
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL: FUNDERS

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for coming today. Before we get started, I would like to introduce myself and the other people working on this project. I'm Raynard Kington and this is Kathryn Pitkin and Catherine Jackson; we're from RAND. Kathryn Pitkin and I will be leading the discussion today, and Catherine Jackson will be taking notes and working the recording equipment. We also have with us today Arnold Tiemeyer from Main Line Health which is a partner organization in this project.

RAND is a nonprofit institution located in Santa Monica and Washington, D.C., and is dedicated to providing objective and scientifically sound public policy research. Main Line Health System is located in Philadelphia and is a network of nonprofit health care providers including the Jefferson Medical Center. We, RAND and Main Line, are partners in a project looking at ways community-based health programs are evaluated and funding decisions made.

The overall goal of this project is to explore the possibilities of developing an evidence-based approach to community health interventions decisionmaking. By an evidence-based approach, we mean a process by which decisions about which community-level health programs to implement are made based primarily on the strength of scientific evidence that a community-based approach or intervention will work. We also mean the rigorous application of scientific principles to assess, after implementing a program, whether it worked. By community-based, we mean those programs that might

be conducted with local organizations at the “community level” that promote health or preventive health practices, such as parenting classes run by a community organization, radio announcements to discourage smoking, or church programs that promote the use of mammograms. We do not include in this category efforts that are normally implemented in a medical setting such as a hospital or a doctor’s office.

In our discussion today, we are interested in learning how scientific evidence is brought to bear on decisions about funding and evaluation of your sponsored/funded programs, especially evidence on cost-effectiveness. We want to learn what key qualitative and quantitative indicators you use to assess cost-effectiveness, how you (and your organization) use such information when choosing between which programs to fund, and what types of monitoring systems you use or would like to see developed for implementation in programs.

GROUP PROCESS

We will ask you about how you and your organizations make decisions. We expect that some of you may work within quite formal criteria, whereas others of you may work with informal criteria. We hope that each of you in the group will speak up and contribute your ideas. Please try to speak one at a time, so we can hear from everyone. We hope not only that the discussion informs our project, but also that you find it interesting and stimulating. There may be times when I may interrupt the discussion and ask that we move to another topic or hear from someone else. I’ll give you the “time out” signal when I need to do that. Please don’t take it personally. It’s just that time is short and we need to cover a lot of ground.

CONFIDENTIALITY

To have an exact record of what we discuss here today, we would like to tape this session. The focus group tapes will be listened to only by project staff. To encourage open discussion, we would like to keep the discussion anonymous. That is, we’ll only use first names and not refer to our organizations or their sponsored programs by name. If you want to share that at the end of the session, that’s OK. I should also mention that for the final report we will not attribute specific

comments to any particular person or organization. We will be conducting several focus groups as well as structured telephone surveys, and will list participating individuals and organizations in the preface of the report. This will indicate to our funders and readers of the report that we have gotten input from a variety of organizations, while at the same time maintain confidentiality of participants' comments.

For now then, let's stay with first names only.

GROUP INTRODUCTIONS

I'd like to go around the table and ask each of you to introduce yourself. Please state your first name. <fill in this information on the seating chart>

Let's start with you

QUESTIONS

Types of Community-Based Health Programs

OK, let's start out by talking about the types of community-based health programs that your organizations fund.

If you don't mind, let's go around the table once more and each of you describe one typical or representative community-based program that your organization funds.

- What specific community or population does the program serve?
- What is the particular health issue being addressed?

Process of Funding Decisions

How does your organization make funding decisions regarding which programs to fund?

- Do you have competitive proposals?
- Does your Board make the decision?

- How do you choose between two (or more) program proposals?

Are your funding decisions influenced by proven efficacy or cost-effectiveness of the proposed program?

- Do you believe you have enough evidence about most programs to make a decision about likely efficacy or cost-effectiveness?
- Does such information exist and do you have ready access to it in a useful form?
- What type of information is missing? What information would you like to have to evaluate program effectiveness?
- Do you think your decisionmaking would improve with more information?
- Do you think that you have the scientific resources, either in-house or available to you in the form of advisory committees, to adequately judge the scientific evidence on the effectiveness of programs that you are considering funding?

Do you encourage potential fundees to provide in their application a summary of the best scientific evidence regarding the likely effectiveness of the programs under consideration?

Foundations often hear different priorities coming from the communities they serve. How do you go about balancing these various priorities?

- In what ways are your funding decisions influenced by the community?

How much influence or input do you provide prospective fundees regarding the types of programs your organization wants to fund?

- Do you essentially replicate the successes?
- Do you modify the failures and try again?

Process of Program Evaluation

How does your organization define program effectiveness?

How does your organization determine a successful program? Are successful programs always effective?

Does your organization routinely evaluate the effectiveness of the programs it funds?

How is this done?

- Program itself provides “production” statistics.
- Outside evaluation takes place.
- We conduct an evaluation.
- What types of inputs are normally part of the evaluation?
 - Client interviews.
 - Provider interviews.

Program Assistance

What does your organization do with programs that just aren't accomplishing the goals that were initially set?

- Does your organization provide technical assistance to struggling programs?
- Do you defund programs, or not renew their funding at the end of the contract cycle?

Wrap-Up

Is there anything else you would like to tell us that might help us understand how community-based health programs are funded and evaluated?

Close

On behalf of the project staff here today, I would like to thank you all for participating in this focus group today. The information and opinions you shared will help us better to understand the process

through which funding organizations make decisions concerning the evaluation and funding of programs.

If any of you would like to see the final report, you can either give me your card or call me later. We'd be happy to share with you the results of our work.