Welcome to today's Coffee Break presented by the Evaluation and Program Effectiveness Team in the Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

*Note: Screen magnification settings may affect document appearance.

Disclaimer: The information presented here is for training purposes and reflects the views of the presenter. It does not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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>
> **Michael Quinn Patton**

*Patton, MQ (2008) page 507. Utilization –Focused Evaluation 4th edition, Los Angeles, Sage, 2008.

"Utilization-focused evaluation is concerned with use from the beginning, and the final report is only one of the many mechanisms for facilitating use." This statement by Michael Quinn Patton is still very true, and in today's presentation, we're going to talk about some of those other mechanisms in terms of using interim findings.

Overview

- ❏ **Value of interim findings**
- ❏ **Overview of the NHDSP Program evaluation**
- ❏ **How we engaged program staff as stakeholders**
- ❏ **Examples of how program staff used interim findings to improve our program**
- ❏ **Key points and lessons learned**

For today's presentation, we're going to focus on using interim findings for use for program improvement. And this session is going to build from last year's presentation from Jan Osby on how to use interim evaluation findings. Again, the focus will be on program improvement, and we hope to enrich this discussion by sharing examples from the National Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention program evaluation and lessons learned from that work.

We'll talk about the value of interim findings, we'll give an overview of the evaluation, talk about how we engage our stakeholders, some concrete examples of interim findings, and then we'll end the session with lessons learned and helpful tips.

Evaluation is a Process

❑ **Evaluations take time (weeks, months, or years)**
  • Planning
  • Identifying resources (hiring an staff and funds)
  • Relationship-building with stakeholders
  • Determining key evaluation questions
  • Vetting evaluation plans
  • Conducting data collection and analysis
  • Vetting evaluation products and reports

Evaluation is a process. It can take weeks, months, and years, and because it's a process in terms of planning the evaluation, collecting or analyzing data, and then producing the final report, it's important to use the findings that you learn all along the way because if we don't, opportunities are missed, if you wait until the very end of your evaluation to use some of those results. And sometimes those key nuggets of information in terms of interim findings may not necessarily be captured in that final report, so it's important to use them as you learn about them.

Reasons for Using Interim Findings

❑ **There is value in using interim findings:**
- Help inform programmatic decisions now instead of later
- Determine if your program's on track with its expectations
- Identify barriers/challenges to address
- Determine areas for technical assistance

❑ **Interim findings help evaluators and program staff**
- Evaluators may revise their evaluation plans to ensure the information gathered will help program staff
- Program staff may have enough information to justify more resources or make significant changes in their program early

Some reasons for using interim findings; on this slide it gives you a list of reasons for why using interim findings is important, but it's ultimately using information to help improve or inform programmatic decisions now instead of waiting until later, and also it could help you identify challenges or barriers that you want to address earlier.

Since program evaluation is not research, it's really important to make mid-course corrections within your evaluation if you feel you find the need to do so. And also interim evaluation findings are not only for evaluators' use; they're also for program staff use. They can use this information to maybe justify additional resources or make significant changes in their program early on, so do include program staff when you're working on your evaluation.

Overview of the National Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program Evaluation

- ❑ **Five-year outcomes-focused evaluation**
- ❑ **Key question: What has been accomplished?**
- ❑ **Methods:**
  - Abstract data from required electronic reports (all)
  - Telephone interviews with staff from 9 states on a focused aspect of the program
  - Conduct a second focused study using an internet survey + phone interviews
- ❑ **Context**
  - Emerging and shifting program priorities
  - Chronic disease programs now emphasizing integrated model
  - Increasing need for information to guide future work

Now this slide gives a quick overview of the national evaluation for the National Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program, and this is an evaluation in looking at outcomes. It's asking the key question of what has been accomplished. In terms of methodology we're really pulling information from it, MIS. But what we learned from pulling that information is that we had additional questions that we wanted to ask. We wanted to dig a little deeper and decided to conduct additional interviews for focused studies. And currently we're about to start a focused study on community clinical linkages.

In terms of the context of this evaluation, it's really operating in an environment where program priorities are emerging and shifting, where chronic disease programs are emphasizing more integrated models, and we really need information from this evaluation now so it can help inform decisions that we're making to advise future work.

The Evaluation Emphasis is on Utility

❑ **Accountability**
❑ **Future Planning**
❑ **Program Improvement**
  • How can CDC improve its technical assistance?
  • What guidance is needed to help states accomplish their work?
  • What tools can help improve the program?
  • What information do program staff need to make help inform their decisions?

You really want to have an evaluation that's useful, and although many of you conduct evaluations as part of your program requirements and for accountability reasons, I think it's also important for you to use the evaluation results to help improve your program and inform future decisions. With this evaluation, we're really trying to learn not only what has been accomplished, but how can CDC help improve its technical assistance, what guidance is needed, and what tools may we develop to help improve the program as well.

Connecting with Stakeholders is Important

To encourage the use of the interim evaluation results:

- Engage the right stakeholders.
- Include program staff early in the evaluation
- Identify areas of need for program staff
- Establish a feedback loop to communicate interim results quickly.

Now a key to using interim findings is to really having—establishing that connection with your stakeholders. It's really important to find the right stakeholders, include them from the beginning, and most importantly, establish that feedback loop because if you learn about the interim findings and program staff don't learn about it, then you're missing that opportunity for them to act on that result. The better that communication loop is established, the more likely your interim findings will be used.

The Evaluation Approach is Collaborative

❑ **Internal team and stakeholders:**
  • Evaluators, program leadership, and project officers

❑ **Level of engagement:**
  • Meetings weekly
  • Regular feedback on evaluation approach, methods, documents

Evaluation Expertise **+** **Program Expertise** **=** **Improved Evaluation Quality and Utility**

Our evaluation approach was very collaborative. We had evaluators and program staff working together on the evaluation. We had regular meetings, and we both provided feedback on the approach, on the methodology, and on the products of the evaluation. Because of this collaborative nature, we were able to have the expertise both from evaluation and program, and combining those two things helped improve the quality and the utility of the evaluation.

In the next slide, we're going to take a closer look at interim findings, and as a reminder, in last year's presentation by Jan Osby, she noted that interim findings are results that are made available before the end of the project or evaluation period. There can be an assortment of things; it's not just reports. It could be briefings, it could be presentations, or a particular table.

Interim Findings Used for Program Improvement

Example	Interim Finding	Application
Data abstraction Template	• In developing the template, key terms needed to be defined and discussed.	• Updated evaluation plan to reflect more complete definitions . Gained shared understanding.
Developing data abstraction tool	• Discovered reporting inconsistency in location where information was entered within the MIS	• Provided written guidance and held an evaluation call to optimize evaluation reporting in the MIS.
Baseline data abstraction	• New understanding by CDC of the level of detail of results entered in the electronic system.	• New guidance to state staff regarding evaluation reporting expectations

On this slide, we're going to take a look at some of the interim findings from the national evaluations and some of the ways that they were applied. When we were developing a data extraction template, we found that particular terms needed to be clarified and discussed. By working on just the template, not even getting into the data, we were able to gain a shared understanding of what terms meant to everyone across both the evaluation and program.

When we were developing the abstraction tool, we realized that there were some inconsistencies in where the information was found within the MIS. We used that information to develop guidance documents to help make sure that the information would be found in the same place across all the entities. When we started extracting data, we realized that there was a diversity in the level of detail. We were able to develop a new guidance document on what we did for patients for reporting.

Ways Interim Findings Used for Program Improvement (Cont.)

Example	Interim Finding	Application
Baseline Data	• Types of efforts accomplished • Number of participants reached • Gaps in reporting	• Identified which priority areas need additional technical assistance. • Planned for new tools such as a tip sheet on calculating reach and impact.
Baseline Data Report	• Status of achieving program priorities and desired outcomes at the start of the program	• New CDC guidelines to state staff to improve alignment of state activities to CDC priorities both existing and evolving. • CDC staff focus their technical assistance to increase state focus on high priority areas. • Helped identify common needs and stimulated dialogue among grantees

Then we get to the point where we actually have the baseline data. What have we learned? We were able to get a sense of what were the accomplishments that were achieved, and more information about reach, and also some of the gaps in reporting. And this was really helpful to identify areas of technical assistance, but also which of these tools would be helpful or useful.

Then once we got to the actual report of the baseline data where there was a little more synthesis, we were able to see where were we at the beginning in terms of what was our status before we got to full implementation of the program in reaching the desired outcome. This information was helpful also to figure out what were areas of high need and how can we identify areas where it would be useful to have grantees come together and discuss common issues.

Other Uses of Interim Findings

- Provided opportunities to influence other evaluations in our branch portfolio by sharing lessons learned with other evaluators.

- Identified additional areas for technical assistance (i.e., population-based approaches).

- Informed decisions for future program direction.

In terms of other uses, the lessons learned we obtained and the interim findings we obtained not only helped this program, but were useful to other program initiatives within our division and other evaluation products, projects, in terms of overcoming certain challenges or ideas to streamline or approaches to take that would really be helpful, not only to this program, but others as well.

And we were able to also figure out what areas would we need to pull from different parts of the division to help improve technical assistance. For example in developing transfer population-based approaches, and then ultimately all the information is being used to inform future decisions.

Avoid the Pitfalls of Interim Findings

- Interim findings are preliminary.

- Manage expectations of your stakeholders—use disclaimers.

- Determine the appropriateness of providing findings early—think about the big picture!

A couple of pitfalls with regards to interim findings that you should keep in mind: Interim findings are preliminary, not the final results. When you use this information, keep in mind that other information can emerge that can give more context, and make sure that you are clear with your stakeholders that they are interim findings—add those disclaimers.

And sometimes you have to think about how appropriate it is to provide findings early. For example, if you find out that you have this program and participants are not entering or aware of the program, that's an important piece of information that should be shared up front so you can make changes to improve awareness and participation in the program. But if it's something that might have an impact on the credibility of what you're trying to say, you just might want to think about is it the best time to share that particular finding more broadly.

Lessons Learned and Helpful Tips

- **Interim findings can be used many ways but you have to look for them.**

- **Engaging program staff on a frequent basis keeps the evaluation on target to be useful and relevant.**

- **Interim findings can serve to help identify potential needs for technical assistance, guidance and other support to improve program.**

- **Interim findings can be a "pulse-check" on progress and informative for planning, staffing, and improving program.**
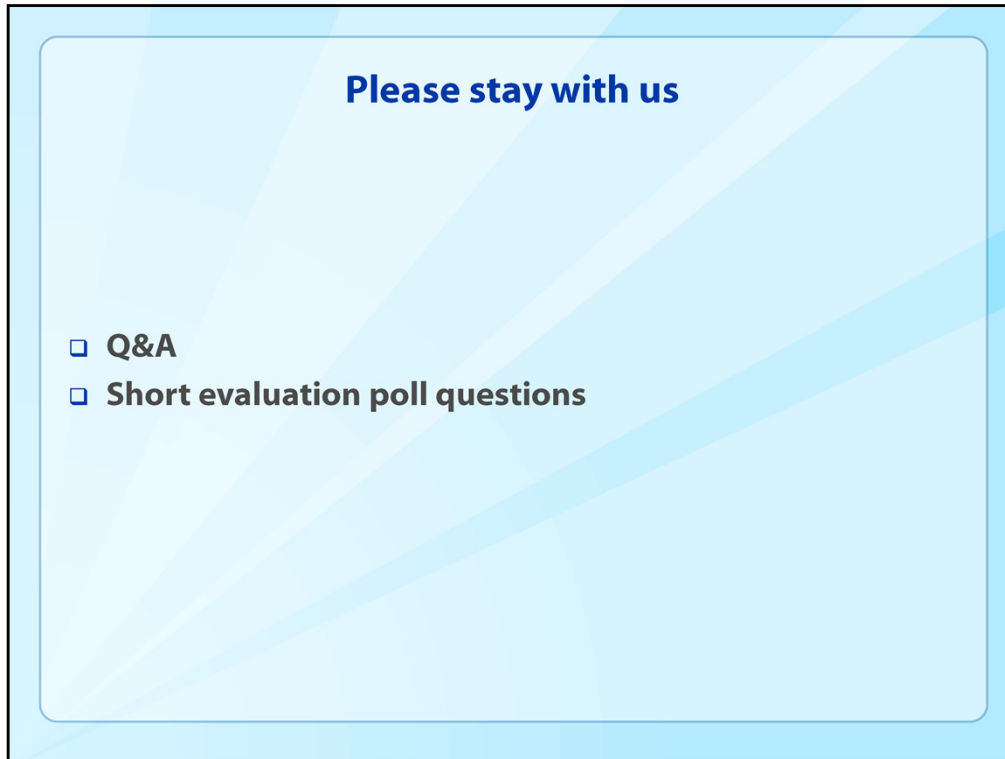
In terms of lessons learned, a couple hints, there are interim findings in all aspects of the evaluation, and it's just a matter of looking for them and watching out for them and making sure that you're using them. And in order to use them, you really have to engage your stakeholders. You have to engage your program staff so that they are aware of the status evaluation and what you are finding, and they might be able to interpret that finding in a way that could be really useful to them, and, of course, identifying technical assistance needs along the way as opposed to waiting until the very end where not much change can occur.

DHDSP Evaluation Guides:
http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/programs/nhdsp_program/evaluation_guides/index.htm

Here is a resource that's available to you to learn more about some of the guides from our team.

Please stay with us

- ❑ Q&A
- ❑ Short evaluation poll questions

Question #1: Are there any precautions to take in widely distributing interim findings?

Great question. I think the precaution to take about wide distribution of findings is, A, it's preliminary, you can learn something else that might counter that finding, but also you don't want to lose credibility with your stakeholders to say, oh, we found this, and then a month later say we found this other information and it changes that interim finding. So it's best to— you want to use the interim findings, but you do want to proceed with caution in terms of how widely you distribute it.

Question #2: What is the difference between passive evaluation and interim findings?

Passive evaluation is a type of evaluation where it's focusing more on program implementation on the top of–in terms of how that implementation is taking place. And interim findings are really anything, any finding, lessons learned, helpful hints before that final report. It can be a finding on a progress evaluation, it could be a finding on an outcome, and I think really that depends, that has to do with the context. The interim findings can be both outcome and process oriented, while a passive evaluation has to do more with the type of evaluation it is.

Thank You

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