Assessing Research and Program Readiness: Exploring Evaluation Interests, Resources, and Needs

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Session Goals

- Describe the goals and activities of the 2013 NAWRS Research Academy
- Identify potential program evaluation opportunities by walking through a logic model exercise
- Discuss evaluation design alternatives and factors to consider when developing the most appropriate research design
- Prepare for the subsequent Research Academy sessions by discussing next steps
Research Academy Goals

- Build research/methodological skills and substantive expertise of state and local public welfare researchers, particularly around the use of small-scale research experiments
- Encourage the use of existing research to inform policy/practice decisions
- Discuss strategies for improving the working relationship between research and practice communities
- Create a collaborative peer learning/support community
Academy Activities

📬 Lunchtime Plenary Session

📬 Three workshops
   - Assessing Research and Program Readiness
   - Lessons from Small-Scale Experiments
   - Developing a Research Plan and Building Capacity

📬 Working session for consultants

📬 Webinars and other events throughout the year
Top Priorities for the Academy: Survey Findings

- Find out more about the research and evaluation work of state and local social service agencies (57%)
- Learn more about how I can conduct program evaluations as part of my work (55%)
- Build connections with researchers in the field of social policy (48%)
- Professionally network with state and local government officials (45%)
- Learn about funding opportunities for research and evaluation work (29%)
Discussion Questions

- From the list, what resonates with you?
- What would you add to the list?
Start with a logic model or framework that explicitly defines the inputs and outcomes

Model or framework should be:
- Specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic
- Coherent – linking the intervention to the results
- Logical – arrows that are meaningful
- Communicate clearly
What is a logic model?

- Visual representation of how a program is expected to “work” – relates resources, activities, and intended changes or impacts a program is expected to create

- They are typically diagrams or flow charts with illustrations, text, and arrows indicating how planned work is expected to benefit program participants
Why use a logic model?

- Helps program administrators better understand their programs – creates a map of how to achieve program goals

- Self-reflection exercise – requires discipline and awareness; gives the program focus – anchors the model for administrators and staff at all levels

- Makes sure that everyone is on the same page with program processes and outcomes

- Provides an opportunity to clearly define and measure program components
What are the core elements?

- Inputs – Resources available for program investments (e.g., staff, funding)
- Program activities – Organized activities planned by a program (e.g., services)
- Outputs – Direct products of program activities (e.g., number of clients served)
- Outcomes – Changes in program participants as a result of the intervention

1 and 2 are planned activities; 3 and 4 are effects of planned activities
Exercise: Inputs and Program Activities

- **What is being provided?**
- **How much?**
- **Who is providing it?**
- **How is it being provided?**
- **When is it provided?**
- **How long does the intervention last?**
- **Who gets the intervention?**
Exercise: Outputs and Outcomes

What would you expect to happen as a result of the intervention?

What would be considered a “success”? How could it be measured?

What data elements effectively capture what you hope to achieve?

What are potential process measures? What are outcome indicators?
Research Readiness

What are your research questions?

To what extent do you have buy in from key program administrators/decision-makers?

What resources are available to carry out the study? (e.g., staff, funding, methodological and substantive expertise)

What is the availability of accurate and reliable data?

What is the feasibility of random assignment?
Research Readiness (cont.)

- How quickly is feedback needed?
- What is the size of treatment and control groups required to detect program impacts?
- Other considerations?
Based on your logic model, what types of evaluation design might be appropriate?
- Implementation study – How did the program/intervention operate?
- Impact study – Did the program make a difference?

What resources do you have to carry out your study?

What additional resources might be needed?
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