THE COLORADO TRUST

The Journey Continues:
Ensuring a Cross-Culturally Competent Evaluation

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Introduction

In 2007, The Colorado Trust published and disseminated the report, *The Importance of Culture in Evaluation*, a guide for evaluators who are beginning to develop their capacity to work across cultures. The report focuses on three characteristics that influence interactions among people – culture, social identity or group membership, and privilege and power – and as such, affect the evaluation process, from design to the reporting of findings.

Following the dissemination of the report, The Colorado Trust convened a group of evaluators in Colorado to discuss the report and potential next steps. During the discussion, some participating evaluators and foundation staff expressed a need for more practical examples of how cross-cultural issues surface in evaluation, and how to address the issues. Their request became the impetus for this report, designed to be a companion piece to the first report, *The Importance of Culture in Evaluation*.

As stated in *The Importance of Culture in Evaluation*, cross-culturally competent evaluators:

- Are conscious that people are different and have their own way of thinking and behaving according to their cultures
- Deliberately set aside time and resources in the evaluation timeline and budget to learn about differences and similarities
- Are willing to engage in a dialogue about how culture, social identity, and privilege and power affect them personally and their work
- Design processes that take into account cultural differences and similarities among all the stakeholders and between the evaluator and the stakeholders.

This report showcases four fictional situations that capture some of the ways in which cultural insensitivity and inappropriateness have emerged in evaluation. These situations are composites of the real-life experiences of evaluators, funders and community stakeholders with whom The Colorado Trust and the author have worked. These situations were created as a starting point for discussions with numerous professional evaluators at the American Evaluation Association's annual conference in 2008. In addition, some evaluators and other professionals with extensive experiences in similar cross-cultural situations were asked to provide feedback. The discussions, held over a period of several months, resulted in this report.

This report begins with the themes that emerged from the commentaries provided by the evaluators and other professionals regarding the types of changes necessary to make the evaluations in all four case studies more cross-culturally competent. The themes are followed by the four case studies and their respective expert commentaries. This report does not elaborate on what evaluators could specifically do to make these changes; such explicit suggestions are covered in the companion piece *The Importance of Culture in Evaluation*.

This report contributes to the growing effort among evaluators to uncover and ground sensible practices that can be applied to improve evaluation in culturally diverse settings. The importance of understanding the nuances of different cultural groups in our diverse nation is critical for informing program design and policy development. We hope that this report contributes to a step in this direction.

Summary of Themes

Several themes emerged from the experts' commentaries across the divergent situations that are useful in reframing evaluation-related situations to become more cross-culturally competent. As well, The Importance of Culture in Evaluation offers specific suggestions and steps for building cross-cultural competence.

Evaluators play an important role in promoting social equity

Evaluators are not just responsible for collecting, interpreting and reporting data. On the contrary, evaluators bear a bigger set of responsibilities, from educating other people about the responsible use of evaluation to using evaluation to promote social equity. This finding was reflected in Case Study A, which involved parents from different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and in Case Study C, which involved a Native American community. This is because evaluators' work generates information – and information is power. As such, evaluators have to consider the implications of the findings, whether positive or negative, and how they could be used to benefit or harm a particular group of people.

The group's history is a critical variable that evaluators should consider

In consideration of what outcomes are reasonable to expect and how evaluation findings might be used, evaluators need to pay close attention to the history of the people who are affected by the evaluation (e.g., Case Study C). While history obviously can't be changed, it can be better understood to explain the outcomes experienced today by the people affected by the evaluation and, therefore, the true impact of the intervention.

Keep current on the dynamic context in which the evaluation is operating

Learning about the group's history and its impact is not sufficient to fully understand the possible implications of the evaluation findings. Evaluators also need to stay abreast of the current context within which the evaluation is operating. Evaluation findings can be taken out of context to support or object to a policy or proposed legislation, like in Case Study D. Evaluators can gather information about such events by participating on Listserves and social networks that deal with the relevant issue, and by consulting with experts, particularly leaders and organizations, that advocate for the equity of the people involved.

Create a dissemination strategy as part of the evaluation design

Properly disseminating the findings is the responsibility of the evaluator and the funder. Possible scenarios about how the findings will be received by various audiences should be discussed early on in the evaluation process, so that a plan can be developed to address any potential controversy, as described in Case Study D. Evaluators also should avoid speaking freely to journalists and other media people, unless they are clear about the messages that need to be delivered or have been trained in strategic communications.

Evaluators must be aware of the dynamics of multiple social identities and group membership

All the situations described in the case studies allude to the complexity of multiple social identities (or group membership) and how they can affect the interactions between the evaluator and the participants. Case Studies B and C also suggest that racial and ethnic concordance between evaluators and evaluation participants, while helpful, is not sufficient to ensure cross-cultural competence. More important is a strategy to ask professional colleagues who share similar demographic characteristics and those who don't, or those who have worked extensively with similar types of evaluation participants, to review the findings in order to minimize the evaluator's potential biases as an "insider" or "outsider."

Reach out and work with bridge builders or cultural translators

The complexities associated with multiple social identities and group membership are reasons why it is important for evaluators to reach out to people or organizations that already have credibility with the people participating in the evaluation (i.e., bridge builders or cultural translators). While racial, ethnic and cultural concordance between evaluators and the people involved in the evaluation is helpful, it is not enough to account for all the possible layers of diversity within the group of people. Bridge builders or cultural translators can help address this challenge; they can help "translate" concepts, terms and behaviors (e.g., reactions to certain words or processes). This is especially critical when working with communities that have been harmed by research in the past, like in Case Studies C and D. Bridge builders or cultural translators can also help recruit participants for the evaluation, like in Case Study A with the focus groups.

Provide a way for evaluation team members to reflect

Typically, more attention is paid to the potential impact of the evaluation on key informants, focus group participants or survey respondents than to evaluation team members. Participants can sometimes make remarks that offend evaluators (e.g., stereotypical comments about the cultural group that the evaluator belongs to), who may find themselves in an awkward position of having to check their emotions in order to maintain an objective stance. Such interactions, if not discussed, could affect the evaluator's line of questioning during a subsequent interview or focus group, or interpretation of the data. Evaluation directors might want to conduct regular meetings with team members to reflect on the previous interactions, how the interactions may have affected the data collection and analysis process, and discuss strategies to correct the situation or prevent it in the future.

Evaluators need to consider the use of advisory committees to guide the evaluation

All the situations presented in this document could have been improved with the guidance of a small group of people from the communities involved. Their involvement could be formal (e.g., an advisory committee that meets regularly) or informal (e.g., individuals who are available to review materials and provide advice). Key questions and issues to discuss with such individuals include:

- What has worked or not worked with regard to data collection in the community?
- Are there tensions within the community that the evaluator should be aware of?
- Are there certain individuals with whom the evaluator must engage in order to gain entry into the community?
- How can the findings best be used to promote justice and equity for the community?

Evaluators need to promote the value of quality, not quantity

Engaging the right people as key informants should not be compromised for the sake of having a large, but perhaps incomplete sample, as suggested in Case Study A. Evaluators have to help funders understand the value of both qualitative and quantitative data. The value of qualitative data is especially important when the situation requires the evaluator to first understand the cultural meaning of the issues being examined. Until the evaluator develops this understanding, it may be inappropriate for him/her to adapt an existing questionnaire.

Plan for translation, interpretation and other language challenges

To engage the right people, evaluators sometimes have to be prepared to provide language translation and interpretation, as well as verbal communication for people with low literacy (like in Case Study A). It is important to use professional translation and interpretation, and not to use family members, social workers or other involved people for translation and interpretation. It is equally important to ensure that evaluation-related documents (e.g., description of the evaluation's purpose, questionnaires and consent forms) are appropriate for the participants' reading levels.

Case Studies

CASE STUDY A:
Evaluation of a School District's Services

The situation

A hypothetical mental health agency is partnering with a school district to implement a program that provides services to students with behavioral issues. The local funder has asked that the program be evaluated to determine its effectiveness.

The school district is located in a geographic area that is rapidly becoming ethnically and racially diverse. Approximately 45% of the student population is African-American/Black, 33% Latino, 20% White and the remaining 2% "other." Latinos make up the fastest growing group in the area; the number of Spanish-speaking students has just about doubled in the last two years. The average household income of families in the area is $35,000, below the average for the county in which the school district is located. The students participating in the school district's mental health program reflect similar diversity.

The mental health agency and school district contracted with a program evaluator who has worked with them before. The budget for the six-month evaluation is $10,000. Staff responsible for the program's implementation told the evaluator they wanted focus groups with school counselors, teachers, students in the program and their parents. The staff wanted answers to the following questions:

1. Is the program effective in addressing behavior problems? Why or why not?
2. Which other professionals need to be involved to help address these issues, and provide the necessary support to the students and their parents?
3. What needs to change in order for everyone (e.g., school staff, mental health agency staff and parents) to work together to help and support the students who are struggling with these issues?

The evaluation

The evaluator worked closely with the school personnel to determine the best ways to recruit participants for the focus groups. With a budget of $10,000, the evaluator estimated that only five focus groups were possible, one with each of the following groups – teachers, school counselors and students – and two with the students' parents. The evaluator agreed to let the school staff manage the invitations and logistics for the focus groups, so that she could have sufficient funds to develop the focus group protocol, analyze the data and summarize the findings.

The school staff contacted the teachers and school counselors by email and telephone. To invite the students and their parents, the staff gave the students a letter and a consent form to take home to their parents. The letter explained the purpose of the focus groups, invited the parents to participate and also asked permission for their children to participate. If the parents consented to their children's participation, they would sign the form and give it to their children to hand in to the evaluator before the focus group began. If the parents themselves chose to participate in the focus groups, they would simply show up at the time and location that was most convenient for them (three options were provided in the letter, and they were asked to pick the most convenient one).

The staff arranged to have the focus groups at the school between 4 and 6 p.m., assuming that it was a familiar location and convenient time for the students and their parents. The staff attempted to recruit 15 people for each focus group (except for the school counselors group because there are only four counselors in the school), in the hopes that at least 12 people would attend each session.

The evaluator was somewhat concerned the procedures for inviting the students and their parents were too passive and impersonal; however, given the budget constraints, she felt that they had no other choice unless they reduced the number of focus groups. She expressed her concern to the school and mental health agency staff, who acknowledged that the situation was less than ideal, but the best that could be done given the circumstances. According to the staff, the resources were limited, and frankly, it didn't matter when they scheduled the focus groups because some of the parents simply didn't care enough about their children's education to attend anything organized by the school.

All five focus groups occurred as scheduled and the response rates were as follows: 10 teachers, 4 school counselors, 10 students and 7 parents (4 in one focus group and 3 in the other). The majority of parents who participated were African-American and White.

The evaluator summarized the results and submitted her report to the school district and mental health agency staff. She made the following recommendations in her report:

- The school and mental health agency might consider programs to help the parents of students with behavioral issues strengthen their parenting skills
- School counselors should work closer with the teachers of these students to strengthen the support provided in and outside the classroom
- The mental health agency might consider offering additional counseling support to the students and their parents, independent of the school
- Provide a peer-support program for the students and their parents.

Commentaries by the experts

The experts discussed the following issues and ways to make the evaluation more cross-culturally competent.

The budget is not sufficient. The experts agreed that the expectations of the mental health agency and school district were unreasonable for a $10,000 budget. Parent engagement in any school-related activity takes a more concerted effort than just one written invitation. The invitation method disregards three types of cultural and language differences among the parents: how they respond to invitations to share information about their families and children, the languages they speak and read, and their past experiences with data collection requests and activities. Consequently, the parents who responded to the invitation were not likely to represent the range of race, ethnicity and cultures of the students in the program; they were more likely to be parents who: could read English, were not shy about participating in any school activity, already had relationships with their children's teachers and had their own transportation. At a minimum, if nothing else were changed to be more inclusive of parents from different backgrounds, the evaluation report should clearly describe this sampling bias, and how it affects the findings and recommendations.

A feasible design for the budget that still ensures a high-quality and cross-culturally competent evaluation. Cross-cultural competency is equivalent to high quality; any attempt to trade off cultural competency contradicts good evaluation practice, according to the experts who commented on this situation. The American Evaluation Association's guiding principle on evaluator competence emphasizes the importance of recognizing, accurately interpreting and respecting diversity, as well as establishing a culturally-competent evaluation team.[1]

If a budget increase was not an option, the design could be modified to reallocate more funds for the parent engagement component, without "trading" cross-cultural competency for another competency. The evaluator needs to convince the school district and mental health agency staff that this modified design would yield better data; otherwise, the findings could potentially be weak and, if used to inform program improvement, even harmful. The American Evaluation Association's guiding principles on systematic inquiry and integrity/honesty recommend that evaluators explore the strengths and limitations of various approaches with their clients and negotiate the best design possible.[1]

The modifications could include a web-based survey of the teachers and school counselors, instead of focus groups, because this group of people is more likely to: be familiar with surveys, easily understand the purpose of the study, have no literacy challenges and have access to a computer. Further, the sample size of teachers could be increased to gather more feedback.

The students' opinions and feedback could also be solicited through a paper-and-pencil survey. The same consent procedures apply; the students would be given an explanation about the survey and a consent form for their parents to read and sign. The form will have to be available in English and Spanish, and easily understood by anyone with sixth grade reading skills.

The students could be given the questionnaire to complete after a program activity, if their parents consented. The students should place and seal the completed questionnaire in an envelope provided, to ensure confidentiality. The program staff would immediately send the completed questionnaires to the evaluator by overnight mail.

The use of a survey for the above groups will save the evaluator money, which could then be used to increase the number of parent focus groups from two to four (including one monolingual Spanish-speaking group), and to implement a more culturally appropriate invitation process that would ensure better representation of the racial, ethnic and culture diversity of the school.

A culturally appropriate invitation process. As suggested in the report, *The Importance of Culture in Evaluation*, the evaluator should ask herself the following questions before collecting any data:

- Who can better help me understand the experiences of the parents in this school?
- Who can help introduce me and the evaluation to the parents? What are past experiences for parents with an evaluator like me and with evaluation?
- Who can I contact for professional interpretation and translation assistance, since I don't speak Spanish?

The evaluator first has to frame the focus groups as informal conversations and discussions, because some of the parents may be unfamiliar with focus groups; confidentiality and consent issues must be addressed during the recruitment process, and reiterated before the conversation or discussion begins. Then, the evaluator could identify two to three parents to advise the data collection process. The evaluator could start by asking the program staff which parents interacted most frequently with them and showed interest in their children's participation in the program. The evaluator could approach these parents, explain the evaluation and ask them about:

- Any concerns that they might have about the evaluation
- The best way to invite parents like them to participate
- Incentives and other support (e.g., child care, transportation, professional interpretation, a convenient location and time) that would make their participation in the focus groups possible and comfortable.

The evaluator could also ask these parents to help reach out to other parents and ask them the same questions, as well as introduce these parents to the evaluation, and alert them about a follow-up telephone call and written invitation from the evaluator.

The above approach would help the evaluator avoid inaccurate assumptions about the parents and alleviate skepticism or discomfort the parents might have about their participation. As a result, the response rate could increase. The evaluator should also hire an interpreter to help reach out to any non-English-speaking parents and ask them the same questions.

The American Evaluation Association has a guiding principle that supports the cultural sensitivity described above: respect for people.[1] According to this principle, evaluators are responsible for understanding and respecting the race, ethnicity, culture, religion, age, gender and sexual orientation of participants, and to consider how these characteristics affect the evaluation process, from design to reporting.

Other considerations to ensure cross-cultural competence. In addition to the invitation process, the evaluator could consider other actions to further ensure the evaluation's cross-cultural competence. For instance, besides engaging parents who speak little or no English, the evaluator could also be inclusive of parents who are not literate in their own native language. This would require the evaluator to read the consent form over the telephone, and record the conversation as proof of consent.

The evaluator might want to conduct separate focus groups for people from different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including one for monolingual Spanish speakers. The evaluator could approach this focus group in one of two ways: hire a professional interpreter who is also a group facilitator to conduct the focus group by him/herself, or conduct the focus group herself with the help of a professional interpreter and simultaneous translation equipment.

CASE STUDY B: Evaluation of Grant Project to Increase Senior Volunteerism

The situation

In another hypothetical example, a senior volunteerism grant project, established by a local foundation, encouraged senior centers to develop programs to increase volunteerism among seniors. The foundation was motivated to create this grant project, following a national research study that demonstrated a strong correlation between volunteerism and improved health among seniors. The foundation distributed a Request for Proposals and selected 10 senior centers in urban neighborhoods as grantees; two of these centers were located in areas that were experiencing an influx of Korean immigrants. Most of the residents in the other neighborhoods are low- to middle- income, and primarily African-American and White. To support the effort, the foundation engaged a management organization to provide ongoing oversight and another organization to evaluate the overall project.

The foundation's evaluation questions were:

- What programs were developed by the centers to increase volunteerism among seniors?
- Did volunteerism increase among the seniors served by the centers?
- What capacities did the centers require to implement and sustain the programs they developed?
- What supports were required to assist the centers in developing these capacities?

The evaluation

The evaluation firm hired a 65-year-old, White female, to be the evaluation director. This person brought with her more than 30 years of experience delivering services to seniors, had overseen program design and implementation for this population, and had experience evaluating programs for seniors. The firm believed that this person's experience made her the ideal evaluation director. The rest of the evaluation team was comprised of four evaluators who ranged in age from 30 to 48, two of whom were White, one African-American and one Korean (bilingual), three women and one man, all with doctoral degrees.

The evaluation involved: a survey of seniors at each center about their volunteer activities; interviews with all levels of staff (from executive director to front-line staff) at each senior center about their volunteer programs, accomplishments and lessons learned; focus groups with selected seniors at each center to discuss their perceptions of the center's volunteer programs and why (or why not) the programs met their needs; review and analysis of technical assistance requests and the management organization's responses; and a group interview with the management organization's staff about their lessons learned regarding the technical assistance process.

About three months into the evaluation data collection process, the management organization received calls from grantees that the seniors were upset about the focus groups and interviews. They complained that the focus group facilitators (i.e., evaluation team members) were condescending and made the seniors uncomfortable. According to the seniors, whenever they discussed their volunteer activities, the facilitators responded with disbelief, almost as if they thought the seniors were incapable of the activities. Some of the seniors added that the facilitators did not seem to take them seriously when they discussed the legacy they wished to leave behind and, therefore, why certain volunteer activities (e.g., helping other older immigrants, mentoring the younger generation) were important to them. Consequently, some of the seniors became hesitant to share their opinions, because they felt that the facilitators did not understand them or value their input.

The management organization's team director shared this information with the foundation's senior program officer for the grant project, adding that the team was concerned about the accuracy of the data, if seniors were reluctant to share their views. These complaints, according to the team director, were particularly apparent in two senior centers that served primarily Asians.

At the same time, and without any knowledge about the complaints, the evaluation team director shared her concerns with the foundation's evaluation manager about the low response rate for the survey and the last five focus groups.

Commentaries by the experts

The experts discussed the following issues as critical considerations in evaluations involving seniors.

Focus group facilitators' and underlying assumptions about the seniors. The focus group facilitators' assumptions (i.e., stereotypes) about the seniors and their capabilities may have contributed to the participating seniors' complaints, according to the experts. It is possible that the facilitators assumed that people 65 years and older are typically not active, especially as volunteers. Therefore, the facilitators may have been both surprised and impressed to hear about some of the participating seniors' activities. Their reactions were interpreted by the seniors as condescending.

As noted in *The Importance of Culture in Evaluation*, evaluators need to pay attention to their assumptions about the group of people involved in the evaluation; they could be caught off guard and respond inappropriately, causing situations similar to the one in this example.

Cultural differences between the focus group facilitators and evaluation participants. While the focus group facilitators shared similar racial and ethnic characteristics as the participating seniors, they differed in age (except the evaluation team director) and education. Both the similarities and differences between evaluators and evaluation participants need to be equally considered. For instance, it shouldn't be assumed that the Korean evaluation team member could easily establish rapport with the Korean seniors at the two centers. On the contrary, the differences in age, education and professional status could complicate the dynamics due to expectations about how younger Koreans should behave around their elders. It is possible that someone who deviates from the norms of their social identity group could be perceived more negatively than an outsider, who isn't expected to fully understand the norms. It also is possible that the older Korean adults view the bilingual Korean evaluation team member as their voice and advocate, and consequently, have unreasonable expectations of this person. It may be helpful to pair up members of the evaluation team for the data collection to check each other's assumptions and alternate their roles, if necessary, to minimize the potential for such incidents. Or, the team could hire an advocate for seniors who is not employed by any of the centers to accompany the data collector.

Don't use off the shelf survey questionnaires. There are several possible reasons why the survey response rate was low; one of them could be the inappropriateness of the questionnaire items, which made the questionnaire invalid. It is not unusual for evaluators to use an existing survey questionnaire because of a preference for validated instruments or budget constraints that prevent the development of a whole new instrument. These decisions, however, could compromise the quality of the data collected. Terms like "volunteerism" and "community engagement" can mean different things to people from different cultural backgrounds. It would have been preferable for the evaluation team to seek initial input on how these terms may be interpreted by people from different backgrounds, and then apply that information to develop a more culturally-sensitive questionnaire and to pilot-test it with a small sample. The evaluation team could accomplish this by conducting a couple of focus groups prior to actual data collection, or by establishing an advisory committee comprised of seniors from diverse backgrounds for guidance.

Other critical cross-cultural competency issues. The experts identified additional cross-cultural considerations in evaluations that involve seniors. First, terms like "aging," "older adults," "seniors" or "the elderly," have all been used in the literature and in practice. It is important to explore which terms are preferable, by engaging a group of seniors to advise the evaluation, or asking the people who work closely with the seniors. An advisory committee comprised of older adults may require more individual or small group telephone conversations, unlike the typical advisory committees, made up of people who can easily travel and regularly meet in person.

Second, evaluators need to be cognizant of how their interactions with the older adults at the centers could be influenced by their personal experiences (e.g., with their grandparents or aging parents, their own sense of mortality) and how their responses could affect the data collection. For instance, it is not unusual for some older adults, who are accepting of death, to speak openly about the subject. In the case study presented here, the seniors may have touched on the issue of death in discussing the legacy they wish to leave behind. This could have made the facilitator uncomfortable and consequently avoid asking in-depth questions about the support these adults might require to become active volunteers.

The reverse is also true. The older adults' interactions with the evaluation team members could trigger memories of their children or grandchildren and cause them to respond in a certain way. Or, they might be reminded of their active years and develop a sense of resentment toward the younger team members.

CASE STUDY C: Evaluation of a Program Located in a Native American Community

The situation

A grant program, established by a hypothetical national foundation, addresses domestic violence through evidence-based intervention strategies. Eight nonprofit organizations in the southwest region of the United States were selected to receive five-year grants. These organizations ranged from family resource centers to domestic violence shelters. In their proposals to the foundation, the organizations identified the evidence-based interventions they intended to adopt and adapt.

The foundation was interested in learning the following:

- Which evidence-based interventions did the grantees adopt and adapt?
- Did the number of women served and assisted by the grantees increase as a result of the adapted interventions?
- Did domestic violence incidents decrease as a result of the grantees' work?

The foundation hired an evaluation firm to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the grant program.

The evaluation

The evaluation team worked closely with the foundation's program staff to develop a logic model for the grant program, the core set of process and outcomes measures to be monitored by the evaluation team, and the schedule for data collection and reporting.

To manage the eight grantees, the evaluation team director assigned two team members ("the site team") to each grantee. Site teams were responsible for all communication and evaluation activities for their assigned sites.

Two people – a Native-American woman and an Asian-American woman – were assigned to work with the one grantee located in a Native-American community. To ensure that the site teams approached their responsibilities in a uniform way, the evaluation director developed a set of protocols for all the team members to follow. The protocols included guidelines for when and how the site teams should check-in with representatives from the sites they managed, collect data for the national evaluation, and report the findings back to the site's representatives.

One year into the evaluation, initial evaluation findings showed that the Native-American grantee had made the least progress, compared to the other seven grantees. The number of women served and assisted by this grantee had not changed since the grant project started; further, the intervention was unclear even though the grantee was supposed to have adopted an evidence-based intervention that focused on strengthening communication among family members.

When the Native-American grantee saw the evaluation report, they were very concerned. The grantee's project director and an elected Tribal leader contacted the foundation's program officer for the grant program, and shared their concern that the findings about their site were not accurate. They felt that the evaluation team did not understand their intervention. They added that the evaluation did not highlight a significant accomplishment in the community – the establishment of an intergenerational program where Native-American youth and elders get together to talk about the violence in their lives and community.

Commentaries by the experts

The experts' responses emphasized the importance of paying attention to the following when conducting evaluations in Native-American communities.

Community history and context. A core set of process and outcome measures is usually necessary for an evaluation that involves multiple sites in order to test the program's logic model. At the same time, the evaluator has to consider the unique political, economic, social and cultural circumstances of the participating sites, and how these circumstances affect the implementation process and outcomes at each site. The set of protocols, to ensure uniformity in the way site teams approached their sites, should also require the teams to consider and document those factors and conditions that are likely to vary across sites (e.g., community composition, local governance and recent events [such as the shooting of a police officer or a youth's suicide] that may have affected the community in significant ways).

The evaluation team for the Native-American grantee needs to understand the nature of domestic violence in Native-American communities, in order to know what additional outcomes were important to document besides the core measures (e.g., why the intergenerational program was considered by the site's representatives as a significant outcome, yet under-emphasized by the evaluation team). As suggested in *The Importance of Culture in Evaluation*, the evaluation team needs to stop and consider:

- What is behind the high incidence of domestic violence in this community?
- What are some of the root causes?
- What is known about evaluating domestic violence prevention or intervention programs in Native-American communities?

The concept of historical trauma or historical grief is especially important to understand when working with Native Americans.[2,3] Historical trauma is unresolved grief that is likely to affect the survivors in negative ways; such grief is passed from one generation to the next and, therefore, could have a cumulative impact on communities.3 To address domestic violence in their community, it might be prudent for the program staff on site to first create a culturally-rooted process that will allow community members to talk about their experiences and acknowledge historical trauma as a condition and, thus, initiate the healing. This process takes time.

It is reasonable to assume that this unique circumstance in the Native-American site means that: 1) it may take a relatively longer time to see any increase in the number of women served and assisted in the Native-American grantee site compared to the other sites, and 2) the community healing process and its results (including the number of participants) are critical for the evaluation team to capture and document, even though it may not have been part of the core process and outcome measures.

Use of research and evaluation in Native-American communities. Evaluators who work with Native-American communities must first and foremost recognize the history of how research about Native-Americans has harmed, rather than strengthened, their communities.[4,5] The evaluation team had to follow the evaluation protocols to ensure uniformity in the evaluation's approach and implementation; however, in doing so, they may not have paid enough attention to building trust and relationships with representatives from the Native-American community. Their actions, therefore, were most likely viewed with suspicion by the group's representatives.

To build trust and relationship, the evaluation team should first engage the project director and other Tribal leaders in a general discussion about their vision of the domestic violence program, their expectations and concerns, their hope for positive change in the community as a result of the effort, as well as their previous experiences with evaluation. Such a discussion would also inform the evaluation's choice of core measures and ensure that outcomes critical to this grantee are captured and documented appropriately. Examples of questions that can be used to guide this discussion are:

- What does evaluation mean to you?
- What experiences have you had with evaluation? Was it positive or negative, and why?
- What do you expect to accomplish with this evaluation?
- Who needs to be part of the planning and implementation process?
- How have you used evaluation findings in the past?
- How can the evaluation process align with the Tribal government decision-making processes?

There is a growing body of information about conducting research and evaluation in Native-American communities. For example, the American Indian Law Center has a publication to help guide Native communities develop their own research codes that might be useful for non-Native researchers and evaluators to review (see **http://www.ihs.gov/medicalprograms/research/pdf_files/mdl-code.pdf**), and the *American Indian Quarterly* frequently publishes articles about evaluation research in different tribal communities.

Nation building and codes of conduct in tribal communities. Evaluation is a process of inquiry. Through this process, information is uncovered that could be used to benefit communities (e.g., improve policies that perpetuate social inequities). In tribal communities, evaluation can support nation-building by providing feedback about the abilities of tribal institutions to address contemporary issues (e.g., financial management, mental health, crime) and, ultimately, improve the economic and social conditions in these communities.[6] Therefore, evaluation in Tribal communities is a tool that can serve the larger goal of decolonization and sovereignty.[6]

Evaluators working in tribal communities should respect and comply with each tribe's codes for conducting research on their lands, and consult with the tribe's Internal Review Board (IRB) processes, if one exists. Evaluators should always check with the community's representative about the tribe's approval process for conducting research and evaluation on its land.[5]

Diversity of the Native-American people. The Native-American communities across the United States share some similarities, but they also vary in their histories, cultural traditions, languages and experiences with non-Native systems and institutions. It is helpful to have a member of the evaluation team be of similar race and ethnicity as the evaluation participants; however, it is not sufficient and should not replace the work that needs to be done by evaluators to become cross-culturally competent. *The Importance of Culture in Evaluation* discusses how people have several social identities because they tend to belong to two or more groups (e.g., an educated Asian female professional), and how these identities often become the basis for creating an "us versus them" dynamic, even within a cultural group. Evaluators who work with cultures different from their own should remember that there is always more to learn about another culture. This is an important lesson even for evaluators who work with cultures similar to their own. Use of advisory committees that consist of people from diverse backgrounds can help the evaluator look at the evaluation from different angles and through different world views.

CASE STUDY D: Evaluation of an Initiative to Increase Health Services for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Individuals

The situation

A hypothetical state-wide foundation funded a five-year grant project to increase health resources and services for LGBT individuals by:

- Addressing the most urgent health challenges faced by this population
- Establishing a system for monitoring future health trends in this population.

The evaluation

The foundation hired an evaluator who worked with the foundation's staff to create a logic model for the project. During the logic modeling process, the two health issues in LGBT communities that emerged as critical for the project to address were: tobacco use and sexually transmitted diseases. Existing studies have shown a high prevalence of these conditions among LGBT adults in the state and nationally.

The foundation issued a Request for Proposals, and funded 10 organizations to implement health interventions that promote smoking cessation and safe sex practices. The 10 grantee organizations included community health clinics, public health departments, family resource centers and community-based organizations that provide some type of health services. Some of these organizations primarily served LBGT individuals, while others served broader populations. The evaluator developed an evaluation design that included annual interviews with grantee organizations' staff and focus groups with program participants. In addition, grantees were required to track and survey, on a quarterly basis, the number of LGBT individuals who accessed and used their services (e.g., health education workshops, smoking cessation programs, counseling sessions) and changed their health behaviors. The evaluator developed a standard tracking form and a survey questionnaire for the grantees to administer, in order to ensure that they all collected the same data. The survey questionnaire asked the grantees' LGBT service recipients about their consumption of tobacco products, safe sex practices and other behaviors that indicated the extent to which they live a healthy lifestyle, such as routine health check-ups and screenings along with physical activity.

After the first year, the evaluator analyzed and compared the results from all 10 sites. These results formed the baseline for the project, particularly the number of people served by each grantee, their satisfaction with the services and their health behaviors. The results indicated that a high percentage of the LGBT service recipients smoked and engaged in unprotected sexual activity. At the same time, a relatively high percentage of them also engaged in regular physical activity and routine health check-ups and screenings.

The evaluator submitted an annual report to the foundation. The report included an executive summary. The foundation made the executive summary available to the public by announcing it in its newsletter and posting it on its website.

A few weeks after the evaluator submitted the annual report to the foundation, a reporter contacted the evaluator. The reporter had heard about the evaluation in an encounter in the community, read the executive summary on the foundation's website and was curious to learn more. The evaluator elaborated on the findings for the reporter.

The next day, an article about the findings was published in a local community newspaper (one of the 10 grantees was located in this community) and within a few days, more exchanges about the grant and the evaluation report appeared in the newspaper. The articles and op-eds tended to be negative in nature, expressing anger about the foundation's support of LGBT individuals and their "unhealthy" habits. The foundation also received numerous calls about its support of the project, which some of the callers perceived as condoning homosexuality, as well as calls from a couple of LBGT leaders who wanted to know more about the design of the evaluation. These LGBT leaders recognized that the study's findings could be used to raise awareness about the ways in which health disparities affect LGBT communities and, therefore, were interested in learning more about the evaluation approach.

To further intensify the situation, there was a legal challenge to limit health care coverage for same-sex couples, and the findings from the evaluation were used – out of context – to support this legal challenge.

Commentaries by the experts

The experts shared the following ideas for how the situation could have been prevented.

Establishment of an advisory committee. It appeared that the project and evaluation were designed with minimal, if any, input from leaders in the LGBT community. Their input is essential for several reasons. First, they can help the foundation staff and evaluator understand the diversity within the community. They also can lend credibility to the effort, which in turn, can increase the participation of LGBT individuals in the project. Because such leaders tend to have more experience than outsiders about the various ways in which their community has been exploited by researchers and evaluators,[7] they are also more likely to consider issues that need to be addressed in advance, to prevent harm. For instance, they may be aware of a potential legislative proposal that an "outsider" would not know about. This knowledge is critical for developing a dissemination strategy for the evaluation findings, as well as measures that the foundation and evaluator can take to prevent the findings from being used inappropriately to ostracize the LGBT community.

Finally, the advisors can help the foundation and evaluator develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the health issues experienced by LGBT individuals in the state. Studies have shown a higher prevalence of smoking among LGBT people; however, they frequently fail to explain the unique social or behavioral dynamics in LGBT communities that are linked to this widespread behavior. Evaluators might consider how LBGT communities have been stigmatized and discriminated against for their sexual identities and behaviors, and consequently, any other behaviors associated with their communities. Health issues facing the LGBT community should be carefully categorized into: 1) areas where LGBT people are at higher risk because of unique circumstances associated with their sexual orientation and identities (e.g., exposure to anti-gay violence), and 2) areas where they are at risk not because of their unique circumstances, but which nevertheless require culturally competent attention (e.g., smoking, obesity, alcohol use).[8]

Analysis of the political context. Like any group of people that has been marginalized and devalued in society, research about the behaviors of LGBT people and evaluation of programs that serve them have typically been conducted within a hostile environment (similar to the Native-American community described in the second case study).[2] Findings have frequently been used to demonstrate social deviance and to stop funding for programs that serve marginalized groups.[8] In this situation, the findings were taken out of context and used by anti-LGBT groups to justify their actions.

Funders and evaluators must do their homework and learn about any policy implications that could result from their work, and to strategize early on with the right parties to discuss this possibility and how to move forward. Such analysis should be required as part of the design for evaluations that involve any type of minority group that experiences discrimination. The American Evaluation Association's fourth guiding principle for evaluators (*Respect for People*) states that, *"where feasible, evaluators should attempt to foster social equity...and ensure that [participants] have full knowledge of and opportunity to obtain any benefits of the evaluation."* The fifth guiding principle (*Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare*) further states that evaluators *"…usually have to go beyond analysis of particular stakeholder interests and consider the welfare of society as a whole."* In *The Importance of Culture in Evaluation*, it was suggested that evaluators consider questions like the following, because of the privilege and power they have as information holders:

- How might the study's findings be used by community members, politicians, policymakers, journalists and special interest groups?
- Will the findings potentially place a stigma on a certain group, or give the group power to access resources and improve their situations?

Development of a thoughtful and deliberate dissemination strategy. It is never too early to plan for how to disseminate evaluation results, even if the findings were originally envisioned as only being used by the funder and grantees. A dissemination strategy has to be part of an evaluation that addresses sensitive issues and groups that have traditionally been harmed by research. It is the responsibility of everyone involved, particularly the funder and the evaluator to ensure that such a strategy is developed and implemented properly. An advisory group could certainly help with the creation of such a strategy. It would be helpful if all the major stakeholders, including the foundation staff, evaluator, advisory committee members and a designated spokesperson from each grantee organization, received training in how to communicate the project and evaluation findings to reporters and other interested parties.

The experts who commented on this situation suggested that a press kit be developed and a press conference held with speakers who can address the findings and put the findings into context (i.e., circumstances in the LGBT community, systems that affect this community and how these factors contributed to the findings). They also suggested that the findings could be timed with the release of other national data related to LGBT communities, such as the annual reporting of hate crimes against LGBT people, in order to provide a more comprehensive analysis of barriers faced by LGBT people (e.g., lack of access to recreational facilities where they feel safe and to culturally competent health care providers).

Diversity within the LGBT community. A comparative analysis across the 10 grantees (as conducted by the evaluator) could be harmful if the analysis did not account for any other type of diversity within the LGBT community, such as race and ethnicity, income, generation and education level. Further, the term "LGBT" contains a broad diversity of difference across sexuality and gender identity and expression. Too often, the realities of transgendered, lesbians and gays, and bisexuals are not disentangled from the term and studied for their unique societal barriers. For instance, a Caucasian gay man has different experiences from an Asian-American lesbian who has different experiences from an African-American transgender. It is also possible that a LBGT community has more in common with a non-LBGT community of the same race and ethnicity, than with another LBGT community of a different race and socioeconomic status.[8] As implied in *The Importance of Culture in Evaluation*, cross-culturally competent evaluators recognize the complexity of multiple social identities and how they affect data collection and analysis and their interactions with program participants. Evaluators have to be cautious about controlling for certain variables (e.g., race, education level, income, social support) to carefully determine which demographic characteristics and social conditions may have contributed to the outcomes. At the same time, they also have to be careful about disaggregating the data so much that they end up with small sample sizes, which can inadvertently make the participants' identity known, placing them at risk for harm. As a potential solution, evaluators should take extra measures to protect the participants' confidentiality (e.g., an on-line survey that ensures anonymity, by allowing participants to complete the questionnaire, at their convenience, using a temporary user name), understand the political context within which the evaluation is occurring (as mentioned above), and explicitly recognize the evaluation's limitations (e.g., sampling bias).

Sampling and other biases. The experts cautioned about certain biases inherent in research and evaluations concerning LGBT communities. They note that the typical respondents are people who feel comfortable about self-identifying as a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, especially if the respondents are recruited from places where they are known to gather. Therefore, individuals who are not comfortable about exposing their sexual and gender identities will not likely participate in the survey. Evaluators need to acknowledge this bias in their reports.

An article that summarized the ethical standards for research and evaluations involving LGBT populations also warned against the use of stigmatizing language that implies abnormality or social deviance among LGBT individuals.[7] Evaluators also should avoid the assumption that people identify only as female and male, or married and single.[9] One solution is to create an open-ended question that asks participants to self-identify their gender.

Conclusion

The themes that emerged from the expert commentaries suggest that cross-cultural competence requires understanding the nuances of each cultural group and is essential in good evaluation practice. Many of the experts' commentaries about the four case studies reflect the guiding principles of the American Evaluation Association; however, for evaluators less experienced in working with different cultural communities, the nuances that require attention are less obvious. Without sufficient understanding of these nuances, evaluators may identify the wrong key informants or misinterpret the data.

On the other hand, as emphasized in *The Importance of Culture in Evaluation*, it is impossible for any evaluator to know the nuances of every cultural group. It is more feasible for evaluators to develop the ability not to make assumptions about any group of people and to know what questions to ask before conducting any evaluative work. More importantly, it is practical for evaluators to cultivate an *intentional* orientation toward the histories, experiences and norms of different groups of people, especially for groups which have been traditionally invisible or ignored.

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