



CULTURE IN EVALUATION #11: MAKING YOUR EVALUATIONS MORE CULTURALLY COMPETENT

Cultural competence in evaluation cannot be overstated. The American Evaluation Association, in its statement on cultural competence in evaluation proclaims:

"Evaluations cannot be culture free. Those who engage in evaluation do so from perspectives that reflect their values, their ways of viewing the world, and their culture. Culture shapes the ways in which evaluation questions are conceptualized, which in turn influence what data are collected, how the data will be collected and analyzed, and how data are interpreted."

In understanding the importance of culture and its significance in evaluation, the statement additionally acknowledges that cultural competence in evaluation:

"...is a process of learning, unlearning, and relearning. It is a sensibility cultivated throughout a lifetime. Cultural competence requires awareness of self, reflection on one's own cultural position, awareness of others' positions, and the ability to interact genuinely and respectfully with others. Culturally competent evaluators refrain from assuming they fully understand the perspectives of stakeholders whose backgrounds differ from their own."

This tip sheet provides ideas and strategies to help make your evaluations more culturally competent, with an eye towards the fact that culture has implications for all phases of the evaluation process. The ideas, strategies and attributes of cultural competence in evaluation, then, represent a starting point for the creation, development and maintenance of a culturally competent evaluation.

Attributes of Cultural Competence

- ✦ Respects the unique, culturally defined needs of stakeholders.
- ✦ Acknowledges culture as a predominant force in shaping behavior, values and institutions.
- ✦ Values natural systems (family, community, church, etc.) as mechanisms of support for stakeholders.
- ✦ Believes that diversity within cultures is as important as diversity between cultures.
- ✦ Understands that the needs of some groups may require that they are served and facilitated by people who share their cultural identity.

- ✦ Is conscious of the fact that cultural groups are affected—directly and indirectly—by the evaluation decisions of the program, and works to ensure that those perspectives are given full consideration in the evaluation process.
- ✦ Understands that the analysis of data should include the cultural and contextual factors related to the issue being evaluated.
- ✦ Listens to the needs of stakeholders without making generalizations about individuals based on some element of fact related to a cultural group.

Helpful Ideas and Strategies

- ✦ Examine your own biases and attitudes and their probable origins; understand that these biases will affect how we perceive the world and how the world perceives us.
- ✦ Reach out to stakeholders from diverse backgrounds for input and help with the evaluation process.
- ✦ During the early stages of planning the evaluation, take time to explore the cultures and any cultural issues that might affect your evaluation.
- ✦ The integration of people from diverse backgrounds where mutual respect, appreciation, and full value for the contributions of all participants is demonstrated should be highly valued in the evaluation process.
- ✦ Educate yourself about the cultural groups involved in your program and/or evaluation.
- ✦ Listen to people tell their stories, ask questions, read, and learn. Consider an activity where people bring in crafts/recipes/artifacts from their cultures to share, and share your own.
- ✦ Engage members of the cultural groups to participate in the design and implementation of the evaluation or in an evaluation advisory group. Incorporate diverse perspectives and opinions.
- ✦ Be flexible in your choice of evaluation design and data collection methods.
- ✦ Recognize that diversity means relationships of difference, including differences in communication, life view, definitions of family, identity, culture, experiences of institutional racism/sexism/ageism/homophobia/and other biases.
- ✦ Use multiple sources of information and data collection methods.
- ✦ Remember that evaluation may take more time if you need to build trusting relationships with new groups.
- ✦ Reject the myth of color blindness. Everyone is touched by race. It shapes how others see you and how you see yourself.

- ✦ Recognize that the culture you belong to – your own identity group – affects your perspectives and behavior. Culture is who you are. This is true for everyone you meet, including program participants and stakeholders.
- ✦ Work with others who differ in race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, abilities, etc. in order to broaden and develop our own perspectives.
- ✦ Culture is the pattern of behavior among a group that includes what they think, value, and believe; how they communicate, behave, and celebrate, and should thus be recognized in the evaluation process.
- ✦ Engage in self-reflective thinking and writing to better understand your own culture in order to better understand others.
- ✦ Don't assume that one way, or your way, is better.
- ✦ Always be respectful. Respect the right to disagree-respectfully.
- ✦ Avoid jargon and exclusive language and behaviors.
- ✦ Engage with others while recognizing their thoughts, ideas, feelings, background and experiences.
- ✦ Be careful of tokenism, when an organization considers the perspective of one person to be reflective of their entire cultural group.

References

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