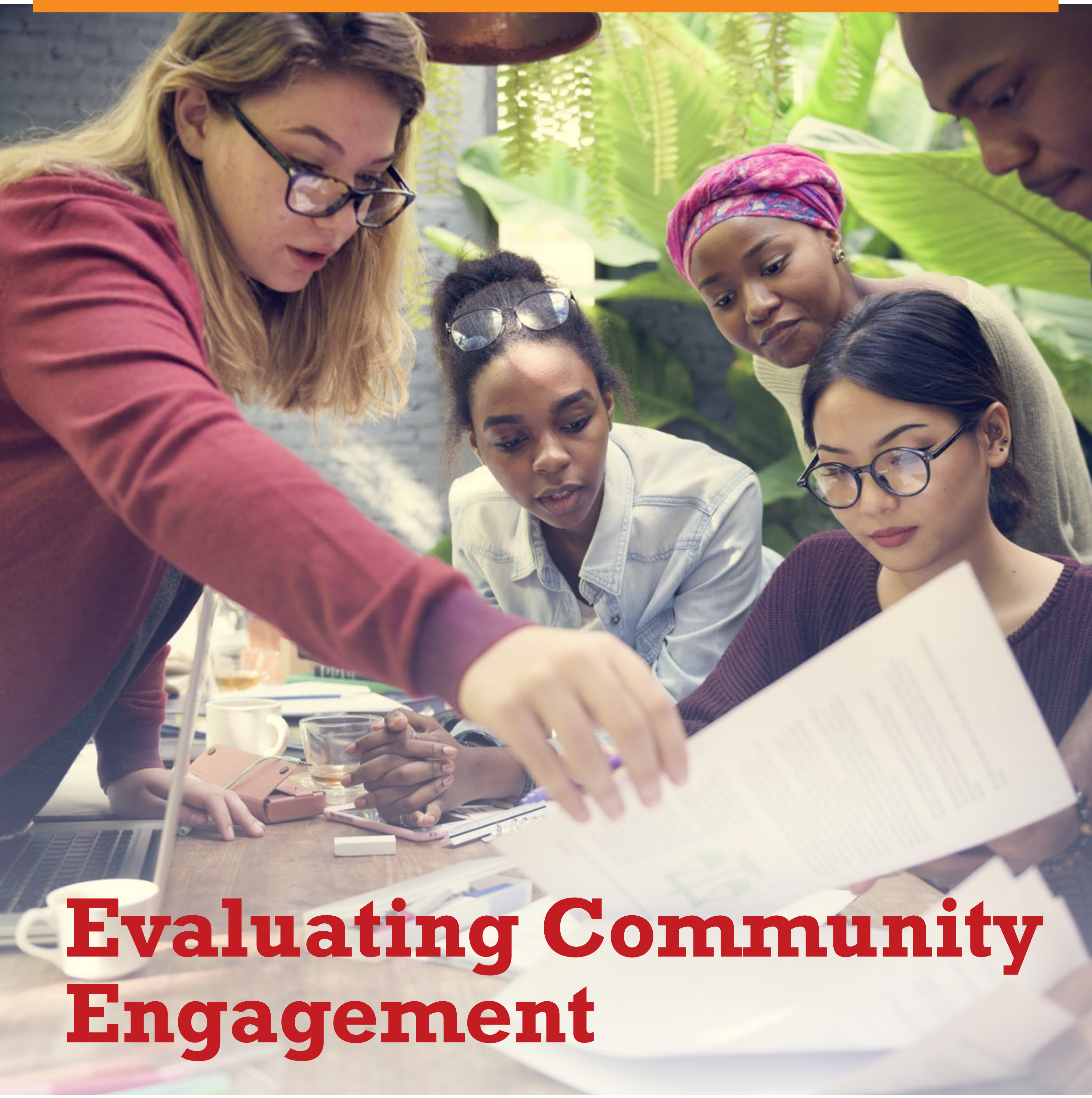

Evaluating Community Engagement

An Evaluation Guide and Toolkit for Practical Use

Everyday Democracy

Ideas & Tools for Community Change

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This is a mini-guide that offers tips for evaluating community engagement. It is not meant to be fully prescriptive on evaluation but it is a practical, hands-on tool to help you determine if you are ready to evaluate your community engagement work, and if yes, it offers considerations for implementing an evaluation.

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Companion Toolkit

Evaluation Basics — Getting Ready

"Evaluation helps us to learn, to do our work better, to be accountable to community and funders, and to support funder-allies in advocating on our behalf." — Building the Field of Community Engagement Community Partners, 2015

Introduction

Evaluation is a critical aspect of any community engagement process. This resource guide was created to provide some guidance in developing an evaluation framework for your community engagement work. This is not a comprehensive evaluation tool but more of a primer that offers some guiding principles and basic instruction when evaluating community engagement.

Readiness

Determining your evaluation capacity is an important step in community engagement planning. This entails answering questions like: "Is there money in the budget to pay for an evaluation?"; "Do we have evaluation expertise internally?"; or "Will we need to hire an external evaluator?" One of the primary benefits of assessing your evaluation capacity is that it will help you make informed decisions about choosing the 'right size' evaluation that fits your current organizational capacity or where you aim to expand toward.

In Your Toolkit: Everyday Democracy's Evaluation Capacity Self Assessment Matrix

Key Principles

Evaluation is the systematic collection of information about activities and outcomes of a program or initiative. Often evaluation is used for both learning and accountability. When it comes to community engagement there is no one-size-fits-all evaluation approach. The scale and scope of the evaluation should align with the community engagement plan. For instance, if you are conducting a one-time, single community engagement event, you would evaluate the level of participation and participant reactions and would collect that information or data at the end of the event. If you are implementing a community engagement program that includes multiple activities delivered over time, then you would evaluate changes. You would collect data throughout the process to assess changes in individual knowledge, attitudes and behaviors to see how those changes affect the way people engage with each other and lead to school and community change.

It is important to be intentional about including evaluation in your community engagement planning. When evaluation is overlooked, you are limited to informal judgments and anecdotal evidence when talking about the success of your engagement effort.

In Short… 1) An evaluation strategy should be integral to the community engagement plan. 2) Evaluation capacity is important to determine. 3) The scale and scope of the evaluation should fit the community engagement effort.

Choosing the Right Evaluation

Evaluation Approaches

What do you and your stakeholders want to learn from evaluating community engagement? This question is an important one to ask because your answer will help you determine the appropriate evaluation design and approach to use. There are three evaluation design options introduced here: Process, Outcome and Impact Evaluation. Each one offers an opportunity to answer important questions about community engagement. In addition, they all allow for using a participatory approach to evaluation, a more inclusive promising practice for you to consider.

Process Evaluation

A process evaluation involves collecting data in the planning and implementation phases of community engagement as shown below:

Planning: Process & Structure	Implementation: Delivery & Quality
- Frequency and content of planning meetings - Inclusiveness of process - Diversity/representativeness of planners - Collaboration (shared decision-making) - Equity (all voices heard and valued)	- Outreach to community - Demographic characteristics of participants - Context in which engagement activities are delivered - Frequency and intensity of engagement activities - Participant satisfaction with engagement activities

It's important to conduct a process evaluation because it provides a way to examine your strategy to see what you need to do better to strengthen the effectiveness of community engagement. Process evaluations are done at the beginning and throughout the engagement process. It allows you to answer questions such as:

1. **How inclusive is the engagement planning process? How equitable is it?**
2. **How do participants rate the quality of the engagement activities?**

While results matter, without a process evaluation you won't know why the engagement process succeeded or failed.

Outcome Evaluation

Outcome evaluation focuses on change. It is used to assess change resulting from community engagement, such as change in the way people engage with each other and change resulting from their engagement. This evaluation collects data that pertain to individual level changes in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that affect how people engage with each other. It also collects data on community and organizational level changes resulting from the engagement. Outcome evaluation is conducted at the end of an engagement process. It is often the evaluation that is required by most funders. Here is a sample evaluation question:

Q. To what extent are people in the community engaged?

Impact Evaluation

This evaluation is considered a gold star design because it sets out to establish evidence of causality. It requires random assignment of participants and the use of an intervention group and a control or comparison group. In this design people are randomly assigned to be in an intervention or control group and depending on which group the individual is placed, they receive either the intervention or something else believed to be less effective than the intervention. This evaluation can be more challenging to implement and costly to do because of the prerequisites needed to be able to conduct it effectively.

The prerequisites for evaluating community engagement for impact would include: 1) having a long-standing (minimum 5-10 years) community engagement program operating that has a lot of data already collected on it, 2) previous evaluations have been conducted and the results are readily available, 3) significant time, financial and human capacity to conduct the evaluation.

If these conditions are met then conducting an impact evaluation may be the way to go. This type of evaluation answers the following question:

Q. To what extent can community change be attributed to community engagement?

Participatory Approach

This approach is about making evaluation inclusive and it aligns well with community engagement because it supports the involvement or participation of stakeholders. With this approach participants (community groups, youth and public service providers etc.) are partners with the evaluator(s) and participate in each phase of evaluation from planning, data collection and analysis to reporting on results.

Three key benefits of a **participatory approach** are: 1) promoting buy-in to the evaluation; 2) empowering participants as it facilitates building evaluation capacity within the community; 3) Creating space to obtain input from all participants and acknowledging and addressing "asymmetrical levels of power and voice among stakeholders."

(Sulfian, Grunbaum, Akintobi, Dozier, Eder, Jones, Mullan, Weir & White-Cooper, 2011, p. 171)

Planning the Evaluation

Developing an Evaluation Framework

There are four steps to developing a framework or plan for evaluating community engagement.

Step One: Develop A Logic Model, **Step Two:** Seek Focus, **Step Three:** Identify Measures, **Step Four:** Identify Data

Step One | Develop A Logic Model

Describe the community engagement program explicitly.

A logic model is a visual tool that allows you to lay out your plan for achieving the goal(s) of community engagement. It is best practice to develop a logic model with a group of people directly involved in planning and implementing the community engagement program. The logic model requires limited and explicit descriptions of what is needed, activities to do, results and outcomes expected to achieve the goal.

Most logic models have five primary components that include: inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and goal(s) and impact. Another way to define outcomes is changes. In the logic model the flow of thinking is that if activities are implemented effectively and produce anticipated outputs then expected changes that are listed as outcomes would occur at different intervals short-term, intermediate, and long-term. An example of a logic model framework is below.

Logic Model

Inputs	→ Outputs		→ Outcomes		
	Activites	Participation Levels	Short	Intermediate	Long

Goal Statement	Impact

In Your Toolkit: Sample Community Engagement Logic Model

Step Two | Seek Focus

Be clear about the purpose of the evaluation and what you want to learn

Determine why you want to evaluate your community engagement program and state the reasons in the plan. By focusing the evaluation, you avoid collecting data that are not relevant. It is important to explore what people want to learn from the evaluation with as many stakeholders as possible so that the evaluation asks the right questions and identifies the appropriate data to collect.

Step Three | Identify Measures

Articulate indicators of authentic community engagement and measures

An important question to ask when developing the evaluation plan is: what does successful community engagement look like and how will we know it when we see it? This is where knowledge of some of the principles of authentic engagement is essential.

A framework for principles of engagement is provided below that includes a list of potential indicators and measures to help guide thinking about community engagement through an equity lens. Each principle is listed and there are indicators of success for each one. There is also a list of possible measures of the indicators.

Step Four | Identify Data

Identify the type of data you will need to collect

There are basically two types of data collected in evaluation: quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative or numerical data are collected from surveys, census reports, tests and other sources. Results from these data require calculations or statistical analyses to make meaning of the numbers by addressing 'how many, how much, or how often.'

Qualitative or narrative data are collected from stories, interviews, survey comments or quotes from focus groups. This type of data allows for gaining a more in-depth understanding of people's experiences. These data address 'why' and 'what' has made a difference.

Principles of Authentic Engagement Indicators & Measures

Principles of Authentic Engagement	Indicators of Success: How you know that engagement is working?	As Measured by:
Equitable	- Understanding of inequity is used to create more equitable opportunities - Shared knowledge, resources and power are evident - Structural racism, socio-economic disparity, unequal educational opportunity and other factors that have shaped community and nation are examined	- How often equity is covered in the content of Community Engagement (CE) plans and agendas - Participant feedback on surveys - Participant interviews
Inclusive	- Involves diverse people representative of community demographics - Equitable opportunity for all people to participate - Opportunities for diverse voices and perspectives to be shared and heard are plentiful	- Number of people from diverse groups represented in CE planning and implementation - Number of positive self-reports participants about their experience
Connected to decision-making	- Decisions and policies reflect everyone's voice - Decisions communicate the needs, interests and values of everyone - Decision-making process is transparent	- Self-reports of participants on inclusiveness of decision-making process - Content of decisions
Connected to change	- Connects local change to national movements - More cohesive communities and governance	- Number of changes in policies, practices, & public participation in education

Collecting and Analyzing Data

"I never guess. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts."
— Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Author of Sherlock Holmes stories

Data Collection Methods

The methods used to collect data in evaluation will depend on the type of data-whether it is quantitative or qualitative. Common data collection methods include: surveys, interviews, focus groups, facilitated conversations, and tests. To evaluate community engagement, any one of these methods listed may be used. However, decisions about which methods are appropriate for your community context should be made during planning.

Surveys are popular to use because people can take them online or in-person. They allow you to collect information from a large number of participants at one point in time or at different points in the community engagement process. They also afford a degree of anonymity to respondents which can increase the likelihood that people will respond more honestly and openly to the questions. A survey can be long and complicated or short and simple. A shorter survey is more likely to be completed.

- The types of items on a survey will vary from closed-ended questions, multiple choice and fill-in-the blank items to open-ended questions.

- Designing a survey that will give you the data you need to answer your evaluation questions requires thoughtful consideration of the items that are proposed and should be a collaborative team process.

Interviews are used when you want to gather in-depth information from participants to capture their perspectives and perceptions of the community engagement experience.

- Interviews can be structured — where the interviewers are expected to follow a rigid protocol with specific questions that are asked the same way for each interview. Or they can be semi-structured — where there is a protocol but the way questions are asked may vary depending on who is being interviewed.

Tips for Designing Survey Questions: Know the goal and objectives of the survey so you can ask the right questions and have good data for analysis. **Be mindful of your wording and avoid leading questions** like, "Experts agree that one-off community engagement is the least effective. Do you agree?" **Avoid using too many "catch-all" responses like** "don't know," "none of the above" or "other." **Use language everyone can understand.** Do not use jargon or colloquial words or phrases. **Avoid general/non-directed questions** such as, "What did you think of the event?" Avoid "double barreled" questions like,"What was the most fun and most informative activity during the event?"

Focus Groups and Facilitated Conversations are structured group interviews used to collect information from people about a shared group experience that could be part of a community engagement program. These methods are useful when it is not practical to conduct individual interviews because of time and resource limitations.

- The size for these types of group interviews may vary, however, eight to 12 people are recommended for focus groups.

- These methods also require a protocol with specific questions that the group is asked to respond to.

Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) is a method used in evaluation to engage key stakeholders in a participatory process to assess the impact of community engagement. It allows participants to look back over a period of time and create a visual map of direct or indirect impacts of community engagement they have seen at group, community, institutional or system levels. REM is led by two facilitators who guide the group in their discussions. A session may have from 8 to 20 participants made up of a diverse cross section of stakeholders. It can be two hours or longer depending on the size of the group. At the end of REM, the data is collected by the session leaders and sent to an evaluator for analysis and reporting.

REM has shown high efficacy as a method for evaluating impacts from community engagement when the Dialogue to Change approach has been used. There is a REM tip sheet in the toolkit that is part of this guide.

Tests are used to collect data from participants to assess changes in knowledge and skills. They are typically administered in a pre- and post-timeframe in order to measure gains or losses in knowledge or mastery of skills after participating in a program or event.

Quantitative analysis involves working with numbers so that the results are presented in some statistical form such as percentages, frequencies, or averages. If you have a large amount of quantitative data to analyze on a number of different variables, you may want to use a statistical software program such as Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) or Statistical Analysis System (SAS). These programs can handle large volumes of data and allow you to conduct complex statistical calculations on the data. These programs can be cost prohibitive so an alternative would be to use Microsoft Excel.

Qualitative analysis involves taking survey participant comments, or the results of individual and/or group interviews and finding themes. In order to identify themes, the data has to be coded and categorized and this can be done manually or through computer software. There are several qualitative software programs available and two popular ones are NVivo or ATLAS-ti both of which can be costly. An inexpensive program available online that is very helpful for coding qualitative data is called Dedoose.

Links to the websites for these software programs are included on the Reference page.

Data Analysis

When you have collected data using various methods described, you will have collected both quantitative and qualitative data.

When in doubt about the appropriate data analysis tools to use, ask an evaluator.

Sample Survey

Demographic Questions

Used to collect information on representation.

Examples:

1) What racial/ethnic group do you identify with? ____________________

2) What gender do you identify with? ____________________

3) What is your age? Under 18 ______ 18-29 ______ 30-49 ______ 50-64 ______ Over 65 ______

Multiple Choice Questions

Used to ask to collect quantitative data and allows participants to have multiple options.

Examples:

1) How did you learn about the event? (Please select all that apply)

Local newspaper __________ Email invitation __________ Friend/Colleague recruited me __________

Flyer posted around community __________ Other (Please Specify) ____________________

Likert Type Rating Scales

Used to collect quantitative data by allowing participants to give a rating response.

Examples:

1) How likely are you to recommend this event to a friend?

☐ (Very Likely) ☐ (Likely) ☐ (Somewhat Likely) ☐ (Probably Not Likely) ☐ (Definitely Not Likely)

2) Will you play a larger role in your local community after participating in this event?

☐ (Very Likely) ☐ (Likely) ☐ (Somewhat Likely) ☐ (Probably Not Likely) ☐ (Definitely Not Likely)

Open-Ended Questions

These are questions designed to capture qualitative information so that you can get a better understanding of the participant's experience in the event in their own words.

Example:

What is the most valuable thing you learned from this community engagement activity?

References

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http://nexuscp.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/BTF-EvalofCommEng.pdf Evaluation and Community Engagement (2015). Building the Field of Community Engagement partners & Tracy Babler

https://www.qld.gov.au/web/community-engagement/guides-factsheets/documents/engaging-queenslanders-evaluating.pdf Engaging Queenslanders: Evaluating community engagement (2004). Anna L. Johnson

http://www.publicagenda.org/files/ATD-self-assessment.pdf Community Engagement (CE) Self-Assessment Matrix for Achieving the Dream (ATD) Colleges (2006)

Data Analysis Software Links:

SPSS - https://www.ibm.com/products/spss-statistics

SAS - https://www.sas.com

NVIVO - http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/nvivo-products

Atlas-ti - http://atlasti.com

Dedoose - http://www.dedoose.com/

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About Everyday Democracy Everyday Democracy works to strengthen democracy by making authentic engagement and public participation a permanent part of the way we work as a country. Since our founding in 1989, we have worked with hundreds of communities throughout the US, first by offering small, structured dialogues that led to positive and lasting change, and now offering an array of flexible resources and discussion guides, technical assistance and coaching, and information about our Dialogue to Change process.

Our process uses solid engagement principles with a racial equity lens, and leads from personal connection to sustained action. We also work with Anchor Partners, and throughout the country, to expand our impact and create a democracy movement. Everyday Democracy is a project of the Paul J. Aicher Foundation.

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