Reaching People with Disabilities through Healthy Communities

Phase Five – Evaluation

Evaluation Approach

[Karma Harris] Yochai, first, before we kind of dive into the evaluation discussion a little bit, tell us a little bit more about your specific role with UIC, as well as your affiliation with NCHPAD, as sort of some background for our listeners before we dive into evaluation.

[Yochai Eisenberg] Sure, thanks Karma. So, I'm an Assistant Professor in the Department of Disability and Human Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), and my research looks at how community design and community planning affects health for people with disabilities. As part of my work, I'm the evaluation lead for the National Center on Health Physical Activity and Disability and provide different kinds of evaluations support and technical assistance for evaluation activities for that role. And then, kind of in that role, I was linked with the work of NACDD for this project and was able and lucky enough to be able to lead the evaluation for the disability and healthy communities project.

[Karma Harris] Very cool. So, tell us a little bit about that evaluation, maybe from a high-level overview, in terms of your specific role with the project.

[Yochai Eisenberg] Yeah, for sure. So, the evaluation involved kind of a multi-level approach, being that this was a multi-level model implementation model. It required a multi-level approach for evaluation, as well. And by multi-level, what I mean is that, you know, we're looking at these national partners collaborating: the NACDD, NCHPAD, and CDC. We're looking at these State Expert at the state level who are providing this important technical assistance and training, and then we're looking at the local community-level. And then even down to persons with disabilities. And so really kind of looking across the socio-ecological model, and that's the kind of broad conceptual model that we use to help organize our evaluation.

This was a pilot project, right? So we were interested in learning about how well it worked, right? So that we could think about using it in in future work through the CDC. And because of that, you know, it's important to think about what kinds of barriers and facilitators the actual implementers of the model had. So, kind of understanding the processes used, and where there were barriers, looking at, in terms of the outcomes, you know, thinking about what was the impact of this project. We were interested in the reach and effectiveness of the policy, system, and environmental (PSE) changes that each of the communities took. And then you were also asking about, in terms of the process we used for developing this model. We took a very collaborative approach involving NCHPAD, NACDD, and CDC to really make sure that everybody's perspectives were incorporated.

[Karma Harris] And Yochai, as somebody with very limited, or amateur evaluation experience, such as myself, even though I was leading and managing this project, but knowing it's a national pilot project, and for the first time, it was intentionally bringing together public health traditional healthy community efforts with disability and health representatives, the thought of designing the right evaluation, just terrified me to be honest.

So that said, I think a lot of the state and community folks who might be listening to this segment probably felt the same way, especially if they don't feel that they are a true evaluators. So I'm really excited we're going to do a little bit of a deeper dive into this discussion because I think it could benefit them knowing, you know, if I'm not a true evaluator, you know, what kind of activity can I do to still evaluate our efforts, because we know that some activities are always better than none. And there's a lot of different things that we could think of that are doable.

And so, to that end, I would love for you to maybe detail some of the evaluation activities and things that we need to be thinking about; what we think about the word evaluation and evaluating projects like this. So, Yochai, can you sort of walk us down, take a few minutes, and walk us down our evaluation memory lane with this project?

[Yochai Eisenberg] Yeah. You know, I think that, you know, it's important not to think of, you know, being a true evaluator, or not. I think it kind of comes back to that idea of collaborative evaluation, which, you know, if you look at a lot of the CDC resources, they have really good resource documents on evaluation. That's all really about collaboration and really, it's about listening, right?

Listening to the people who are leading the project, and the people involved in implementing the project, because those are the people who know what's going to happen, and understand it, they can really inform the evaluation design. I think there's important things to consider in terms of the evaluation. Just the idea that the famous evaluation quote, that, you know, "What does not get measured, does not get accomplished." So really, is thinking about what we can measure and how we can measure it to help us answer important questions, that we think will inform the quality and outcomes of what's going on.

Also another important factor is considering the budget, in time, right? In an ideal world, we'd have a million dollars to do an evaluation, and we'd have a thousand assistants to help, in terms of data collection. But really, it's, you're kind of limited by a certain budget, as well as, you know, in some ways you don't want to overwhelm the people involved in actually carrying out the project. So those were some of the important considerations that we talked about; we don't want the actual coaches and State Experts to feel like they, all they were doing was evaluation, and not implementing anything.