Evaluating the RD Parent Empowerment Program
A pragmatic approach within real-world constraints

Presenter Disclosures
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No relationships to disclose

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Presentation Aims

• Describe a common challenge
  *How do we meaningfully evaluate and disseminate programs responding to public health need and community demand?*

• Offer a pragmatic approach based in theory and practice

A (R)Evolutionary Idea

• Program development & evaluation are evolutionary processes
  - Optimize the match between phases of program development and evaluation
  - Think in terms of evaluation cycles

Urban, Hargraves, & Trochim, 2014, *Eval & Program Planning*
The Need

• Well-documented problems with population diet and physical activity
  — Especially relevant for eliminating socioeconomic and racial disparities in chronic illness
• Communities want to do something!

Evidence for Intervening

• E.g., The Community Guide
  — Nutrition: “Insufficient Evidence”
  — Physical Activity
  • Multiple recommended strategies
    • Includes individually-adapted health behavior change programs

Limitations of the Evidence

• External validity (Glasgow 2008; Green & Glasgow 2006)
• Scale and scope of interventions (Brownson et al 2009)
• Dearth of evidence on viable programs (Chen 2010)
• Mismatch with community desire to act
The Real World

• A suite of programs serving lower-income families has been developed, refined, and adapted over 10+ years
  — Based on “8 Habits”
• Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics emerged as partner and leader
  — RDs support family-based changes

RD Parent Empowerment Program (RD-PEP)

• Multiple implementation cycles sparked paradigm shift for evaluation
  — Began with strenuous attempts to adapt research methods to constrained circumstances
  — Shifted to fitting evaluation to the program circumstances and needs

Key to the Change

• Family Nutrition & Physical Activity (FNPA) survey (Ihmels et al)
  — Contemporaneous evolution
  — Designed as intervention tool with empirical support
  — Unknown sensitivity to detect change
FNPA Survey

http://www.adaf.eatright-fnpa.org/public/partner.cfm

• Next slides show examples of
  – survey item
  – reports: individual & group leader

FNPA Mock Report

FNPA Mock Group Report
Evaluation: A Familiar Story

• Our version of the 3 R's
  – Resources
  – Rigor
  – Reality-based
• We developed *a priori* evaluation principles to guide evaluation design to maximize the 3 R's

Pragmatic Evaluation Principles

• Maximize resources
  – Project budget: money and time
  – Participant time and attention
• Maximize fit
  – Only collect key intervention goals
• Maximize validity
  – Use multiple methods, minimize bias

APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES
Integrate Data Collection Into Program Activities

• FNPA became intervention and evaluation tool
  — Ensured match between evaluation & intervention focus
  — Engaged, rather than burdened, participants
  — Provided data for tailoring

Mix the Methods

• Focus groups intentionally probed on behavior changes that could be detected by pre-post FNPA
  — Separate focus groups for parents & leaders helped further triangulate
  — Qualitative and quantitative data went hand in glove

Be Where We Are

• Acknowledge evolutionary phase of program and evaluation
  — Strive for good match
  — Contribute “the best evidence available” for decision-making
Challenge #1
• Publishing and disseminating this type of evaluation
  — public health vs. evaluation field
  — consequences of not publishing

Challenge #2
• Working with IRBs
  — Must, to publish and disseminate
  — Logistics of using an instrument for both intervention and evaluation
    • Administration issues
    • Timing issues

Challenge #3
• Facilitating the evolutionary process for programs and evaluations
  — How feasible is it to cross from pragmatic to higher levels of validity?
  — What are the barriers and facilitators?
Ideas & Guiding Examples

• Broader evaluation field
• SQUIRE guidelines
  – used in healthcare QI studies
  – adapt for program evaluation?
• CBPR and qualitative research in public health

Looking Ahead

• We continue to engage with these questions and ideas
• RD-PEP evaluation published