Getting the word out: A comparison of methods for disseminating research findings

Rationale

Although evaluation of state tobacco control programs has become more prevalent over the past decade, there has been little focus on effective techniques for disseminating evaluation results to state tobacco control professionals.

Disseminating evaluation results to program stakeholders is an essential part of any program evaluation. There is limited evidence about the most effective way to disseminate information to state program partners so that the results can be utilized in their program planning efforts. Therefore, the main research question for this project was:

What is the most effective dissemination strategy (e.g., print, website, workshop) for disseminating evaluation results to state program partners?

Methods: Background

In 2005 the Center for Tobacco Policy Research (CTPR) conducted Project LEaP (Linking Evaluation results to state program partners?) to the tobacco control partners in each state via a print report series, website, and/or interactive workshop.

In 2007 the Center conducted Project LEaP II, which extended the dissemination effort into all 50 states to evaluate the effectiveness of the three dissemination modes (print, website, workshop) as compared to Project LEaP I. The states and their assigned dissemination modes are shown in the map below:

- **Report Series and Website**
- **Report Series and Workshop**
- **Report Series, Website, and Workshop**

**A 26-page report series was developed covering five areas:**
- Introduction and Executive Summary
- Program Environment
- Program Resources
- Program Capacity
- Program Sustainability

**The website contained five sections and included all the report series content.** Other features of the website included polling questions, a feedback form, a site search engine, and a tell-a-friend form.

**The one-day workshop was designed to be an interactive learning experience to help practitioners use the evaluation results for program planning.**

The workshop was organized into four sections: Project LEaP introduction, partner relationships, program sustainability, and program planning.

Participants developed short-term action plans addressing 2-3 challenges for their programs.

**Participants completed both a web-based baseline and post survey. Workshop participants also completed pre/post surveys at the time of the workshops. Visitors to the website were tracked with StatCounter, a web tracking service.**

To evaluate and compare the effectiveness of the dissemination methods, five major outcome measures were examined using a 5-point scale:

- Overall usefulness of LEaP results to the individual participant
- Usefulness of LEaP participation for state’s tobacco control program
- Usefulness of LEaP participation for individual’s agency
- Usefulness of LEaP participation for individual’s own tobacco control work
- Participation in LEaP was worth individual’s time

Methods: Data Collection

Results: Main Outcomes

- **The overall response rate for the post survey was 97%.** The reports were distributed to all 167 survey participants. 93% (n=155) of participants reported being aware of the Project LEaP results.

- Of the 167 reports distributed, 53% (n=88) reported reading the reports. Of the 109 invited to a workshop, 62% (n=69) reported attending a workshop.

- Of the 167 website links sent, 47% (n=43) reported accessing the website.

**Participants receiving all three modes of dissemination (report series, website, and workshop) were more likely to:**

- Determine how to use the results to capitalize on your program’s strengths
- Learn about Oregon’s ability to sustain its program and the tools used to examine the relationships between tobacco control partners and their programs.
- Examine the relationships between tobacco control partners and their programs.
- There was some evidence of usefulness for all five outcome variables. However, usefulness was more apparent when the report series was combined with the website, workshop, or both.

- Planned comparisons revealed that participants engaging in all three modes found the project results significantly more useful for their own work or their agency than participants engaging in one or two modes of dissemination (p<0.01).

**Results: Comparison of Dissemination Modes**

**Overall, 62% of participants shared the Project LEaP results with their colleagues.**

- Over 80% of those receiving all three modes reported sharing the project results with their colleagues.

- There was an increasing trend in the percent of participants sharing the evaluation results from those receiving reports only to those receiving all three modes (chi-square=7.4; p=0.01).

Based on these findings, the use of the traditional reports is not enough. Evaluators and researchers need to implement a multi-mode approach to disseminate findings.