BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH EVALUATION AND RECOGNITION OF EXEMPLARY PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

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Introduction

Training, technical assistance, resource materials and on-site consultation are often used to build the capacity of community-based programs to conduct evaluation. The results of such work are variable among programs, communities and staff. Funders view this variability with some dismay.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of one funder’s efforts to influence knowledge, skill, motivation and practice in community-based program evaluation through recognition of exemplary program evaluation.

Methods

- Evaluators, contracted by the funder to build evaluation capacity among its community-based programs nationwide, established six criteria for quality program evaluation in the areas of community development and programs for children, youth and families.
- Criteria were disseminated across the wide national network of program directors, evaluators and staff.
- Nominations for designation as Exemplary Program Evaluation were solicited via forms that requested basic program and evaluation information.
- Self-nominations and nominations from others were both requested.
- In-depth information was then collected via telephone interviews with the program director or evaluator. Evaluation plans, instruments and reports were submitted.
- Contract evaluators then applied the criteria and designated those programs that met them as Exemplary Program Evaluations.

Results

- In year one, 16 nominations were received and 5 programs were selected as Exemplary Program Evaluations.
- A website was created (http://ag.arizona.edu/fcs/cyfernet/cyfar/exmplry_pgm/index.htm) to showcase these programs and evaluations.
- A workshop at the annual meeting of funded programs drew approximately 30 participants to learn how to improve their evaluations to meet the criteria.
- Certificates were presented to program directors and evaluators at a general session of the conference by the top funding agency administrator to publicly recognize quality evaluation.

Educational Importance

- Recognition for quality evaluation is an effective motivator to request technical assistance, learn more, improve evaluation practice, and attend to how others evaluate.
- Systematic efforts to build evaluation capacity need to go beyond training and technical assistance.
- While this project was conducted within the U.S. Cooperative Extension program for children, youth and families, it is applicable across systems, programs areas, and other parts of the world.