EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENT AS A TOOL FOR RESEARCH NETWORK DEVELOPMENT: EXPERIENCES OF THE COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH NETWORK OF ALBERTA, CANADA

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Abstract: Many research networks have emerged as means to increase research involvement, build research capacity, and develop a research culture, but little is known regarding their effectiveness. Evaluations require that networks have a clearly specified program theory and clearly specified objectives; many networks do not. This article describes the experience of the Complementary and Alternative Medicine Education and Research Network of Alberta, a network that undertook a modified evaluability assessment to assist in developing the network and to plan a meaningful evaluation. Lessons learned may help other research networks to think strategically and plan for effective evaluations.

Résumé: Beaucoup de réseaux de recherche ont émergé afin de faciliter l'implication dans la recherche, d'augmenter la capacité de recherche, et de développer une culture de recherche, mais on en sait encore peu en ce qui concerne leur efficacité. Les évaluations requièrent que les réseaux aient des objectifs clairement définis

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ainsi qu'un plan pour les atteindre; plusiers réseaux n'en ont pas. Cet article décrit l'expérience d'un réseau de recherche, Complementary and Alternative Medicine Education and Research Network of Alberta, qui a fait une « évaluation de l'évaluabilité » adaptée pour aider à développer le réseau et pour planifier une évaluation significative. Cette expérience pourrait aider d'autres réseaux de recherche à penser stratégiquement et à planifier pour des évaluations efficaces.

To date, research networks have emerged in Canada in many diverse fields. Research networks now exist for specific disciplines within the health care field, such as family practice, rehabilitation, cancer, pediatrics, and complementary and alternative medicine. The primary purpose of research networks, in general, has been summarized as increasing research involvement, building research capacity, and developing a research culture (Clement et al., 2000; Gunn, 2002; Thomas & While, 2001). Typically, this purpose is consistent across disciplines; however, research networks vary widely in their individual objectives due to such issues as varying levels of research skills and experience of members, variations in funding levels, and differing geographical regions (Clement et al., 2000). The structure and operation of individual research networks also tend to vary. Networks may be structured in a "top down," "bottom up," or "whole systems" approach (Thomas, Griffiths, Kai, & O'Dwyer, 2001), depending on whether the members, leaders, or both, initiate and pursue research and who is ultimately responsible for the overall direction and outcomes of the network. Research networks, therefore, although proposed for similar reasons are individually very different. Each network develops in its own context, for its own reasons, and universal rules for successful network development, implementation, and evaluation are difficult to define and apply.

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) encompasses a "group of diverse medical and health care systems, therapies and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine" (National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine [NCCAM], 2002). CAM research networks have specifically been proposed as programs to create and transfer CAM knowledge, to encourage CAM research uptake, and to build CAM research capacity (Boon, 2002; de Bruyn, 2001; Hoffer, 2003; Verhoef & Jansen, 2002). The evidence base of CAM is limited for many reasons, including a lack of collaboration between CAM practitioners and clinical research investigators (Hoffer, 2003). For the most part, CAM practitioners lack research training and the protected

time necessary to conduct research (Hoffer, 2003) and mainstream researchers lack the in-depth understanding of CAM necessary to conduct meaningful research. Other barriers to CAM research have been identified as lack of funding, infrastructure, access to research experts, and sufficient leadership (Broadfield, 1991; Deshefy-Longhi, Swartz, & Grey, 2002). CAM research networks may help overcome these barriers and also may help address the concerns of the government and the medical community regarding the growing consumer demand for and use of CAM, despite limited research into the safety and effectiveness of these products and therapies.

Despite their popularity, little is known regarding how, why, or even if, research networks are effective mechanisms to achieve their purpose (Clement et al., 2000; Keenan, Martin, Kosuth, Eberhard, & Sibbald, 2000). In a 1998 literature review by Clement et al., no published research regarding the evaluation of research networks was found. A current literature review by the authors revealed the same result. Clement et al. responded to this need by proposing a conceptual framework for the evaluation of primary care research networks. Their framework, however valuable, assumes that a research network has clearly specified goals and objectives along with a realistic and plausible way to meet those objectives. Such considerations are necessary to conduct meaningful and useful evaluations (Rutman, 1977); however, given the limited theoretical knowledge of research networks, such conditions are rarely met.

Evaluability assessment (EA) is a process that helps to clarify program theory by exploring program intent and program practice and, if necessary, helps to redesign programs to ensure the preconditions of evaluation are met (Wholey, Hatry, & Newcomer, 1994). The EA process was developed by Wholey (1979) upon the realization that many United States federal programs were not ready to be evaluated, which resulted in tension between policy makers and evaluators. Policy makers were skeptical that information resulting from expensive evaluations was useful to address important national issues, and evaluators were frustrated with programs intended to address grandiose goals but few concrete objectives (Smith, 1989; Trevisan & Yi Min Huang, 2003). The EA process was developed as a means to ensure programs were ready for evaluation and thereby save scarce evaluation resources by recommending evaluation only when programs are ready, and then only targeting resources for essential evaluation needs (Jung & Schubert, 1983; Smith, 1989; Trevisan & Yi Min Huang, 2003).

EA is a qualitative evaluation process that ensures that plausible, meaningful and measurable outcomes are identified, along with activities, or an action plan, to ensure those outcomes may be met (Wholey et al., 1994). A primary benefit of EA, therefore, is the clarification of a program theory, or the cause-effect linkages of program resources and activities with intended outcomes (Chen, 1990; Smith, 1989). In addition to promoting clarification of how a program is intended to work, the EA process has been suggested as a program development tool. EA can assist in the planning of plausible, evaluable programs and the corresponding determination of resource requirements and availability (Jung & Schubert, 1983; Patton, 1997; Smith; Trevisan & Yi Min Huang, 2003).

The purpose of this article is to describe the experiences of a CAM research network, the CAM Education and Research Network of Alberta (CAMera) that used the EA process to assist in developing the network as well as to plan a meaningful evaluation. The EA process that was implemented by CAMera, although guided by relevant literature (e.g., Rutman, 1977; Smith, 1989; Wholey et al., 1994), was not typical and required revision mid-way to respond to the diversity in perspectives that was being observed. The EA framework forced CAMera's Steering Committee to think logically about an effective approach toward the overall purpose of the network and also helped to prepare for a useful, meaningful evaluation. Lessons learned during CAMera's experience may help other emerging or existing research networks to think strategically and plan for evaluation.

THE COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH NETWORK OF ALBERTA

CAMera was founded in June 2002 after a one-day CAM Research Symposium held at the University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Participants identified a lack of resources, such as time, money, and staff, and a lack of research skills and experience as the major barriers to conducting CAM research and proposed the development of a research network as a strategy to overcome these barriers. Participants saw a research network as a means to collaborate with other researchers and practitioners and to pool and share expertise, infrastructure, and resources, leading to increased involvement in research activities and increased legitimacy for CAM throughout Alberta.

A four-member volunteer steering committee and an eight-member volunteer advisory committee guide the development and operation

of CAMera. A part-time network coordinator manages daily network operations and is responsible for maintaining contact with network members. Primary activities include offering research methods courses, workshops, and consultations, hosting an annual research symposium, and disseminating CAM research-related information via a website, newsletter, and newsflashes (e-mails). Membership, which is free, is open to CAM researchers and CAM practitioners with an interest in research across the province of Alberta. Currently, there are over 270 members.
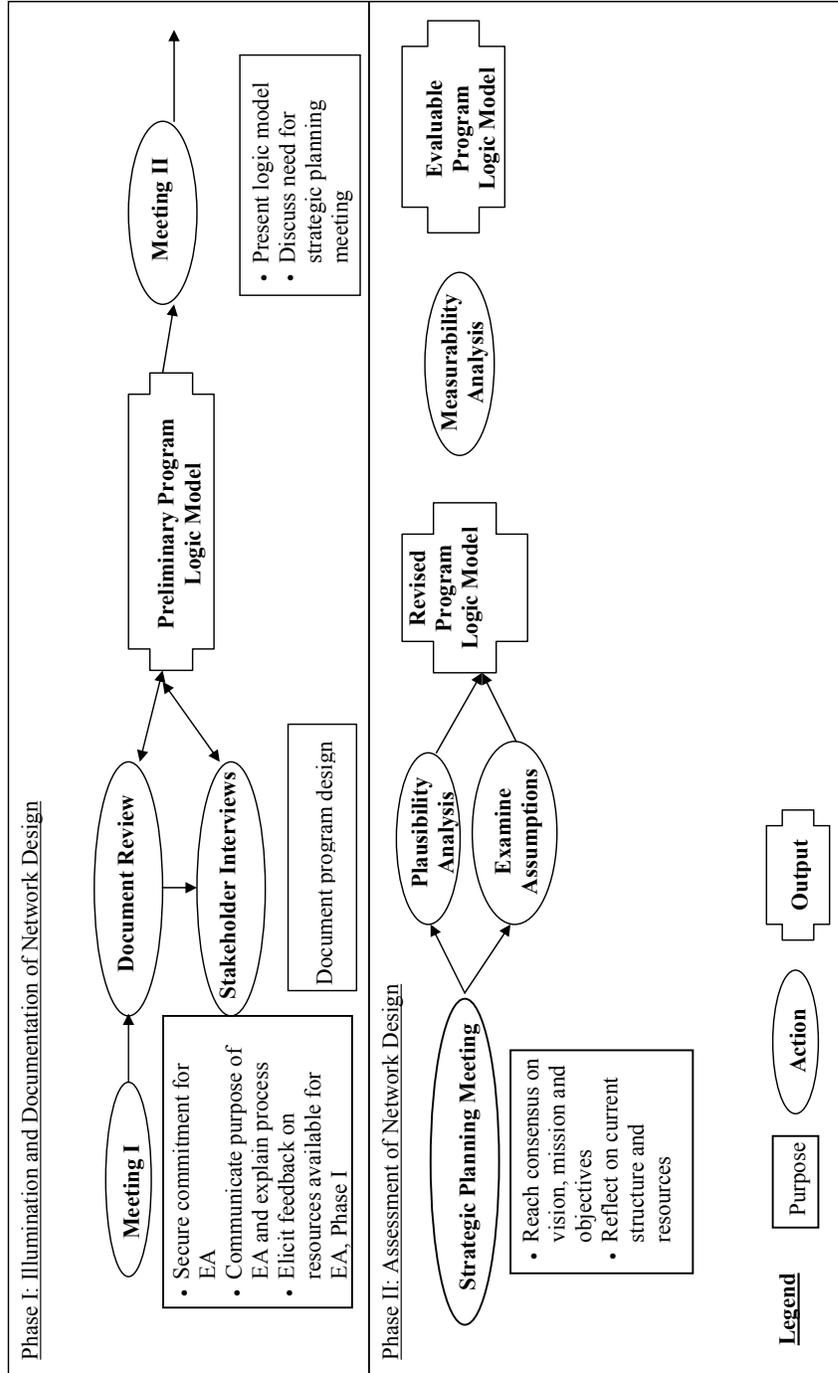
METHODS

CAMera's EA consisted of three phases: (a) illumination and documentation of network program theory, (b) assessment of network program theory, and (c) exploration of alternative evaluation designs. Figure 1 outlines the process within Phases I and II, which will be discussed in this article.

The main purpose of Phase I was to illuminate and document CAMera's program theory including network resources, activities, and outcomes, as well as the causal assumptions linking these elements (Chen, 1990; Smith, 1989). Through a document-review process and interviews with key stakeholders, the primary aim was to produce a preliminary program logic model and a list of potential indicators of program performance (Jung & Schubert, 1983; Wholey et al., 1994). A program logic model is a graphical representation of the logical structure of a program, or program theory (Wholey, 1979). The main purpose of Phase II was to reconcile any differences in expectations and assumptions of logic model elements obtained from different data sources. The aim was to produce one realistic and plausible logic model.

Document Review

Documents containing information regarding the three main elements of a logic model (resources, activities, and outcomes) were reviewed, including three proposals for CAMera operational funding; 27 sets of steering and advisory committee meeting minutes; standard operating protocols; CAMera's website content; six newsletters and 30 newsflashes (e-mails) distributed to CAMera members; and a network contact database, which records contacts with CAMera members. All documents produced between June 2002 and December 2003 were

Figure 1
Evaluability Assessment Design: Phase I and II

Phase I: Illumination and Documentation of Network Design

Meeting I

- Secure commitment for EA
- Communicate purpose of EA and explain process
- Elicit feedback on resources available for E.A, Phase I

Document Review

Stakeholder Interviews

Document program design

Preliminary Program Logic Model

Meeting II

- Present logic model
- Discuss need for strategic planning meeting

Phase II: Assessment of Network Design

Strategic Planning Meeting

- Reach consensus on vision, mission and objectives
- Reflect on current structure and resources

Plausibility Analysis

Examine Assumptions

Revised Program Logic Model

Measurability Analysis

Evaluable Program Logic Model

Legend

Purpose

Action

Output

reviewed to ensure a variety of perspectives were observed. Information on the purpose and author of each document and the author's relationship to CAMera was recorded on a document review protocol form, along with direct quotes to support each of the main logic model elements to facilitate subsequent referencing (Smith, 1989). Understanding the context in which each document was prepared, and considering this in the analysis, adds to the validity of observations. Document review and analysis was iterative; one document was reviewed and analyzed before proceeding to another document. A preliminary logic model reflecting all document data was developed and subsequently used in stakeholder interviews, which allowed for clarification of document data and facilitated discussion on differences in expectations and assumptions (Smith, 1989; Wholey et al., 1994).

Stakeholder Interviews

A stakeholder is anyone who impacts a program in a very significant way, or who is significantly affected by the actions of a program (Smith, 1989). Major CAMera stakeholders include steering and advisory committee members and general network members. Interviews with CAMera stakeholders ($n = 7$) followed an interview guide (see Table 1) and elicited participants' perspectives on the elements

Table 1
Interview Guide for Key Stakeholder Interviews

Interview Question
1. From your perspective, what is CAMera trying to accomplish?
2. How is CAMera related to the priorities of the CAM research field?
3. Describe the organizational structure of CAMera.
4. What activities does CAMera conduct to bring about the mentioned objectives?
5. How does each activity mentioned contribute to accomplishing objectives?
6. What resources are available to carry out CAMera's activities?*
7. How adequate are the resources to allow CAMera to meet its objectives?*
8. What evidence is necessary to determine whether objectives are met?*
9. What kinds of information do you obtain on CAMera's performance and results?*
10. How do you use the information you obtain on CAMera's performance and results?*
11. What kinds of information do CAMera's funders request?*
12. What results or successes have been recognized to date?
13. What accomplishments are likely in the next one or two years?
14. Why would CAMera produce those results?
15. What are CAMera's main problems?
16. What do you think could or should be done to solve these problems?
17. Are there any questions or concerns about CAMera that you would like to see addressed by an evaluation?*
18. What would you change about CAMera if you could?

* Questions that were not asked to general CAMera members.

of the preliminary logic model and the assumed cause-effect linkages between these elements (Smith, 1989; Wholey et al., 1994). All four steering committee members and three advisory committee members participated in one-on-one, in-person interviews. The remaining members of the advisory committee were invited to share their opinions, along with general network members who volunteered to participate, at a later (initially unplanned) strategic planning meeting ($n = 15$).

As with document review, data collection and analysis during the interview process was iterative. Between interviews, the interview guide was revised in response to new data, for example, to add originally unanticipated questioning regarding network problems and potential solutions to those problems. Additionally, changes to the logic model were made immediately following each interview.

Data Analysis

The intent of data analysis was to process, summarize, and present data that described each of the logic model elements (resources, activities, outcomes), the cause-effect relationships between these three elements (assumptions), and indicators of program performance (Jung & Schubert, 1983; Smith, 1989). These five categories formed an initial analysis template that was applied to all documents and interview transcripts. The template was modified throughout the analysis process to add new and unexpected categories, including network problems, suggested solutions, possible new activities, evaluation needs, and past network successes. When a new category emerged, previously analyzed data were re-analyzed using the modified coding template to ensure the most recent coding template was applied to all data.

In some cases, documents and interview transcripts were analyzed more than once to make comparisons between different data sources. When differences in stakeholder perspectives were uncovered, a meeting was held with CAMera's steering committee to discuss if the difference was: (a) an expectation that represented reality but was omitted from the preliminary model, (b) an expectation that was not planned or implemented but the steering committee agreed should be, or (c) an expectation that was considered to be unrealistic (Smith, 1989).
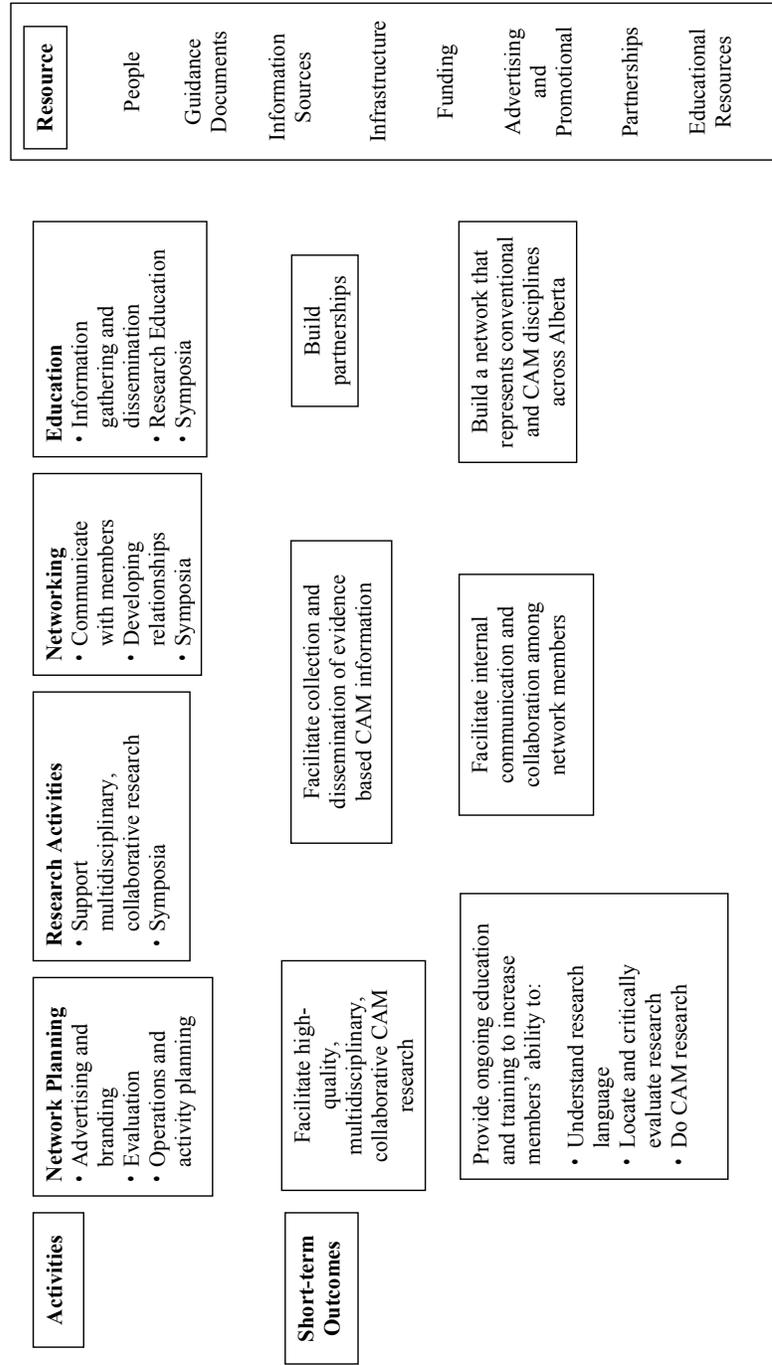
RESULTS

Phase I — Documentation of Network Program Theory

Following document review and three steering committee interviews, saturation of the resource and activity elements of CAMera's logic model was achieved (see Resources and Activities, Figure 2), meaning that no new information regarding these program elements was being seen or heard and no revisions to these elements in the logic model were being made (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). To reflect saturation and to focus future data collection, at this point a decision was made to no longer include questions regarding resources and activities in future interviews. Document review and three steering committee interviews were deemed sufficient for saturation of these elements, as resources and activities are inherently factual and were deemed to not require the same level of exploration and analysis of diverse perspectives as other logic-model elements. Subsequent interviews ($n = 4$) focused on CAMera's intended outcomes, possible new activities, problem areas, and potential solutions to those problems.

Following the four subsequent interviews, saturation of other logic-model elements and emergent analysis categories appeared far from imminent; in fact, with every interview the diversity in stakeholder perspectives became increasingly apparent. For example, Table 2 lists a wide range of potential outcomes that emerged during data collection along with suggested new activities to effect those outcomes. CAMera's steering committee felt that many of the suggested outcomes were not feasible given CAMera's funding term (three years) and current (limited) resource base and recognized that CAMera was operating without a clear, agreed-upon program theory.

Additionally, during data collection, the many challenges that CAMera was facing were made explicit, including: an increasing and increasingly diverse membership; financial instability; the desire to address many of the challenges and needs in the CAM research field, despite limited time and resources; and low visibility. Most importantly, it became apparent that many of CAMera's actions to date were reactive, not proactive, most likely as a result of limited resources. The observed diversity in perspectives, along with the identified challenges, pointed to the need for the coming together of all stakeholder groups in order to reconcile varying viewpoints. Further, the need for all stakeholder groups to be involved in the development of a strategic plan that would satisfy a range of needs became evident.

Figure 2
CAMera Program Logic Model

					Resource
					People
					Guidance Documents
					Information Sources
					Infrastructure
					Funding
					Advertising and Promotional
					Partnerships
					Educational Resources

Activities

Network Planning
- Advertising and branding
- Evaluation
- Operations and activity planning

Research Activities
- Support multidisciplinary, collaborative research
- Symposia

Networking
- Communicate with members
- Developing relationships
- Symposia

Education
- Information gathering and dissemination
- Research Education
- Symposia

Short-term Outcomes

Facilitate high-quality, multidisciplinary, collaborative CAM research

Facilitate collection and dissemination of evidence based CAM information

Build partnerships

Provide ongoing education and training to increase members' ability to:
- Understand research language
- Locate and critically evaluate research
- Do CAM research

Facilitate internal communication and collaboration among network members

Build a network that represents conventional and CAM disciplines across Alberta

Table 2
Potential Activities and Objectives Suggested during Data-Collection Process

Suggested Activity	Potential Objective
1. Host an online discussion board for CAM researchers and practitioners	1. Facilitate internal communication and collaboration among network members
2. Provide courses and/or workshops to help practitioners develop information packages for their patients and develop critical thinking and/or critical appraisal skills	2. Provide ongoing education and training about research methods to assess CAM
3. Provide small start-up research grants	3. Facilitate and promote high-quality CAM research
4. Develop partnerships with CAM colleges and professional associations	4. Build partnerships with other networks, interest groups, and CAM professionals
5. Provide information sessions to communicate results of recent CAM research, for example, about a disease or a particular product or therapy	5. Disseminate evidence-based information to researchers, the public, and policy makers
6. Develop into a clinical research organization, which practitioners or product companies may approach to conduct independent research	6. Ensure sustainability of the network
7. Develop an alerting service for CAM and conventional practitioners when new CAM research is published	7. Facilitate collection, appraisal, and presentation of current knowledge of CAM products and modalities
8. Host research placements for practitioners looking for supervised research experience	8. Impact CAM practice through the use of research and evidence
9. Lobby for new CAM research-funding competitions	9. Provide a voice for CAM research and CAM researchers in Alberta
10. Provide sessional instructors at local colleges to furnish a research component to practitioner training	10. Increase awareness of the importance of research
11. Host special interest groups for governmental organizations, e.g., Alberta Health and Wellness	11. Impact CAM policy

CAMera subsequently held a strategic planning meeting, to which all steering committee, advisory committee, and network members were invited. This strategic planning meeting represented a change in the intended EA process; the meeting replaced intended future interviews with remaining advisory committee members and general network members. This meeting was deemed the most efficient and effective way to elicit and reconcile a variety of perspectives on the future direction and structure of CAMera.

Phase II — Reconciling Views through Strategic Planning using an EA Framework

Although a diversion from the intended EA process, the purpose of Phase II remained unchanged, and in fact the need to reconcile

differing stakeholder perspectives and to clarify CAMera's program theory became even more important than originally envisioned. A strategic planning meeting was held with the purpose of allowing all stakeholder perspectives to be voiced in an open manner, to reach a consensus regarding CAMera's vision, mission, objectives (outcomes), and membership targets, and to reflect on the effectiveness of the current network structure and resource base. The meeting was to provide the foundation for the development of a strategic plan that reflects the needs and attributes of its members, that is feasible and realistic given CAMera's limited resources, and that ensures agreed upon objectives (outcomes) may be met by outlining a consistent and plausible program theory.

Eight network members, three advisory committee members (not those who participated in the individual interviews), and all four steering committee members participated in the meeting, facilitated by an unaffiliated consultant. Prior to the meeting, each participant was given a participant package to prepare for the meeting and to focus the discussion. The package included current (original) vision and mission statements, current (original) network objectives, a list of CAMera's current activities and suggested new activities that emerged during data collection, the preliminary logic model, an annual budget, a list of successes to date, and a draft marketing plan. See Table 3 for the original vision and mission statements and the original network objectives.

The majority of the meeting was spent discussing a revised vision and mission, followed by the approval and prioritization of objectives that were deemed to be consistent with the vision and mission, feasible given CAMera's resource base, and plausible given a logical program theory (see Table 3). A common consensus-building exercise was undertaken, where all participants were asked to list up to three relevant objectives on separate pieces of paper, which were subsequently grouped into common categories. Each category was discussed in turn and participants were asked to explain why they felt each objective was important for CAMera. Following this discussion, the objectives were prioritized by anonymous vote using the criteria of feasibility and relevance to CAMera's mission.

The primary focus on the overall network purpose was necessary to ensure the overall direction of the network reflected a variety of perspectives, to build consensus, and to focus the remaining discussion. The resulting vision statement captures the primary intent of

the network, narrows the scope to the primary activities of research and education, and uses language that should be acceptable to a wide range of stakeholders. The resulting mission clearly stresses CAMera's focus on education as a primary activity to encourage accessing, using, and doing research for the purpose of legitimizing and improving the effectiveness of CAM practice. The new objectives are clearly stated, feasible and realistic given CAMera's funding term and current resource base, and plausible given CAMera's primary activities of research and education (see Figure 2). The objectives, however, are not easily measurable, as required for evaluation. A primary recommendation that arose from the strategic planning meeting is that CAMera conduct a membership needs assessment, to explore the research and education needs of its target members. Through this needs assessment, CAMera would be able to establish a

Table 3
CAMera's Original and Revised Vision, Mission, and Objectives

	Original	Revised
Vision	To increase evidence-based complementary and alternative health care practice in Alberta	Complementary and alternative medicine practice in Alberta is research-based
Mission	To sustain a provincial education and research network to: • Increase awareness and communication of CAM research in Alberta • Improve knowledge, expertise, and collaboration of CAM research in Alberta	Through education, enhance the capacity of the Alberta CAM community to access, use, and do CAM research
Objectives	1. Facilitate internal communication and collaboration among network members 2. Facilitate collection, appraisal, and presentation of current knowledge on CAM products and therapies 3. Facilitate evidence-based education about CAM 4. Contribute to the development of appropriate methods and models to study CAM 5. Facilitate and promote high-quality CAM research 6. Build partnerships with other networks, interest groups, research teams, and CAM professionals 7. Create funding opportunities to enhance sustainability of the network 8. Disseminate evidence-based information about CAM to researchers, the public, and policy makers	1. Facilitate internal communication and collaboration among network members 2. Facilitate collection and dissemination of evidence-based CAM information 3. Provide ongoing education and training to increase members' ability to: • Understand research language; • Locate and critically evaluate research; and • Do CAM research 4. Promote high-quality, multidisciplinary, collaborative CAM research 5. Build partnerships 6. Build a network that represents conventional and CAM disciplines across Alberta

baseline measure of the Alberta CAM research environment, against which similar measures may be applied in a future impact evaluation. Until results from the needs assessment are available, the steering committee agreed that CAMera would promote the set of "rhetorical" objectives that arose from the meeting for marketing purposes. Following the needs assessment, CAMera will develop, in conjunction with an evaluator, a set of measurable objectives.

BENEFITS OF THE EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The EA process was a catalyst for CAMera to reflect critically on its current structure and network program theory and also reminded CAMera's management of its achievements and outcomes to date. CAMera's structure and activities had remained static, while its members and their needs were continuously changing. Given the limited resource base and therefore limited time, CAMera likely would not have had the opportunity to gain such valuable information without the decision to undergo this process. CAMera's commitment to undertaking a meaningful evaluation that reflects the needs of its members, through an initial EA, provided many more benefits than originally envisioned. By all accounts, the EA was a success in the eyes of CAMera's steering and advisory committees.

Smith (1989) and Trevisan and Yi Min Huang (2003) suggest criteria to externally evaluate the success of the EA process. Success by such external criteria suggests that EA is a useful tool for research network development, implementation, and evaluation, an area with little documented guidance to date. Some of the suggested criteria and a reflection on CAMera's experience follow.

- Clarification of program theory — CAMera's EA provided the input necessary to guide the development of a meaningful, relevant research network, based on a feasible, realistic, and plausible network program theory to effect outcomes that are in line with needs of the CAM community in Alberta.
- Increased effectiveness and efficiency of program staff and thus the program's probability of success — Following the EA, CAMera's leaders were clearer about the network's intended outcomes and feasible, logical strategies to accomplish them. With increased clarity and the resultant efficiency, CAMera is more likely to have an impact on CAM research and practice in Alberta.

- Immediate implementation of program improvement actions — Following the EA, CAMera undertook several initiatives to improve program delivery and the potential for impact. For example, external funding was secured to undertake a membership needs assessment, internal funds were invested to develop an online membership database to facilitate communication and collaboration between network members, and research education activities were focused to the areas of accessing, using, and doing research.
- Improved staff program development skills — With a more directed mission statement, or overall network goal, CAMera's leaders are better able to promote, defend, and develop CAMera's activities in a logical fashion to effect positive outcomes.
- Leaders had time to think about their programs — CAMera's leaders were afforded the luxury of spending time to strategically think about and clarify their program away from the stress of daily network activities. As one of CAMera's steering committee members said: "I can see that this project, it's forcing me to think about the structure and what the goals are and how we can get there. It's never been made explicit before."
- Increased visibility and accountability for the program — By including all key stakeholders in the EA process, interest and commitment to CAMera was heightened, as was CAMera's visibility and credibility in target member groups. It is expected that such commitment and visibility will continue to increase as the membership needs assessment gets underway.

As Smith (1989) has suggested, therefore, the EA process was the product: an invaluable research network development tool. Following the EA, CAMera has changed. The network has improved focus in a direction more likely to effect meaningful, relevant outcomes, and staff are more committed to achieving those outcomes. The EA therefore facilitated change through the EA process and related staff experience as much as through the findings generated (Patton, 1997). Given the number of research networks that are now emerging, with the bold purpose to build research capacity and develop a research culture, network development and implementation must proceed in a logical fashion to ensure scarce resources are applied to strategic activities to effect meaningful outcomes. Further, evaluations are needed to understand if research networks are effective for their

intended purpose. An EA therefore has two benefits when applied to research networks: network development in an efficient and effective manner that considers the needs of all key stakeholders and the assurance of a meaningful, timely, and relevant evaluation.

LESSONS LEARNED

In addition to helping clarify CAMera's program theory, the EA process taught CAMera's leaders some valuable lessons, including:

1. CAMera had been reactive, not strategic in its planning. Given the limited time available from volunteer steering and advisory committee members, the majority of time was spent developing activities to react to the perceived CAM research and practice environment but not strategically to develop an efficient, effective, and logical action plan.

2. Given limited resources, activities that were the easiest and most visible, not necessarily the most effective, were performed. Without a clear network program theory and with scarce resources, those activities with which the network leaders were the most familiar were offered (e.g., education versus mentorship) without substantial thought given to the plausibility of those activities effecting intended outcomes.

3. Members were not actively engaged in the activities and development of the network and CAMera had not been transparent regarding how and why decisions were made. CAMera was proceeding in a top-down approach, which was incongruent with the diversity of the target audience. Decision-making authority rested with CAMera's steering and advisory committee members, and decisions were filtered down to the network membership, often without justification. A whole systems approach (Thomas, Griffiths, et al., 2001) may be more appropriate.

4. Objectives were not explicit to members, nor to all steering and advisory committee members, and were not in line with network member opinions of CAMera's potential. CAMera had evolved in a reactionary nature with no clear program theory and without communication and participation with network members regarding their needs and wishes.

5. Despite some problems, many outcomes and achievements had been realized. Due to limited time to critically reflect on experiences, achievements were often overlooked and not celebrated. For example, a network of over 270 members had

been developed, two successful symposia have been held, and ongoing funding has been secured.
6. Research literacy (the ability to understand and use research) precedes research capacity (the ability to do research), and therefore a research network should promote both. Related to the need for a consistent program theory, prior to the EA, CAMera struggled with the decision to focus on one or the other, but not both.
7. Research terminology needs to be simple, appear relevant and not be intimidating. Terms such as "research literacy" and "research capacity" many not mean much to some CAM practitioners, and "evidence-based" may be perceived to be associated with the biomedical model, and further, begs the question of what the standard for "evidence" is. In an attempt to build a credible research network, CAMera's promotional materials would include such "high-level" terminology, which intimidated many potential members and led to the impression that CAMera could not meet their needs.

CAMera's EA afforded many benefits to all of CAMera's key stakeholders and, in addition, suggests that similar benefits may be realized by other emerging and existing research networks seeking guidance on network development, implementation, and evaluation. The EA process, by its qualitative nature, is flexible and adaptable to the many varying contexts that characterize research networks. The process of qualitative inquiry into research network program theory can assist leaders in learning about the strengths and weaknesses of their program conceptualizations and can help supply a knowledge base for program development, improvement, and evaluation (Patton, 2002; Wholey et al., 1994).

Research networks do not easily fit within the mandate of traditional funding organizations, and it is therefore common for networks to operate from a limited resource base with limited funds. Although every network is unique, many face the same challenges as CAMera, including financial instability, sporadic or low member participation, and evolving member needs. The benefits realized throughout this EA process are transferable to any developing research network. The time taken to engage members and plan strategically is invaluable. To do this under the framework of an EA has the added benefit of preparing for a future evaluation that is meaningful and responsive to member needs. In order to be successful, a research network needs to engage its members, listen to and respond to their evolving needs

and interests, undertake meaningful evaluations, and use the results to redesign the network and its activities. A focus on evaluation and strategic planning, however, should not be a one-time effort. The integration of evaluative inquiry and strategic planning into organizational culture and operations has the potential to increase an organization's capacity to construct shared views on program structure, capture and interpret external information, and question underlying assumptions of organizational strategies (Cousins, Goh, Clark, & Lee, 2004). With a continued focus on evaluation and strategic planning, CAMera will be well placed to build research literacy and research capacity, through education, in the years to come.

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