

Facilitator's Guide for

Participatory Evaluation with Young People

Barry Checkoway & Katie Richards-Schuster



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How to Use This Book

This *Facilitator's Guide* is intended for use in conjunction with the workbook *Participatory Evaluation with Young People*. It follows its format, and provides additional information, ideas, examples, and exercises to strengthen its facilitation.

When working with one of the sections or steps in the workbook, please use the table of contents in the guide to find additional information which we hope will be helpful to you.

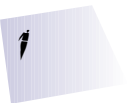
INTRODUCTION

Evaluation is an everyday experience for young people. They evaluate friends and teachers, food and music, news events and community issues, although they may be unaware of it as evaluation. They assess community center programs and make recommendations to the board of directors; interview city council members and prepare a proposal for new municipal services; and survey racial attitudes and create anti-racism programs in the schools.

Participatory Evaluation with Young People is a workbook which was prepared for young people who want to develop knowledge for action and change, whether through program evaluation, community assessment, policy analysis, or other studies. It provides practical tools for participatory evaluation, including steps in the process, methods of gathering information, making sense of the findings, and formulating strategies for creating change.

This *Facilitator's Guide* supplements the workbook with information and ideas intended to facilitate "learning for action." Because young people are often unaware of evaluation as a process in which they can and should participate, this guide is especially important.

This guide is meant to be used in conjunction with the workbook. It follows its format, draws directly upon its contents, and provides additional information to strengthen its facilitation.



TRAINING OF TRAINERS

Adapted from Julius Eitington, *The Winning Trainer*, 1989.

Participatory evaluation is a group process whose skills grow with experience. Young people may lack the experience that comes from practice, but adults can help them develop by using participative facilitation methods.

We favor such methods because they view young people as active participants in their own learning rather than as passive recipients of information. They tend to be interactive and experiential, often facilitated by involving people in an activity and discussing the lessons learned. They make training come alive for the participants, and can include the following activities:

- **Pre-work**, in which people prepare for a session by completing an advance assignment.
- **Seating**, using flexible chairs in changing arrangements which facilitate participation and energize the group.
- **Moving around**, requiring participants to rearrange themselves in numerous ways that energize them throughout a program.
- **Owning the room**, such as when people write on large pieces of newsprint paper and post them on the walls for everyone to see.

- **Flipcharting**, which enable facilitators to write ideas on newsprint paper for posting on walls and creating a public record of what was said.
- **Ice-breakers**, which ease participants into the program, help them get acquainted, and link with a subsequent topic or session.
- **Small-groups**, subdivisions of a larger group which promote participation in a low-risk way, and may require a leader and recorder.
- **Dyads and triads**, sure-fire participative techniques in which a person turns to one or two others for quick discussion.
- **Fishbowl**, a technique which has an inner ring of people for discussion, and an outer ring for listening and observation.
- **Role-playing**, allowing the acting-out of real-life situations and providing participants with feedback on what they think or feel.
- **Games and simulations**, which involve people in structured experiences for later discussion.
- **Exercises**, activities with guidelines which produce information for debriefing by participants.
- **Problem-solving**, enabling people to define the problem, gather information, set priorities, and formulate solutions.
- **Generating solutions**, tools for producing alternatives, such as buzz groups, brainstorming, and round robin.
- **Lecturette**, enabling resource persons to frame a session or present ideas as a basis for subsequent discussion.

WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION?

We begin with definitions of evaluation and challenge young people to come up with their own, because too often they experience evaluation as a negative process which is defined and dominated by adults. When young people define evaluation for themselves, and understand the many approaches in which they might participate, it can be empowering.

We offer a working definition of participatory evaluation as “a process in which people join together and develop knowledge for action and change.” We begin by reducing evaluation to three simply stated questions in an effort to make it easier for young people to grasp and enable them to take ownership of a process. At its simplest, evaluation addresses the following:

1. What are you trying to accomplish?
2. How well are you doing?
3. How could you improve?

We find that by repeatedly returning to these questions, it grounds the process in a few specific statements and contributes to the participants' ability to conceive of something which is often not of their making.

It is important to emphasize that youth participation refers to their active participation and real influence in decisions that affect their lives, not to their token appearance or passive presence in adult agencies. It is measured not only by the number of people or their number of activities, but also by their influence or effects.

PICTURING EVALUATION

This exercise encourages young people to visualize evaluation as they experience it, and as they would like it to be. Too often they experience evaluation as an negative process dominated by adults, whereas these pictures offer opportunities to discuss alternatives.

One facilitative approach is to pose the questions to the group and to discuss each in turn, either in small groups or as a whole group exercise. Pictures are a helpful learning tool, and the various responses can lead to lively discussion.

WHAT DOES EVALUATION MEAN TO YOU?

This “one word” exercise enables young people to visualize various meanings of evaluation, and to discuss the one or ones that best fit their group. It allows people to practice analytical skills, look for patterns in meanings and discuss questions such as “What stands out?” or “What are the patterns?” or “What conclusions can we draw?”

When used at the beginning of a workshop, this exercise enables young people to become better acquainted with other participants, and to start “owning the room” by taping their own words and papers to its walls.

When people realize that there is no single meaning, it frees them to consider more possibilities and understand that they can make meaning of their own.

PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION IS EMPOWERING

Participatory evaluation is especially important for young people. Young people are often evaluated by adults, but rarely are the evaluators of their own programs. As a result, many of them think of evaluation as a negative, rather than as a positive, process. Yet, when young people conduct an evaluation of their own, rather than to merely react to adult authorities, it can lift their democratic spirit and motivate them to action.

EVALUATION IN ACTION

In Des Moines, young people challenged an attendance policy they felt was unfair and misinterpreted by parents and school administrators. They collected data from school officials, held meetings with the superintendent, attended school board meetings, and demanded that the policy be rewritten to simplify its language. Because of this board members created a committee to examine the policy, and young people became members of the committee.



YOUNG PEOPLE EVALUATE ALREADY

One way to help people understand a new phenomenon is to provide examples of it from everyday life. In preparation for the exercise, you yourself might think of some examples of how young people evaluate already, help them generate their own list, and elaborate on some selected ones. This exercise puts a human face on evaluation and, as such, makes it easier for some people to understand.

OBSTACLES TO PARTICIPATION

Youth participation is about creating change, and obstacles are a normal part of the change process. It is important for young people to realize this, for otherwise they might become frustrated and withdraw rather than address the obstacles and accomplish their goals.

We emphasize adultism as an obstacle to youth participation, because the notion that evaluation is an “adult process” for which young people are unqualified can cause young people to internalize adult views of their deficits and to blame themselves for obstacles which are not of their own making.

It is no surprise that young people often question their own legitimacy, doubt their own ability, or “internalize the oppression” of adults and the limitations they place upon them. The “culture of silence” is common among oppressed groups, although its causes are typically not theirs.

You can help young people to understand that obstacles are normal, and to generate some ideas for overcoming them. One facilitative approach is to form small groups to list a few obstacles, and discuss alternatives as a whole group exercise.

EVALUATION IN ACTION

In Ann Arbor, Michigan, teenagers were concerned about discrimination in the schools. They organized a group and conducted their own citywide survey of racial attitudes. Based upon this, they developed a program in which high school students educate themselves and younger students about discrimination.



MAKING EVALUATION MULTICULTURAL

What are some ways to make evaluation more multicultural?

If democracy is about the participation of the people, and the people are becoming more socially and culturally diverse, then methods of participatory evaluation should recognize group differences and build bridges across group boundaries.

Multicultural evaluation is arising in communities whose people are becoming more diverse. Although there is little empirical evidence on which to make broad generalizations, it is possible to make preliminary observations about some of its emergent elements:

- *Getting organized*, by assuring that youth evaluation leaders and committee members represent the social and cultural diversity of the population.
- *Enlisting bridging persons*, those special young people who work easily across cultural boundaries and who are able to bring diverse individuals together.
- *Strengthening social and cultural knowledge*, especially of key groups whose characteristics might affect the methods which are selected.
- *Representing diverse interests*, in all steps of evaluation from asking questions to gathering information to sharing the findings.

- *Selecting methods of gathering information*, by identifying the methods – e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys – that fit the class, race, or gender of the young people.
- *Increasing intergroup dialogue*, by enabling group members from diverse backgrounds to talk and listen effectively with one another.
- *Dealing with conflict*, by recognizing this as a normal part of multicultural participation in a diverse democracy.

EVALUATION IN ACTION

In response to reports of increasing rates of school suspensions and expulsions, Oakland youth organized a multiracial group of students, investigated public records, and conducted surveys in schools and communities. They concluded that the public schools used suspensions too often, and thus compromised student learning and violated their due process rights. They prepared a report, developed a videotape, educated their peers, and recommended action steps.



EVALUATION ROLES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

*Adapted from Barry Checkoway and Katie Richards-Schuster,
Youth Participation in Community Evaluation Research, 2003.*

What evaluation roles do young people play in evaluation? What roles should they play?

These questions are intended to help young people consider various roles, and discuss options that are possible rather than the ones they are assigned.

One facilitative approach is to pose the first question, ask group members to point to the on the continuum that they play already, and compare with others in the group. This can form the basis for discussion of the second question, for which the following elaboration of roles might be helpful in your own preparation for discussion.

Youth as Subjects

Young people are often the subjects of evaluation. In this pattern, adults conceive the evaluation, gather the data, and develop knowledge in order to solve youths' problems, serve their needs, or improve their quality of life. In their roles as subjects, young people are described and analyzed by the evaluators. They are unaware of how the evaluators were conceived or the information was gathered, even when they are described in subsequent publications and affected by the findings.

Youth as Consultants

Some young people play roles as evaluation consultants. In this pattern, adults initiate an evaluation and consult with young people to make its operations more effective, such as when they advise on the age-appropriateness of interview questions or on the right places or times to interview respondents. Young people are recognized for their special knowledge about themselves at a particular stage of human development, and adults may or may not use this information in their evaluation decisions. When they do, it may make their efforts more responsive to factors which they often overlook.

Youth as Partners

Young people sometimes participate as partners in evaluation research. In this pattern, adults initiate a project and enlist youth as partners in intergenerational relationships which involve both parties. If youth and adults share interpersonal and institutional power, they take a step toward quality participation. If the power remains largely in adult hands, however, they do not.

Youth as Directors

Young people may organize their own evaluation, study problems of their own choosing, and work for solutions at the community level. Whether the project originates in reaction to a crisis or in a proactive desire to address an important issue, the process is rooted in a decision by young people to take initiative.

“Youth as evaluation director” is a role about which relatively little is known. Our observation is that it places emphasis on taking action rather than creating knowledge for its own sake, and on addressing real-world issues rather than undertaking an academic exercise. Youth-directed evaluation may be conducted with or without adult assistance, and adults who participate play supportive rather than directive roles in the process.

EVALUATION IN ACTION

In Providence, young people challenged an unfair school transportation policy. They surveyed more than 500 youth, and gathered information about their transportation needs. They analyzed survey results, presented a report to school officials, and used the information in community meetings.

EVALUATION ROLES OF ADULTS AS ALLIES

The following sections are adapted from Dorothy Stoneman, *Leadership Development*, 1988.

What roles do adults play as allies to youth evaluators? What roles should they play?

These questions assume that young people are not working in isolation, without support or encouragement. Rather, adults are working closely with them and playing various roles in the process, as discussed in the following:

Adults as Allies: What is the Role?

The adult organizer must genuinely respect the ideas and abilities of teenagers, and make this constantly clear. In meetings, the role is to draw out the ideas of every member of the group, take them seriously, compliment them, and let them make the decisions themselves. In action, the role is to stand back, let the young people do the work and make the decisions, but provide essential information as needed so they can make informed decisions. This is not easy for most adults. Most adults fall into authority roles without even noticing it. They consider their opinions and mode of operation to be automatically superior to those of teenagers. The adult organizer must be an exception to this pattern.

Adultism

To work with young people successfully, it is necessary to tackle the pervasive existence of adultism. Adultism refers to all of the behaviors and attitudes that flow from the assumption that adults are better than young people, and are entitled to act upon them in many ways without their agreement.

Except for prisoners and a few other institutionalized groups, young people's lives are more controlled than other groups in society. In addition, adults reserve the right to punish, threaten, hit, take away "privileges," and ostracize young people when they consider it beneficial in controlling them or "disciplining" them.

If this were a description of the way a group of adults were treated, society would quickly recognize it as a form of oppression. Adults, however, generally do not consider adultism to be oppressive, because this is the way they themselves were treated as youth; the process has been internalized.

The essence of adultism is that young people are not respected. Instead, they are considered less important and, in a sense, inferior to adults. They cannot be trusted to develop correctly, so they must be taught, disciplined, harnessed, punished, and guided into the adult world.

Consider how the following statements are essentially disrespectful. What are the assumptions behind each of them? How would a young person hear them?

“You’re so smart for 15!”

“When are you going to grow up?”

Don’t touch that, you’ll break it!”

“As long as you are in my house, you’ll do it!”

“Go to your room!”

“You are too old for that!”

“What do you know? You haven’t experienced anything!”

“It’s just a stage. You’ll outgrow it.”

A handy way to determine if a behavior is “adultist” is to consider the following questions: “Would I treat an adult in this way? Would I talk to an adult in this tone of voice?”

The liberation of young people will require the active participation of adults. A good starting place is to consider and understand how we – today’s adults – were mistreated and devalued when we were children and youth, and how we consequently act in adultist ways now.

As youth develop in their leadership roles, they will increasingly demand that adults end their adultist attitudes. To do this, adults will need to support each other in changing their ways, listening when the young people point out disrespect, interrupting the adultism that the youth themselves have internalized. Adults have central roles in the liberation of young people.

Essential Elements of Youth Leadership Development

Historically, young people have been treated as if they were less important than adults. Their ideas have been assumed to be less valuable, and their feelings less valid, than those of adults. Their rights to make decisions have been largely denied; the details of their lives have been subject to incredible control from parents and peers in all types of institutions, but especially schools. They have been vulnerable to punishments and abuses, limited in their legal rights, and treated as if they were the possessions of their parents. Young people who are members of a racial or cultural minority in society carry a double or triple load of oppression.

Leadership development can provide young people with experiences that counteract these invalidations and eliminate the inequality. It can liberate them from the current reality of oppression and help heal the scars of their past mistreatment.

There are several things to keep in mind when undertaking leadership development:

- **The Importance of Nurturing Relationships** – Generally speaking, people are not eager to take on responsibility for the well-being of others unless they feel well-cared-for themselves. Furthermore, individuals learn best from others who love them. This is particularly true with young people. Whenever a young person emerges and is able to sustain himself or herself as a solid leader, it is almost always true that at least one adult had taken long-term personal responsibility as a mentor, friend, and counselor for that person's development and well-being.

- **Differences in Potential Leaders** – The potentially outstanding young leaders are not always the most outspoken, most popular, most assertive people with the most developed viewpoint. In fact, sometimes the most aggressive “leaders” have some negative characteristics associated with their dominance. Some outstanding potential leaders are very quiet at the outset.
- **The Importance of Accomplishments** – Programs that seek to organize young people to create community change should have, ideally, very high standards of achievement. Activities that seek only to educate young people are not always enough. The work also should have significant and visible results.
- **Involvement in Real World Issues** – Young people do not have to limit their vision to their own community or ethnic group. Experience starts at home, but vision doesn’t stop at the borders of the neighborhood.
- **Correcting Academic Deficiencies** – To develop young leaders, it’s important to help them correct academic deficiencies. If the leaders can’t read well, can’t write, and can’t speak standard English when they choose to, their ability to exercise leadership will be limited.
- **Broadening the Scope of Activities** – Some youth-serving agencies and schools limit themselves to leadership development within their ongoing programs. Others add a whole component of youth-run community improvement projects, aiming to make tangible, visible, and significant contributions to the community. Nothing builds pride and skill as much as the success of these projects.

Identifying Potential Youth Leaders

The first step in youth leadership development is identifying the potentially outstanding leaders. As noted above, these are not always the most outspoken, popular, or assertive young people. Adults need to watch every situation for the expression of leadership qualities and skills.

For instance, if a young person raises his hand, wordlessly indicating: “I want to give my time participating in that activity, because it will improve the program, the community, the world, or will teach me something about how the world works,” chances are good that behind that raised hand lies a deep yearning for real leadership responsibility.

After meetings in which young people are involved, adults can encourage leadership by taking the opportunity to speak personally to individual youths, and offer positive comments such as, “I was very impressed with your participation in this group. Everything you said was thoughtful, and very smart, and you obviously care about what happens here. I hope you will get more involved, because you have real leadership abilities.”

Role of Adults in Developing Youth Leaders

Adults play a key role in identifying, nurturing, educating, encouraging, counseling, advising, and inspiring young leaders. Unfortunately, there is a widespread shortage of adults who are available for real friendships with an adult who could be trusted with confidential information, lend a hand, provide guidance and reassurance, and lift adolescent depression with caring confidence.

Adults who possess authority give approval, and become real friends to young people can have unexpected influence. Frequently, adults are surprised at how little intervention it takes to establish a significant relationship with young people, and to be embraced as a “mother,” “father,” or “mentor.”

Most of us who are now adults can count on one hand – if we can count anybody at all – the number of grownups outside our immediate family who took a personal interest in us. The teacher, minister, professor, social worker, godparent, friend of the family, neighbor, or coach who noticed and took time, who welcomed and praised us, who offered us a home telephone number, who took us aside for a personal conversation, who invited us to his or her home—these unusual people and events stand out in our memories. This is an indication of how important our personal involvement is to the young people we can care about.

ASSESSING ADULTS AS ALLIES

Adapted from Barry Checkoway, *Adults as Allies*, n.d.

1. How would you assess your own present level in the following ways of working with young people? (Circle one number for each question.)

	Very Adequate	Somewhat Adequate	Somewhat Inadequate	Very Inadequate
Truly respecting their ideas	1	2	3	4
Giving encouragement	1	2	3	4
Providing resources for activities	1	2	3	4
Listening carefully	1	2	3	4
Promoting active participation	1	2	3	4
Dealing with bureaucracies	1	2	3	4
Building community support	1	2	3	4
Helping them get organized	1	2	3	4
Encouraging critical thinking	1	2	3	4

2. Add the numbers circled and put the total here.
3. Underline the items that need the most improvement.
4. Circle an item you could start changing today.
5. Compare your total with other adults and discuss the results.

MENTORING YOUTH LEADERS

What are some ways adults can mentor youth leaders? We suggest the following exercise:

1. Assemble an adult group in a large circle with some initial volunteers sitting in a smaller circle in the center close enough for the others to observe and listen.
2. Ask the volunteers to discuss the question for a period of time, then invite others in the outside circle to tap the shoulder of anyone in the inner circle and join the discussion after the tapped person goes to the outside circle.
3. Continue the process and, at an appropriate moment, ask everyone for their observations.

WHY EVALUATE?

The rationale for youth participation is important to discuss for its own sake, and especially for preparing young people for their roles.

Young people who participate in evaluation may encounter resistance from those who do not share this purpose. One way to prepare them for these encounters is to make sure that they understand the rationale participation, and expressing them, as a platform on which to stand. We offer the following rationale to prepare for this discussion:

Legitimate Information

Youth participation in *evaluation* can be a legitimate way to develop knowledge for social action. Like other groups, young people want to take action and improve communities, and evaluation research can provide a source of credible information for action-taking. Similarly, community agencies want the best available information for making decisions, and young people have important perspectives for their consideration, especially in the evaluation of programs that serve them. The notion of setting a few more seats at the evaluation table for young people is consistent with professional practice principles in participatory community-based research.

Rights of Young People

Youth participation can enable young people to exercise their political rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child protects the rights of young people to obtain information, express their own views, meet with others, and form associations. This, the most ratified rights statement in history, ensures the accessibility of young people to information and materials from diverse sources, and to freely disseminate information of social and cultural benefit. When youth participation is framed as a political right, it elevates the rationale to another level of discourse.

Democratization of Knowledge

Youth participation can allow young people to share in the democratization of knowledge. In an age when technical, expert knowledge predominates over knowledge derived from everyday experience and active citizenship,

there is need for new strategies by which traditionally underrepresented groups can mobilize knowledge resources as part of the broader movement for democracy. The “democratization of knowledge” has potential to break the monopoly on knowledge development and enable youth to produce and gather information they require for competent citizenship.

Community Participation

Youth participation in community evaluation research can prepare young people for active participation in a democratic society. At a time when too many youth neither participate nor aspire to participation, there is need for new strategies of civic engagement which will awaken them to community conditions, enable them to reflect upon the root causes of problems, and motivate them to take action in a civil society. When research is viewed as participation, it contributes to “education for democracy” in accordance with the principles of John Dewey and other educational reformers.

Social Development

Youth participation can strengthen the social development of young people in various ways, by increasing their individual involvement, their organizational development, and their ability to create community change. There has been no systematic study of the effects of youth participation at these multiple levels, but there is reason to expect subsequent studies will substantiate its effects on such measures as personal confidence, social connectedness, group decision-making, resource allocation, public awareness, and community outcomes.

IT'S YOUR RIGHT

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most ratified rights documents in history, states:

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 13

However, our observation is that young people are unaccustomed to talking about their rights, and especially unaware of the right to information as one among them. Our experience is that framing youth participation as a right elevates the discourse and motivates some people to action.

One facilitative approach might be to begin by asking: What is meant by “rights”? What are some of the rights of young people? What difference does it make when we frame evaluation as a right?

EVALUATION IN ACTION

In New York City, young people evaluated the images of youth in the New York Times. They analyze the content of newspaper coverage of youth for three months, and reported their findings in a report. They held a meeting with editors, and conducted media awareness workshops.

MAKING THE CASE

“Making the case” for youth participation is a logical response in an environment in which there are obstacles. One way to approach this exercise is to ask the group to brainstorm a list of the benefits of participation, compile the list on newsprint paper, and use the role-play as an opportunity to practice “making the case.” Our experience is that an inner ring of role-players who make the case, surrounded by outer ring of observers, is an effective vehicle for discussion.

This role-play exercise enables young people to practice the rationale for participation in a thoughtful and assertive way. Through back-and-forth dialogue, they can become more conscious of relevant content, strengthen their intellectual base, and develop their commitment to participation.

WINGSPREAD DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

This declaration resulted from collaboration by youth and adult participants in the Wingspread Symposium on Youth Participation in Community Research. The declaration was intended to provide the first written principles on which to base the emergent field of youth participation in evaluation research.

One approach to facilitation is for group members to read the principles, and discuss any questions or issues that stand out to them. One follow-up is to select specific principles or phrases – such as “youth empowerment” or “reciprocal relationships” – and discuss their meaning.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

Conceiving of evaluation as a process provides a framework for “seeing the whole” and simplifying complex phenomena into component parts as a series of steps.

We consciously depict the steps in the process on a single page - as a way to more easily visualize it “as a whole” – and present this in two ways. First we present the steps in a circular design, to suggest that the process is ongoing and that there is no single place to start or end. Second we present the usual linear design, with a brief summary of each step, as if in a story or narrative form.

One approach is to begin with the circular design and provide participants with a quick overall feel for the process, then use the linear design or narrative information to summarize each step in turn, then explain how the remainder of the workbook follows the ordering which was represented in the summary.

Conceiving of evaluation as a process has benefits, and we present a flexible model for consideration. However, we caution that our model is not a recipe to be followed verbatim, but only one of the possibilities.

EVALUATION ON THE GROUND

This popular exercise enables participants to “do something” and come up with their own approach to the steps in the process. Most people find it fun to get on the ground, put the steps in order, and compare their version with others.

Discussion of this increases awareness that there various are versions of the process, and that they can create their own steps, depending upon their particular situation.

“On the ground” is especially engaging for intergenerational situations. When people conduct discussions or analytical activities on the ground, the process tends to take on a more democratic character, and put participants on a more equal level.

GETTING ORGANIZED

Evaluation becomes more sustainable when people regularize their roles and relationships over time. As described, the process can begin with a single person who takes the lead, makes contact with others, establishes a team, and formulates a plan. Planning is like a list of “steps to take” or “things to do” which, in its simplest form, includes the following:

1. Make a list of specific steps;
2. Put the steps in order;

3. Determine who will be responsible for each step and when; and
4. Start at the top.

Which forms of organizational structure will best fit your situation?

Our experience is that evaluation is helped when one or more individuals step forward to serve in the role of “community-based evaluator,” or when people form a “evaluation committee” who share responsibilities for the work.

EVALUATION IN ACTION

Lifting New Voices was a national project which involved community organizations and was evaluated by a participatory process involving youth and adults in documenting their activities, assessing their experiences, and using their learning. Each organization had a community-based evaluator who worked with an evaluation committee of youth and adults to facilitate the process.

SETTING EVALUATION PRIORITIES

How can young people set priorities for evaluation? We suggest the following exercise:

1. Brainstorm a list of evaluation ideas and post them on newsprint paper.
2. Discuss the criteria you will use to set priorities.
3. Based upon the criteria, ask each person to put three asterisks (***) after his or her first choice, two asterisks (**) after the second choice, and a single asterisk (*) after the third choice.
4. Count the asterisks and discuss the results.

ASKING QUESTIONS

What do you want to know? What questions will you ask? What are some sources of information?

These three questions are essential to evaluation, and when asked and answered together, they make it easier to conceive of evaluation as a series of steps and grasp the process “as a whole.”

One way to orient participants is by starting with a preview of “asking questions together,” posting three pieces of newsprint paper on the wall with these questions, and explaining that they will conclude with this exercise. Once this is done, you can return to the first question, and proceed from there.

GATHERING INFORMATION

It is important to emphasize that there are many methods for gathering information; that there is no single best method; and that the key is to select the one or ones which fit your situation.

An approach is to formulate some questions or criteria to use in making decisions; then brainstorm a list of potential methods; and then assess the methods according to the criteria.

Are some methods of gathering information more participatory than others? Are there age-appropriate or culturally-competent methods? We believe that the answers are “yes,” but our observation is that youth often select standard methods like the ones we emphasize in the workbook: documents, observations, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and debriefings. We emphasize these methods because they are among the most frequent ones, not because they are the only ones.

We know that there are many other evaluation methods which are worthy of consideration. In our experience, for example, one evaluator used a video camera to document project activities; another used sociodrama to involve young people in skits which assessed community campaigns; another assessed the effects of a project on the youth; yet another appointed young people as historians to keep journals and compile writings in a project scrapbook.

We suggest that you develop your own criteria for selection, brainstorm a lengthy list, and select the ones which fit your purpose.

EVALUATION IN ACTION

In San Francisco, young people surveyed youth centers to assess what was available for youth and to make recommendations. They designed their own survey tools, worked in teams, and visited 23 centers citywide. They observed each center and recorded their observations, conducted formal interviews with youth about their experiences, and assessed the strengths and weaknesses of each center. They analyzed the results, prepared a “report card” on the facilities, and proposed recommendations for improvements.

MAKING SENSE

Making sense is a systematic step in which people organize information, analyze results, and draw conclusions. Although this step can be challenging, it is important to emphasize that this is an everyday experience. Young people constantly look for patterns, see similarities and differences, and draw their own conclusions. Throughout the workbook, young people are asked to make sense by answering questions like: “What stands out?” “What patterns do you see?” “What lessons can be learned?” There is no single answer to questions like these, but addressing them provides practice in a step that is instrumental to evaluation.

MULCH MANIA

The following exercise enables young people to discuss what they want to know, what questions to ask, and what sources of information to seek.

Youth council members made a grant to the neighborhood center for an intergenerational summer program to involve young people and senior citizens in community gardening. Young people wanted to work with seniors to plant gardens in a park that was popular with young and old.

The program proposed to involve at least fifteen young people and ten senior citizens in activities that would strengthen intergenerational relationships, serve the community in a meaningful way, and improve the environment. Funds were provided for transportation from senior centers, gardening equipment, and other materials.

Youth council members have asked you to design an evaluation of the program:

1. Divide into small groups, select one person to move discussion along, and another to take notes and share the information with other participants.
2. In small groups, discuss the following questions in alphabetical order and write your answers to each on a separate piece of newsprint paper:
 - a. What do you want to know?
 - b. What questions will you ask?
 - c. What are some sources of information?

3. Each group will tape its newsprint pages on the wall in a vertical row, with a at the top and c at the bottom. Each group's pages should be alongside other groups' pages.
4. Ask everyone to look at all of the newsprint pages, and discuss:
 - What did your group come up with?
 - Looking across groups, what stands out?
 - Are there similarities and differences?
 - What have you learned about asking questions?

PRACTICING INTERVIEWS

In conjunction with Mulch Mania, the following exercise enables young people to practice interviewing and gathering information:

1. Organize the group in a circle with two persons seated facing a third person in the center close enough for others to hear.
2. Ask the two persons to play the role of youth council evaluators who will interview the third person in the role as director of the summer program with information about its activities and outcomes.
3. As a group, brainstorm a list of questions that interviewers might use, such as: What did you accomplish? How well did it go? How could it be improved?
4. Everyone listens to the evaluators interview the program director.
5. After the interview, ask the participants to describe their approaches, then discuss the characteristics of an effective interview.

ARE YOU MAKING SENSE?

Also in conjunction with Mulch Mania, the following exercise enables young people to discuss “making sense.”

1. Put a piece of masking tape down the center of an open space in the room.
2. Tell the group that the summer program director has reapplied for funding for an additional year, and that they must decide whether or not to approve the proposal based upon the information gathered so far.
3. Ask group members to stand on one side of the line if they would refund the program based on the information, on the other side if they would not refund, and on the line itself if they are unsure.
4. Ask group members to discuss where they stand, how they came to their conclusion, and what additional information they would need to make sense.

SHARING WITH OTHERS

Sharing with others is an essential part of evaluation which is treated too often as hit-or-miss rather than as systematic strategy.

Evaluation findings and program recommendations do not operate in isolation, but in a field of forces that facilitate or limit them. Even excellent ideas are no guarantee of their use, if support for implementation is not built.

We emphasize the importance of formulating a communications strategy, because this shows commitment to evaluation as part of process of thinking ahead and increasing the likelihood that the information will contribute to change. Thinking strategically is an important step, and practicing it here is beneficial.

Integral to sharing with others is identifying the individuals or groups that can influence implementation and sensitizing them to the issues. When young people think in this way, it develops skills which strengthen evaluation.

One approach is to brainstorm a list of individuals and groups, identify important ones, and communicate with them. When young people share with others, it both serves an information function and also strengthens their roles as change agents and community leaders.

EVALUATION IN ACTION

In Mississippi, students and parents protested the spraying of chemical poisons on the cotton plantations surrounding the schools. Elementary, middle, and high school students surveyed the county, identified the most hazardous sites and presented the findings to the board of supervisors, who agreed to clean up the sites.

TAKING ACTION

Most important here is to make the connection between “learning” and “action,” become aware that action can take various forms, and discuss some strategies of creating change.

One way for young people to think about alternative approaches is by identifying people who already create change, and asking their about the actual activities in which they engage. This keeps the discussion within their own experience.

There are several strategies of community change, and it may be useful to frame the discussion with some local examples. It is likely that there are those who organize action groups, plan local programs, and involve people in institutions and decisions. Thinking these through in advance may strengthen your role as a facilitator.

TAKING THE FIRST STEP

Participatory evaluation is about learning for action, so it is logical to “take the first step.”

Our observation is that young people seem more eager than adults to do something with their learning from evaluation, and that it is important to focus this energy into specific steps while fresh in their minds.

The first step may be a meeting to formulate strategy, or a step in a strategy that is already underway. Whichever fits your situation, we emphasize the importance of viewing evaluation as a process and which moves forward from learning to action.

RESOURCES, RESOURCES, RESOURCES....

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Youth Participation in Community Evaluation Research.

Provides perspectives on evaluation roles for young people.

Young People as Competent Citizens.

Case studies of young people creating change in their communities.

Community Youth Organizer's Bookshelf.

Up-to-date summaries of books, articles, reports and publications.

Young People Creating Community Change.

Step-by-step process for youth working at the community level.

Adults as Allies.

Practical tools for adult allies of young people creating change.

Information on these publications is available upon request from:

*Program for Youth and Community
School of Social Work
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
www.youthandcommunity.org*

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