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USER-FRIENDLY EVALUATION IN COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS

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Abstract: There is a growing trend in current evaluation to encourage the active participation of those being evaluated, particularly in community-based programs. This evaluation often focuses on processes as well as outcomes, documenting what has been effective over the life of the project. However, such evaluation is often done "on the run," without thinking through what the evaluation might mean from a user perspective, particularly for clients or project participants. Three examples of community-based evaluation projects are used to explore some issues in taking the idea of "user-friendly" evaluation seriously.

Résumé: Il y a, dans l'évaluation actuelle, une tendance croissante à encourager la participation active des personnes évaluées, en particulier pour les programmes communautaires. Ce genre d'évaluation met souvent l'accent sur les processus et sur les résultats et fait l'inventaire des stratégies qui se sont avérées efficaces pendant la durée du projet. Cependant, une telle évaluation est souvent effectuée «à la va-vite», sans qu'on se livre à une réflexion profonde sur ce qu'elle peut signifier du point de vue de l'utilisateur, en particulier des clients ou des participants au projet. Trois exemples de projets d'évaluation de programmes communautaires sont utilisés pour explorer certaines questions entourant la prise au sérieux de l'idée d'évaluation «conviviale».

Over the last 15 years, I have participated in many evaluation studies of community-based projects. Generally, I have been the evaluator, but sometimes I, too, have been one of those evaluated. Over the years, I have known communities who feel "evaluated out": they have been the subjects of so much evaluation that they never want to see another survey or be interviewed by yet another researcher. I have also been part of discussions about large-scale evaluations where the evaluation processes seem very distant

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from those directly affected by the project. Other evaluation projects have felt very much "on the run," often completed once a project is finished. Given these experiences, one of the elusive threads about evaluation for me has been how to ensure that evaluation is user-friendly, that is, a positive experience for those involved in the project being evaluated. A more user-friendly approach might, for example, mean that participants in the process could see direct benefits from the evaluation and feel constructively involved in the process.

In this article I use my experience of working in three evaluation projects to explore what user-friendly evaluation in community-based settings might look like. I need to stress first that I am not assuming that all evaluation will or should involve users. My focus is on community-based projects where there is likely to be interest in or even an expectation of collaborative and participatory approaches to evaluation and in processes as well as outcomes. Much of the current writing in this area comes from North America, where projects are more often large and controlled by central authorities. I am writing from Australia, where there is a stronger tradition of local ownership of projects. Part of the aim of this article is to explore how current theory on participatory evaluation might be extended by looking at some Australian examples. In particular, I want to explore how evaluation could be more "friendly" to those involved in a project, whether as managers, staff, or participants.

Evaluation has developed considerably over the last few years to include approaches that seek to actively involve individuals and communities in evaluation processes. Wadsworth (1998, p. 12) talks about the change in her role as an evaluator from "a 1970's role as '*messenger*', to a *1980's go-between*', and to a 1990's '*dinner party hostess*' or '*caterer*'." These images symbolize the increasing involvement of users in dialogue with each other with the evaluator as facilitator. Russ-Eft and Preskill (2001, p. 47) document the "evolution of evaluation," the development of what they "believe are the eleven most influential evaluation models and approaches that have developed during the last four decades." Four of these have in common a high degree of stakeholder or participant involvement of some kind:

- utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 1997)
- participatory/collaborative evaluation (Cousins & Earl, 1992)
- empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 2000)
- evaluative inquiry (Preskill & Torres, 1999).

Owen and Rogers (1999) identify a broad category that they call "interactive evaluation," which includes the first three of these. This

> assumes that people at the local level can create effective solutions to situational concerns … The evaluator is employed to provide input and, in some cases, support the agenda of the local practitioners. Participants play a major part in setting goals and in organisational and program delivery, and evaluation efforts are influenced strongly by those who are "close to the action." (Owen & Rogers, 1999, p. 220)

Generally, this kind of evaluation is used where a program is developing rather than established. Owen and Rogers (1999) also include action research (Wadsworth, 1991) as a separate category. All of these can include both qualitative and quantitative methods of evaluation depending on the particular project; the key is the involvement of participants.

Some of these approaches are more inclined than others to take the view that "evaluation can be an end in itself, as a means of empowering providers and participants" (Owen & Rogers, 1999, p. 222). Similarly, the approaches vary in the degree to which the evaluator or researcher is an equal participant. The underlying assumptions also differ to some degree, with empowerment evaluation stating that the aim is partly to give users a greater voice in terms of social justice issues.

Cousins and Whitmore (1998) also identify a wide range of meanings of participatory evaluation, suggesting two basic kinds: practical participatory evaluation (P-PE), which focuses on program and organizational decision-making, and transformative participatory evaluation (T-PE), which seeks to empower minority groups or voices. They conclude that "despite differences that are evident at first blush, T-PE and P-PE have substantial similarities" (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998, p. 10). Evaluative inquiry is similar in many ways to participatory evaluation approaches, but is distinctive in being an ongoing process, part of the organization's culture, "integrated into the organization's work processes and … performed primarily by organization members" (Preskill & Torres, 1999, p. 55).

Part of the impetus in participatory evaluation is ensuring that the evaluation will be useful and used, therefore "the evaluator and in-

tended users commit to the intended uses of the evaluation … and determine the focus of the evaluation" (Patton, 1997, p. 376). Like Patton, Cousins and Earl (1992, cited in Cousins, 1996, p. 627) would "propose that participatory evaluation, in which primary users of the data are actively involved in a wide range of activities in the research process, will enhance the local utilization of the data." Those using a collaborative or cooperative inquiry approach describe "a form of participative, person-centred inquiry which does research *with* people not *on* them or *about* them. … In its most complete form, the inquirers engage fully in both roles, moving in cyclic fashion between phases of reflection as co-researchers and of action as co-subjects" (Heron, 1996, p. 19). This process is then seen as useful in itself as well as, presumably, generating outcomes.

Given that my background is in social work, exploring user-friendly evaluation reflects for me a desire to ensure that the evaluation happens in a way that is consistent with social work values. McDermott (1996, p. 6) suggests that making social work values more explicit means that social work research would explore the links between the individual and society, be concerned with how the research process could be involved in change, and focus "on the situation of the poor, the vulnerable, the oppressed and those who interact with them." Shaw, for example, stresses the "notion of 'just inquiry' carried out in the spirit of mutuality and within a commitment to social justice" (Kemshall & Littlechild, 2000, p. 234). This implies using evaluation that recognizes the value of individual voices and particularly the voice of the less powerful, that would seek to involve individuals and communities actively in evaluation processes, and that would consider the links between the experience of individuals and social structures.

There is a greater degree of acceptance now that no evaluation is value free (Everitt & Hardiker, 1996; Herda, 1999). The evaluation methods we choose reflect our values as evaluators and professionals; "to assert that values can be eliminated through control is to negate the inevitable influence of values on data collected and on their analysis" (Everitt & Hardiker, 1996, p. 86). Rather, the evaluator needs to articulate their value position. Herda asserts that bias or negative prejudice can affect both traditional research and research with a critical hermeneutic tradition. "In critical hermeneutic research, our attempt is to bring biases out into the open, not to technically reduce or control them" (Herda, 1999, p. 90).

Given such a value base, exploring the literature on participatory evaluation suggests questions for assessing whether evaluation — or my experience of evaluation — is user-friendly. Cousins and Whitmore's (1998, pp. 18–19) questions are useful here in raising such issues as power, participant selection, and what conditions enable participatory evaluation. Broadly, the question is: what needs to happen for users to feel both able and interested in participating actively in evaluation? More specifically:

- Do they feel able to influence the aims of the evaluation?
- Are they clear about the evaluators' roles, their preferred evaluation approaches and values?
- Can their reflections contribute to the ongoing processes of the project as well as to considering outcomes? Do they have access to the results of the evaluation and the opportunity to participate in how they will be used? Do they see the evaluation as useful?
- Do they feel valued about their contribution, whatever they say or do?
- Does the evaluation suit users' preferences in terms of methods, time, and timing?

I am suggesting here that "users" include all of those who are actively participating in the project or activity that is being evaluated, rather than Patton's meaning of those who will directly use the evaluation findings. Users in this sense may participate in and benefit in some way from the *processes* of the evaluation even if the findings are of no direct benefit to them. In a user-friendly evaluation, for example, it would be seen as essential to include the perspective of staff and clients or project participants on the basis that they are the people that directly experience the impact of the project. Benefit to them may be in improvement of the project as it develops, but might equally be in feeling that their opinions are valued.

In considering user-friendly evaluation, I want to explore more about what helps and hinders participatory evaluation processes, what my experience confirms is useful. In this article I am primarily talking about community-based projects in broadly health and welfare settings. This can include either geographic communities or communities of interest; clearly there can be overlap between these. The three projects I will focus on here all took place within rural communities in the State of Victoria, Australia. The projects are:

- Shared Action — a project based in a provincial city called Bendigo, funded initially by the Potter Foundation to explore how to increase child safety in a specific local community using a community development approach, and subsequently by the Federal Department of Family and Community Services to explore community building. The first phase (Shared Action — Part One) took three years, the second phase (Shared Action — Part Two) covered two years, starting a year after Part One finished. This project was under the auspices of a large human services agency called St. Luke's.
- Rural Access Project for the Arthritis Foundation, a voluntary agency providing education and support services for people with arthritis in Victoria. The project evaluated a two-year pilot project in two state government regions and aimed to provide education about arthritis and how to manage it for both users of services and providers in rural communities.
- Birthing Practices Project, Loddon District Health Council. This was based at a small community agency that aimed to provide a consumer voice in the development and reviewing of health services. Over six months, this project explored user satisfaction with birthing services in rural communities in one region of Victoria.

The methods of data collection were very similar for Shared Action and the Rural Access Project with a mixture of chronicling and individual and group interviews. The Birthing Practices Project used group interviews and a questionnaire. The aim was to use forms of data collection that allow users to "think aloud," to explore their thoughts and feelings. These are outlined in more detail below.

- Chronicling: In the Rural Access and Shared Action Projects we met monthly with workers for "chronicling," that is, to explore such questions as:
  - Over the last month, what has been effective in the project, what has engaged people, what has started progress on key goals and activities?
  - What has made those particular things effective: what combinations of time, community interest, worker participation, and so on have been useful?
  - What hasn't worked, what processes have been ineffective, where are issues unresolved, what would you do differently?

Chronicling on such a frequent basis encouraged workers to reflect regularly on both outcomes and processes. Where workers worked as a team and were located in the same area, we held the chronicling sessions together. These joint sessions meant that workers could reflect on issues together, often taking an issue and considering it from different perspectives

- Individual interviews or conversations with other participants. We sought to have conversations that would build respectful and trusting relationships within which people felt able to be honest and to explore their views. Herda (1999) makes the point that there is a difference in evaluator attitude between conversations and interviews. In a conversation, the researcher is also open to new learning. "It sets the researcher in a reflective and imaginary mode, thus opening new ways to think about the social problems that drew one to research in the first place" (Herda, 1999, p. 87). Our conversations varied considerably; some were with people we had built relationships with over time and met in other settings, others were one-off sessions with people we had no other contact with.

- Group interviews or discussions. There were two main kinds of group discussions for Shared Action and Rural Access Project users: meetings with reference groups of committees overseeing a project, and focus groups with users meeting to talk about their experience. The Birthing Practices groups were meetings set up in each small town to discuss users' experiences of giving birth and providers' experiences of service delivery.

- Questionnaire. For the Birthing Practices Review, a 16-page questionnaire was sent out to users. The questionnaire had a mixture of factual questions about what had happened and open-ended questions about how people had felt about birthing services. The response rate was high, with some people adding a page or more so that they could say all they wanted to.

So what are some of the common threads in thinking about what would have made these user-friendly? Notice I am saying what *would* have because while we aimed for this, I think we could have been

more successful. It is also more realistic to think about these as a continuum — the question is how much has this or could this be done.

1. Clarity about the Aims of the Evaluation

Ideally everyone involved in the evaluation is clear about its aims so that they can make an informed decision about whether they want to contribute. Cowan (1998) suggests the aim of evaluation is to make an assessment of the effectiveness of the project in fulfilling its objectives and to make recommendations on that basis. However, an equally important aim may be to document the processes that were judged by users to have been effective.

In all three projects the purpose of the evaluation was explained either verbally or in writing. The general purpose was usually established by the funding body in consultation with evaluators, but with little if any input from users. For both Shared Action and the Rural Access Project, the evaluation was about documenting process as well as outcomes. With the Birthing Project, the evaluation was more about outcomes, including data about issues like length of stay in hospital as well as views about services provided.

In practice, users generally agreed about the explicit aims, but hoped that other aims might also be achieved. In all three projects, people had other aims that we couldn't fulfill or at least couldn't guarantee. The usual one for the Shared Action and Rural Access Projects was the hope that the project would continue beyond the initial funding. This was not part of the aim of the evaluations for the funding bodies; rather the aim was to have data that identified key processes that could be used elsewhere. Another possible purpose was to raise issues of concern to the participants about, for example, work practices in another agency or to suggest changes beyond the scope of the evaluation and often of the project.

We could have made explicit an aim of using the evaluation as a way of developing users' evaluation skills. There were limited examples of this. In Shared Action Part Two, for example, a reference group, made up of community members and interested agency representatives, was established to oversee the project. This group was solicited for comments about the draft evaluation plan, particularly about whether the particular methods suggested would fit with the community. The local reference groups and workers for the Rural

Access Project were similarly consulted about methods. The idea of paying attention to processes as well as outcomes made sense and was seen as an important contribution to other communities.

2. Joint Ownership of Evaluation Process

Ideally, in user-friendly evaluation, users would be involved in the development of the evaluation process and have some sense of ownership of it. This would heighten commitment to the evaluation, provide good matching of evaluation methods to community, and help ensure clarity about aims and processes. Many writers support joint work partly from an ethical position. Heron (1996), for example, says that

> Persons have a human right to participate in decisions about research design (including its management and the conclusions drawn from it) the purpose of which is to formulate knowledge about them.… This … empowers them to flourish as fully human persons in the study and to be represented as such in the conclusions. It avoids their being disempowered, oppressed and misrepresented by the researcher's values implicit in any unilateral research design. (Heron, 1996, p. 21)

Such evaluation would mean that the evaluator would be seen as contributing information about themselves, their position in the team as evaluators, and what their approach to evaluation might be. Partly this relates back to Herda's (1999) comment about being open to where the evaluation conversations go, building trusting relationships where the evaluator is open to hearing, and seeking to understand perspectives and values different from their own. With some users, making explicit where experience is shared can be critical. With the Rural Access Project, for example, an important part of establishing credibility as evaluators was talking about our own experience of living and working in rural communities. Once users realized that we had at least some common understanding about rural issues, they were much more prepared to talk openly about their experiences.

Another issue of joint ownership concerns being clear about confidentiality of information and how that fits with owning the process. This can usefully be compared with mediation practices where the counsellor is seen as controlling the process of the session, while the

participants control information and decision-making. In evaluation, the roles are reversed with participants sharing ownership of the process and the evaluators controlling the information. This relates in some ways to the dilemmas of insider/outsider evaluation. The insider is known and familiar with the community, which may help generate positive relationships for evaluation; on the other hand, users may be reluctant to be critical to someone they know, especially if they want to be critical about the insider's own or their family's actions.

Evaluators also need to be clear about who they are seeking joint ownership with. This is relatively easy with smaller groups, but becomes more difficult with larger evaluations. It may not be realistic to involve the whole community, so who is considered to be representative? Shared Action Part Two had a reference group with community and agency representatives that provided a relatively easy focus for discussion of evaluation plans and processes. The Rural Access Project had several committees that provided a range of input about their particular communities.

Finally, this raises another issue in joint ownership, that is, how knowledge and skills are shared. The evaluators are likely, at least initially, to be seen as the professionals who know about evaluation. This may inhibit the participation of users who feel they don't know enough to comment. In Share Action Part Two, some of the reference group members had participated in the evaluation for Shared Action Part One. Because of this, they had a reasonable sense of how the evaluation might work and were more prepared to comment. They also appreciated that this time we wanted to involve them more in the evaluation and could see the value of having feedback along the way. They could also see the wisdom of the evaluators asking them about what kind of evaluation might work best in their particular community. This previous experience of evaluation is by no means common. For joint ownership to work, evaluators need to be committed to training and/or sharing of knowledge in a systematic way.

Finally, an issue in joint ownership is resolving the final results, particularly if there are dissenting views. In a sense the evaluator is in a privileged position, having heard a range of views, some of which may have been expressed confidentially. The evaluator must present these fairly, ensuring that it is clear that there is a range of views, but also which views are more strongly represented. The

evaluator must also decide what to do with material that has been gathered in the process of the project, but which is not strictly relevant and which may also have been given in confidence (Gardner & Lehmann, 2002).

3. Evaluation as Part of the Process

Ideally, user-friendly evaluation is part of the ongoing development of the project. Rather than data being kept from users in order to not “bias the investigation,” the data are used as part of a process of users reflecting on progress. This is in the spirit of co-enquiry, that is, the aim of the evaluation is to facilitate the project as well as considering how it has been successful (Heron, 1996). The use of chronicling is one example of evaluation being part of the project, a process for reflection which had an impact on the project. In Shared Action Stage Two we took this a step further, meeting with the reference group for the project about every four months. This can raise issues for evaluators: as relative outsiders, it can seem obvious to them what steps should be taken next. Evaluators have to be particularly aware of their own values and preferences and be careful not to impose these.

Seeing evaluation as part of the process complements joint ownership; evaluation is seen as integral to the working of the project rather than “a kind of add-on” (Frances, 1997, p. 34). Given this, evaluators need to be assertive about the need to start the evaluation early, ideally with the development of the project. As Smith (2000) says about therapeutic interventions, we need to move from “using global measures of outcome aimed at establishing only *if* interventions work” to “establishing *why* interventions work” (Smith, 2000, p. 149). This is not to suggest that outcomes are not important, but simply to affirm the value of paying attention to processes as well.

One of the key questions in many community-based projects is whether a similar project would be effective elsewhere. In Shared Action, for example, the development of a football team for under-13-year-olds was a significant achievement and a major focus for community activity and participation. In another community, especially one that already had a football team, this might not have been an effective strategy at all. Evaluation needs to document the processes that were effective in generating participation rather than suggesting particular outcomes that will suit all communities.

4. Valuing User Voices

In most community-based evaluation projects, at least some of the users are participating in the project because of their own experience. User-friendly evaluation would assume that this experience is a valid and valuable source of knowledge that is an important part of the project. This knowledge can also have considerable impact on the kind of evaluation methods that are chosen and how they are developed and implemented. Users in rural communities, for example, will point out times of day depending on the time of year that are more likely to suit a range of farming families.

Another major impact comes when user experience has been painful or difficult, and this needs to be taken into account, too. An evaluator needs to be sensitive to the experiences of people experiencing chronic illness and associated pain in a way that is significantly different from people being asked their preferences for plans for park development (Renzetti & Lee, 1993).

The voice of the user is generally a very powerful one. Quotes directly from a user often have a greater impact than much evaluator writing. Consider this example, from a Shared Action user talking about developing a football club for under-13-year-olds:

> [E]ven the kids, their attitude was different. The kids learnt to be able to cope with being able to get along, being able to accept no you can't do this … You can't back answer or you can't swear or anything, they all accepted that and some of those kids it must have been terrible hard not to be able to do that because that was an everyday thing that they did. I felt that some of them learnt responsibility and that was the idea of learning to be responsible and talk for your own actions.

Evaluations can tend to concentrate on eliciting information from users about the area specifically of interest to the evaluator, for example, their experience with arthritis or with giving birth. Ideally, Herda (1999) suggests the evaluator and user participate in a conversation where the user feels respected as a person rather than simply a source of information about one area of their life. This also avoids seeing participants in a deficit way of thinking — seeing only the problem rather than the person. We certainly gained consider-

able data using this approach, which sometimes created dilemmas about how or whether to use it (Gardner & Lehmann, 2002).

Ideally, in user-friendly evaluation a range of voices will be heard and valued, including those least likely or able to contribute. A community of interest must include consumers as well as providers. Evaluating a project in a geographic community has challenges for gaining an all-community perspective. Reliability of results is increased by diversity, both in the evaluation methods used and in ensuring diversity of participants. In Shared Action Part One, for example, the views of community members, agency workers visiting the community, and key people from outside the community were very similar.

5. Diversity of Evaluation Processes

Taking seriously the question about users feeling able to participate suggests the need for a diversity of evaluation processes. Experience across these projects confirms that multiple processes allow a variety of contributions. People vary in how they like to contribute to community projects; evaluation needs to have similar flexibility so that people can be involved in ways they feel comfortable. In both the Rural Access Project and Shared Action Part 2, we ran some focus groups. Some people felt both more comfortable and more stimulated by these. One commented that she found it hard to think of things to say in an individual interview, but once a conversation started in a group, there were many things she could add. Others clearly preferred individual interviews, feeling that they would find it too difficult to say what they really wanted to in a group or that there might be other people there that they didn't want to talk with. One woman asked whether a particular person was planning to come, because, if so, she was not prepared to go.

Not everyone has the time or interest to be interviewed; some people prefer the anonymity of a questionnaire. For some people in rural communities particularly, there are issues of confidentiality. It is easier to be honest about local health service providers if they will never know where the comments came from, especially if you play tennis with them on the local team. With the Birthing Practices Review, few people attended meetings. Feedback confirmed that the issue wasn't lack of interest; it became clear that women did not feel comfortable discussing these issues, particularly if they were to be critical in a public way.

Creative ways of enabling people to participate can also help. St. Luke's, Bendigo (under whose auspices the Shared Action Project ran), has developed a series of cards to help generate discussion. One set of cards called "Views from the Verandah," which aim to help people think about planning for the future, were used to start discussion at a reference group meeting. Each card has a cartoon picture and a word; some are more focused on personal issues, some on personal or community change, for example, balance, security, achievement, employment, and contemplation. At the meeting people selected cards to represent both what had been achieved and what they thought needed to be concentrated on in the future. Having the cards prompted contributions from everyone, including those who generally found it harder to speak in the meeting.

Time and place of interviews also need to be user-friendly. Users vary in where and when they feel comfortable about being interviewed; some find it easier to be interviewed at home, others prefer an office or community centre. There can be advantages and disadvantages to all of these from the evaluator's point of view. For these projects, I interviewed in coffee shops over the din of exuberant children, in homes with a constant stream of visitors (some of whom have very usefully joined in the evaluation), and in a community centre with an audience.

Time is also important in the sense of allowing time. This might be about making sure interviews with users aren't rushed and that there is time to build a trusting relationship: some projects cover sensitive topics and it may not be easy for people to contribute honestly with a stranger. It can be useful in user-friendly evaluation to maintain contact over a period of time with users. Views change over the life of a project, and it can be useful to identify what has changed and why. Workers commented during the chronicling process that they were sure they would have forgotten much of what seemed important along the way if we weren't meeting to record what was happening. By the end of the project, it can be that what is remembered is the successes and/or the failures, not the processes that helped generate them.

6. Understanding Community Context

Having users able to participate fully in evaluation means understanding how the community context will impact on them. Part of seeing users as a whole is seeing them as people with strengths and

resources who are in relationship to their community. This understanding is also critical in exploring their experience of a situation. Users talking about giving birth made it clear that their individual experience was affected by their family and support networks and the community in which they lived. Attitudes to staying in hospital after birth, for example, varied significantly between communities, with one community thinking women should return to help on the farm as soon as possible, another thinking that women should stay as long as possible to have a rest. Similarly, with the Rural Access Project, both professionals and users talked about the issue of the community and living in a rural area. Many pointed out that "people in rural communities like to have contact with a local person." One made the point that there are "subtle cues of speech, dress, body language that picks a rural connection for workers instantly."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

What then does a user-friendly approach to participatory evaluation need to include? How can evaluation be appealing to program managers, staff, and participants alike?

First, evaluators need to convey genuine interest in and commitment to user involvement. Having a clearly articulated value base that underlies this interest is likely to help. Evaluators also need to identify what they mean by user, and here I am advocating including project managers, staff, and participants as users. All have valuable information to offer from different perspectives; all can contribute and benefit from their involvement.

Next evaluators need to be clear about the purpose of the evaluation, including their own purpose and those of the funding body, which may not completely overlap. These also need to be conveyed clearly and directly. Users actively involved in an evaluation will have their own purposes and need to see how their purposes relate to those of the evaluators. They will want either to see a potential benefit to themselves or their community of interest or to feel that they are contributing to something that will be of benefit to others. Benefits can vary enormously; some examples from the projects here were feeling your opinion is valued, being part of a group process you enjoyed, learning more about evaluation, and seeing a process outlined that will help other communities.

Part of being clear about purpose includes whether the evaluation is focusing only on outcomes or process or on a combination of both. Community-based evaluation is more likely to be focused on processes as well as outcomes, and this links well to joint ownership and to more active participation by users. It can be relatively quick to answer what you think the outcomes of a project have been; it often takes longer to tease out what you think worked and didn't. Paying attention to process over time can also mean more participation in the evaluation. This reinforces the evaluation being an integral part of the work of the project.

Sharing and clarifying purposes is likely to be the beginning of establishing a process for joint ownership of the evaluation. Generally, this will mean developing an evaluation reference group. Useful questions here include:

- Who knows about the community of interest? That is, who has information on both context and what methods of evaluation are appropriate?
- What groups of users need to be included so that the evaluation is seen to be representative?
- Who should be included so that the evaluation is seen as important and that results are acknowledged and used?
- Does anyone else need to be involved, given the value base of evaluators and/or the agency?

To keep users involved and to ensure they would want to be involved in other evaluations, the reference group and the evaluators need to have clear expectations of central issues. Who has access to what information, for example, what happens if the evaluators and the rest of the group disagree about how to evaluate or about particular results, who ultimately owns the evaluation — all are questions that need to be addressed early in the group's work.

Context is an important part of what this group offers evaluators: an understanding of the background history, current issues, and dynamics that the evaluators need to be aware of. Awareness of rural issues, for example, was important context in two of these projects. Context helps determine appropriate methodology; what will work in one community will not necessarily work in another.

Using a variety of evaluation methods also encourages active participation in evaluation. People and their circumstances vary; no

one method suits everyone. Offering several methods allows people to take part in ways that suit them. Interest in user involvement is also conveyed by using evaluation methods that value the user's voice and that allow time for users to explore their views. Using quotes from users in reports also reinforces that users communicate meaning through their own language and examples, often more convincingly than evaluators writing about what they have said.

Finally, what might this mean for thinking about evaluation? The obvious results of evaluation are in reports, judgements about what has worked and hasn't, sometimes suggestions about processes that are more effective than others. Perhaps we need to articulate more clearly some of the other results of evaluation so that they are more consciously built into projects, so that the evaluation contributes to the project's aims. If we are involved in projects about community building, for example, do we look for evaluation strategies that also generate community building?

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