A FERA Stakeholder Data Interpretation Workshop

Question: What is a data interpretation workshop?

Answer: A data interpretation workshop is an opportunity for program stakeholders to come together to engage, reflect upon and interpret data, and to develop implications from evaluation data about their program.

Question: Why conduct a data interpretation workshop?

Answer: It allows program stakeholders, who, by definition, care about the program, an opportunity to help interpret the data before the evaluator offers her/his sense of the highlights, conclusions and, if appropriate, recommendations. It creates an opportunity for stakeholders to go through this exciting process with the evaluator and taps their best thinking about the data and its relationship to their program. It creates some space for guided reflection.

Question: When is it conducted?

Answer: It can be conducted at several points after data has been collected and initially analyzed, but before a final report has been prepared. For example, it can be conducted as soon as data summaries have been prepared, but before the data has been organized and displayed in tabular or graphic form. It can be conducted after the data has been organized for presentation, but before a draft report has been prepared It can be done after a preliminary report has been offered, but before it has been finalized. Conducting a workshop at each of these points has its pros and cons. This decision is best made in consultation with the client.

Question: Who should attend the workshop?

Answer: If stakeholders were identified at the outset of the evaluation to help design it, then these folks should be involved along with any others who have become key stakeholders. If they weren't involved, then key stakeholders, e.g., service providers and other key staff, the program director, board members, fundors and clients or customers are possible participants. This decision depends on several factors, e.g., the position of the program in the organization and the focus of the evaluation.

Question: How long does a workshop take?

Answer: The timeframe is flexible, but usually a minimum of at least three hours is necessary and sometimes a day is necessary, depending on the number of objectives. Possible agenda items include: highlighting the data, interpreting it more thoroughly, drawing conclusions from the data, developing recommendations and finally creating action plans to implement the recommendations. Sometimes this process is segmented over several days or weeks and task groups are formed to focus on some part of the agenda.

Question: Who leads the workshop?

Answer: Decisions about the content of the material to be offered and the process of the workshop are best worked out with the client. The evaluator usually facilitates the process. However, the evaluator, because of her/his relative independence and familiarity with the data, is also a key contributor to the interpretations which occur during the workshop. Sometimes two FERA staff members are used in the process.

Question: What techniques are used to facilitate the process?

Answer: A number of meeting management factors and group process techniques are used. Some of these key ingredients are: round robin introductions; sharing and clarifying expectations, roles and responsibilities for the experience; an agenda; a rough schedule; a designated facilitator and recorder; attention to comfortable seating, usually in a square or rectangle and good lighting; and finally making sure the appropriate equipment is available, e.g., computer, overhead projector, newsprint, notepads etc. Some of the appropriate group process techniques which democratize the work, stimulate reflection and foster consensus include: 1) centering or focusing techniques used to help participants relax, clear their minds and orient their energy toward the task at hand, 2) providing time for review of the data and note-making and or filling out trigger sheets to cause reflection on the data before discussion (a modified IGI or instrumented group interview), 3) facilitating open and shared discussion, and 4)the nominal group process, and conflict resolution techniques.