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Knowledge Translation to Enhance Evaluation Use: A Case Example

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Introduction

Foundations, nonprofits, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) need to harness information from needs assessments, monitoring, evaluations, and lessons learned for both accountability and improvement (Gill, 2010; McCoy, Rose, & Connolly, 2013; Moxham, 2014). Such knowledge is becoming an increasingly important commodity within foundations in order to function efficiently and competitively (LaPaige, 2010). Additionally, being able to capture the reality of programming in complex contexts is important knowledge for programming with an equity focus (Drake, Hutchings, & Elias, 2010). While the capacity to access, process, and use information varies among organizations, there are some common issues concerning information use, described here by Sonnichsen (2000, p. 82–85):

- Decision-makers will make decisions with or without sufficient information.

- Decision-makers urgently need information.

- Evaluations usually involve complex issues with complex solutions.

- Decision-makers are generally more comfortable with in-house information.

- Decision-makers want answers to "What works?"

- Information must be presented in an understandable format. Know the audience!

- Information sometimes acts as a "referee."

- Decision-makers may have program responsibility but insufficient decision-making authority.

Key Points

- Knowledge in the form of information suitable for decision making or advocacy by foundations is not always readily available — a situation unacceptable for those who need such information for accountability, learning, and influencing policy and practice. This article addresses how essential information about monitoring, evaluation, and lessons learned can be made available to foundations.

- The Fred Hollows Foundation identified a gap in this area through an evaluation capacity-building readiness assessment, and introduced the concept of participatory, real-time monitoring, evaluation, and learning bulletins grounded in the principles of knowledge translation. This article describes how those bulletins were developed and used within the foundation to ensure access to relevant and timely information, and examines how they provided a mechanism to promote internal reflection and shift attitudes around data, which supported the development of a culture of evaluation.

- This approach for the timely development, synthesis, sharing, and dissemination of relevant information will be useful for foundations that have limited resources. As knowledge translation is often not resourced sufficiently in and by foundations, this article seeks to add weight to the argument for prioritization of packaging information in accessible ways.

In the context of this article, the knowledge being "translated" is collected from organizational projects rather than research, which is the more common form of knowledge referred to when describing knowledge translation.

All the issues resonate strongly in the context in which this article is based, but presenting information in an understandable format, we believe, is crucially important. Even though information is essential for informed decision making to ensure considered actions are implemented, these are problems that organizations continue to face and that may even be heightened in an age of information overload. "The need for and use of information can be unsystematic, situational, and driven by events and crises that, once concluded, are soon forgotten. … This random approach to organizational problem solving is suboptimal use of knowledge-producing resources" (Sonnichsen, 2000, p. 86).

This article seeks to answer the question, How can information about monitoring, evaluation, and lessons learned be available when critical programming decisions need to be made or when tools for advocacy are required? Donnelly, Letts, Klinger, and Shulha (2014) found that although the field of evaluation has been focused on use of evaluation, there is minimal literature on how evaluation can support knowledge translation and how knowledge translation can support evaluation use. This article addresses this gap by sharing a case example of how The Fred Hollows Foundation's Indigenous Australia Program used knowledge-translation theory to enhance the uptake of monitoring, evaluation, and learning information. From the internal perspective of practitioners working within the

foundation, an international NGO concerned with eye health, we share how we applied the principles of knowledge translation when considering dissemination of evaluation information.

In the context of this article, the knowledge being "translated" is collected from organizational projects rather than research, which is the more common form of knowledge referred to when describing knowledge translation (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2016). This article clarifies what we understand knowledge translation to entail, discusses the importance of understanding and using evaluation and other learning information, and describes the context and the methods that were undertaken to address the information needs of foundation decision makers. We also discuss developing evaluation dissemination products that were appropriate, useful, engaging, and relevant, which may be useful for foundations in similar situations who need to communicate findings to multiple audiences.
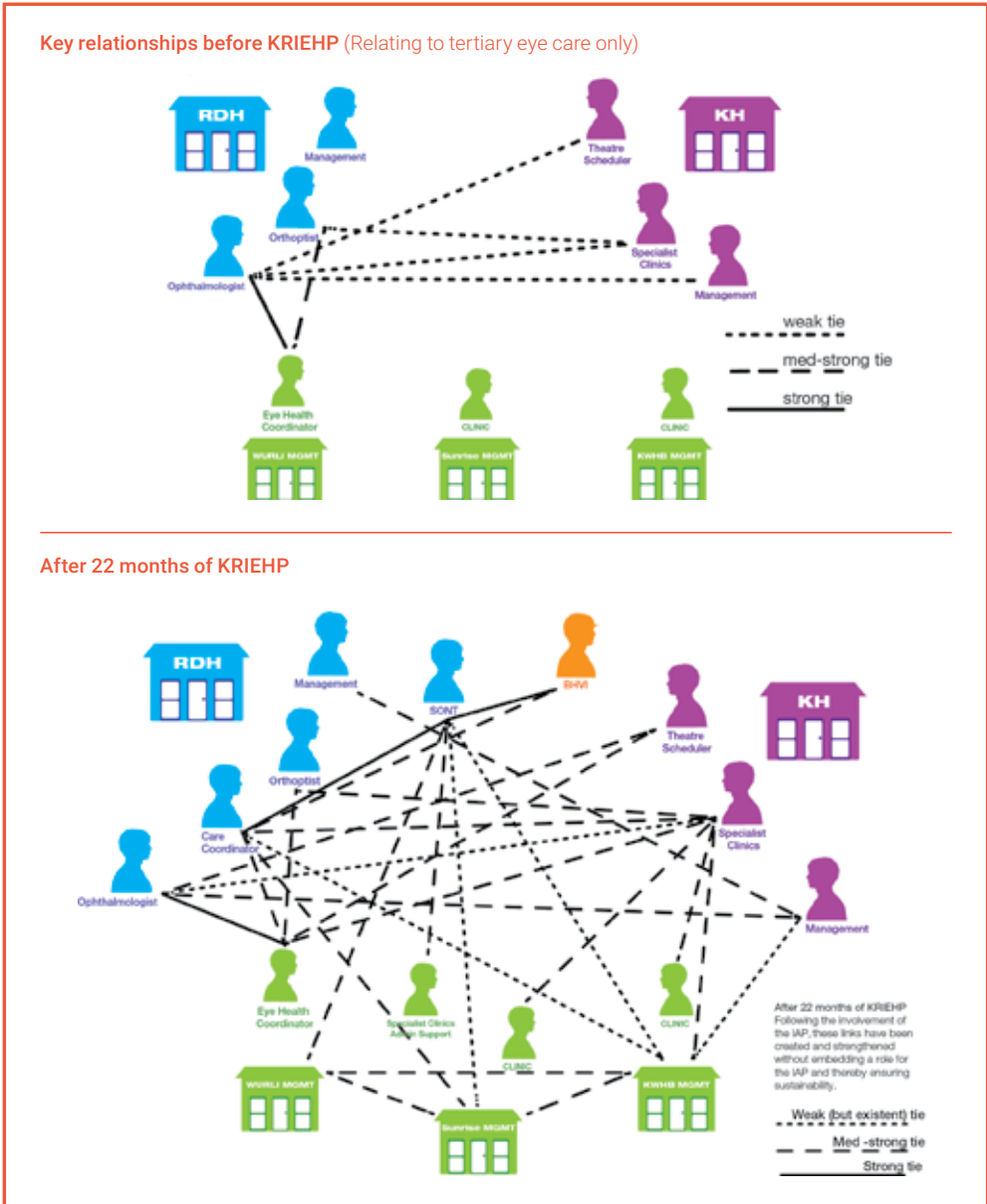
Knowledge Translation

The field of knowledge translation, alongside other related terms (McKibbon et al., 2010), concerns the process of accessing, generating, synthesizing, and disseminating knowledge in order to make decisions and create action (Dagenais, Ridde, Laurendeau, & Souffez, 2009). The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) defines knowledge translation as

> [a] dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange, and ethically sound application of knowledge to improve [health] …, provide more effective health services and products, and strengthen the health care system … within a complex system of interactions between researchers and users …. (2016, para. 5–6)

Effective knowledge translation can improve health and development and reduce health inequities through enabling appropriate knowledge to influence policy and practice (Welch, Ueffing, & Tugwell, 2009; Jönsson, Tomson, Jönsson, Kounnavong, & Wahlström, 2007; Ferreira, 2012), a key priority of many foundations. Foundations can play a wide range

FIGURE 1 Changes in Stakeholder Relationships Over Time: A Networking Map


of roles throughout the process of knowledge translation, including conducting, promoting, and advocating for relevant research and evaluations; managing knowledge effectively; utilizing knowledge for practice and advocacy; disseminating findings appropriately; and acting as knowledge brokers (Sanders, Labonte, Baum, & Chopra, 2004; Zachariah, Ford, Draguez, Yun, & Reid, 2010; Delisle, Roberts, Munro, Jones, &

Gyorkos, 2005; Hamel & Schrecker, 2011; Drake et al., 2010). Considering the important role that knowledge translation can play in improving health, it is important to support and build on foundations' capabilities to participate in knowledge translation activities.

Although the field of evaluation use and knowledge translation emerged as two separate fields

FIGURE 2 Multiple Patient Databases Restricting Flow of Information: A Systems Map
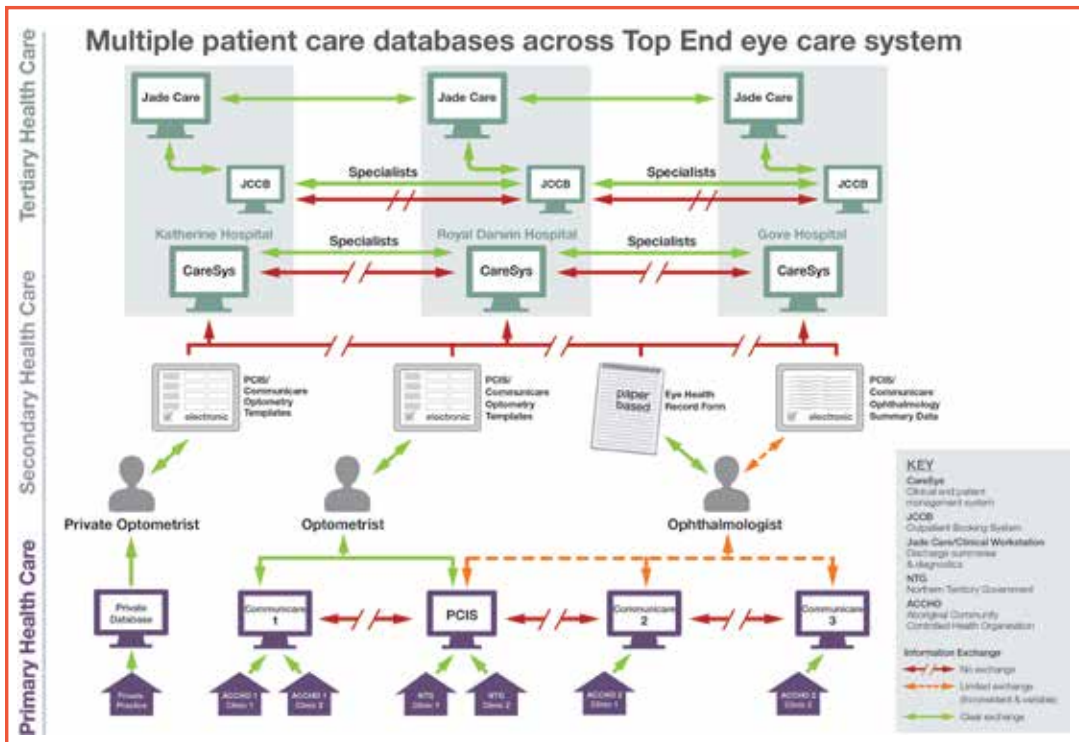
with different terminology, they in fact describe similar change processes (Donnelly & Searle, 2017). Knowledge translation has focused heavily on the translation of research to policy (Jacobson, 2007; Davies, Nutley, & Walter, 2008; Kitson et al., 2008), but the "knowledge" component need not be restricted to research. In fact, the term "knowledge" itself has many meanings, interpretations, and classifications (see, e.g., Brown, 2010) and is made sense of and understood in different contexts (Powell, 2006; Narayanaswamy, 2013; Miltenburg et al., 2016). This has particular relevance for foundations, whose characteristically unique connections to community and commitment to social justice make knowledge that can promote equity critically important. For example, presenting monitoring data in an infographic that highlights disparities among members of different cultural groups on a waiting list for surgery could a be powerful advocacy tool. Visual representations of change in stakeholder relationships through social network maps or blockages in the flow of data also become tools that can be catalysts for change. (See Figures 1 and 2).

There are a vast number of models, frameworks, and theories of knowledge translation (Brehaut & Eva, 2012; Estabrooks, Thompson, Lovely, & Hofmeyer, 2006; Tabak, Khoong, Chambers, & Brownson, 2012). Jacobsen (2007) provides a concise overview of these — both push/pull and more interactive models of knowledge translation; those that focus on process and relationships; the "two communities" model;[1] and diffusion of innovation — sometimes with an additional component such as communication, organizational, political science, or behavior-change theories. Nevertheless, the purpose of knowledge translation remains the same, and, for this article, involves facilitating the awareness of the existence of knowledge and its use to improve health and creating action from this knowledge (LaPaige, 2010).

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[1] The "two communities" model defines a cultural gap between knowledge producers and users (Jacobsen, 2007).

Much of the knowledge translation literature focuses on the instrumental use of knowledge: looking at how research has a direct impact on policy and practice (Weiss, 1979). But knowledge translation can also facilitate change through "shifts in perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs" (Davies et al., 2008, p. 189). This may be particularly relevant in the fields of work that concern foundations.

Understanding and Using Evaluation

How evaluation is undertaken, what approaches are adopted, what questions are asked, how the information is collected, and how the evaluative information is used varies greatly among organizations (Gill, 2010). Foundations source evaluation expertise in many ways to implement inquiry, feedback, reflection, and change, and to make value judgments (Baron, 2011; Beere, 2005; Bourgeois, Hart, Townsend, & Gagne, 2011). But despite the potential benefits of evaluation and the variety of approaches to it that are undertaken, the problem of evaluation use by foundation leaders and decision makers still exists. Even when evaluations are designed to consider how every step in the process will affect the utility and actual use of the evaluation findings, there can still be a mismatch in expectations. Based on interviews with internal evaluators using a utilization-focused approach, Patton (2008) observes: "Internal evaluators are often asked by superiors for public relations information rather than evaluation" (p. 139). A disconnect remains between undertaking evaluation and engagement with decision makers and applying the findings to learning opportunities.

Doherty, Eccleston, Hansen, Natalier, and Churchill argue that "evaluation literacy is what is really needed — the capacity to understand and use evaluation, not necessarily the capacity to do evaluation" (2015, p. 36). It is essential to ensure that there are opportunities to reflect and think critically, and that tools are available and mechanisms are in place so employees can access all types of evaluative information from any stage of a monitoring, evaluation, or learning process so they can understand and use the information to make decisions (Rogers, Kelly, & McCoy, 2019). Integrated knowledge translation can facilitate

Integrated knowledge translation can facilitate evaluation literacy, which consists of "the cognitive and social skills that determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand, and use evaluative information in ways that ultimately contribute to achieving organizational goals."

evaluation literacy, which consists of "the cognitive and social skills that determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand, and use evaluative information in ways that ultimately contribute to achieving organizational goals" (Rogers et al., 2019).

Donnelly and Searle (2017) describe three ways through which knowledge translation can improve evaluation use:

1. the synthesis of knowledge surrounding a particular topic to ensure a more informed evaluation,

2. promoting action by ensuring that evaluation findings are translated into useable products, and

3. promoting evaluations that start with the intended use in mind.

This article describes the development of a communication product that supports item No. 2, translating evaluation findings. The useable product was not only about providing pure evidence that directly informed changes, but also about influencing a shift in perception.

To address this need, real-time monitoring, evaluation, and learning "bulletins" were introduced, similar to what other foundations have been using and grounded in knowledge translation theory.

Context of the Case

Both authors are undertaking doctoral-level research into topics that relate to knowledge and evaluation; both research projects are set within foundations, but focus on distinct topics. However, we are studying and working in the sector simultaneously and are seeking to ensure our work will be useful and relevant for practitioners. For over five years, we have held program-development positions with a focus on monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and have been embedded in a team that is delivering projects designed to strengthen health systems. The impetus for this article emerged from our experience in using knowledge translation for enhancing evaluation use and the recognition of a gap in the literature.

Separately located from the head office by a distance of more than 3,000 kilometers, The Fred Hollows Foundation's Indigenous Australia Program was constantly being asked, "What are you doing up there?" "Where are the numbers?" "Why are you doing it that way?" Like many foundations, we were doing highly challenging human services and public health work that involved complex ethical issues. From global, political, and organizational perspectives, we needed to work toward enhancing the use of monitoring and information to learn, improve, and be accountable for how funds were being used to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Prior to 2014, the program was struggling, with limited resources, to meet the increasing demands from the foundation to demonstrate performance and effectiveness.

The Need for a Communication Tool

The Indigenous Australia Program went through a formal process of embedding evaluative thinking, critical thinking around evaluation, and integrating evaluation at all levels of the organization through an evaluation capacity-building (ECB) approach (Buckley, Archibald, Hargraves, & Trochim, 2015; Preskill & Boyle, 2008). Our overarching aim was to promote evaluation literacy to ensure that strategic goals were accomplished and effective development programs delivered; that project management decisions were made on the basis of monitoring and evaluating findings; and that we were able to demonstrate the use of evaluation throughout all systems, processes, and activities (Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Sanders, 2002).

In 2014, a readiness appraisal was conducted with all 14 staff members to assess the extent to which the program met the necessary conditions to support an ECB approach. The key question was, "What is required to embed ethical and appropriate evaluative thinking into the program's processes and make evaluation an integral, efficient part of routine operations?" The appraisal concluded that the program met the majority of conditions required to embed evaluation throughout all systems, processes, and activities, such as support from leadership, an encouraging learning climate, and access to resources. However, it also identified a need to increase the use of evaluation findings for decision making and to purposefully communicate findings. To address this need, real-time monitoring, evaluation, and learning "bulletins" were introduced, similar to what other foundations have been using (Hwalek & Grcich Williams, 2010) and grounded in knowledge translation theory.

Developing a Bulletin: A Case Example

The process of developing and disseminating a real-time monitoring, evaluation, and learning bulletin can be broken down into the following steps:

1. Using a Word template, project officers managing the grant with partners and involved with the evaluation process

FIGURE 3 Sample 2018 Bulletins From Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet

summarize into dot points a monitoring, evaluation, or key learning event under the following headings:

- Key achievements

- Health-system reform

- Training events/outcomes

- Networking maps/graphs/tables

- Background

- Publicity/internet links

- Reflections

- Challenges

- Improvements required/lessons learned — What would we do differently?

- Quotes

2. The internal evaluator adds existing information from programming experience, previous findings, and published or gray literature; coordinates and encourages the engagement of others; and provides support to the project officers throughout the process.

In contrast to the initial difficulties we encountered when communicating our evaluation findings, the bulletins allow the Indigenous Australia Program to demonstrate to a wide audience its commitment to learning and provide us with a way to purposefully communicate evaluation findings.

3. The draft Word version of the bulletin is shared with other project officers for input.

4. A final draft is shared with management to add context, refine language for an external audience, and frame challenges effectively.

5. A graphic designer creates a modern, easy-to-read, four-page format for the text and visual elements that is aligned with the organization's style guide. (See Figure 3.)

6. An electronic PDF version of the bulletin is created and shared via email, launched on the organization's internal social media platform, uploaded to the organization's intranet, and attached to the quarterly board report.

7. Bulletins are then available to be referenced in project design documents, used as briefings prior to site visits, attached to grant proposals, shared with donors, analyzed for common findings in a meta-analysis, and shared with new staff as part of orientation.

While it is possible to produce such a bulletin in a day, the process required between four and six weeks in order to develop opportunities for multiple stakeholders to contribute. In this context, where the evaluation may have been undertaken over four to six months, that represents a relatively short turnaround. The iterative process required time and sufficient opportunities for reflection, and multiple levels of checking and reviewing promoted important discussion. Active engagement required time for consultation, negotiation, and even conflict resolution as different perspectives and beliefs were acknowledged and incorporated.

Over 40 bulletins have been produced since 2014. Each contains rich, solid information from a variety of sources, such as summaries of external evaluation reports or monitoring data from partner organizations. The bulletins are brief, but contain evidence drawn from our programming experience in combination with knowledge from subject-matter experts. They provide data when critical decisions need to be made or tools for advocacy are required. The bulletins have an attractive layout and contain a balance of photos, models, and diagrams; flow charts, systems maps, and graphs; quotes; references and links; and text.

The range of bulletin topics has been extensive. They are determined by the project officers, at the request of a manager, or by the internal evaluator, and are usually driven by the release of information requiring timely dissemination. Some bulletins have captured what we learned from our programs focusing on the social determinants of health; others reflect on our approach and the way we work, consolidate our monitoring data, or summarize evaluation reports. Many of the bulletins synthesize knowledge that may otherwise have remained unshared and therefore unable to influence management decisions, policy, and practice — including the voices of community members, the reflections of project officers on what works and why, and the outcomes of critical conversations among staff that took place while they worked together on a bulletin.

Using the Information

The response from other sections of the organization since the introduction of the bulletins? "Ah, now we know what you're doing up there!"

In contrast to the initial difficulties we encountered when communicating our evaluation findings, the bulletins allow the Indigenous Australia Program to demonstrate to a wide audience its commitment to learning and provide us with a way to purposefully communicate evaluation findings.

The bulletins are attached to the quarterly board reports to provide succinct, yet tangible, examples of the progress and challenges in our quest to improve health. They are distributed on our social media platform to our colleagues across the world, and uploaded onto our internal intranet so that staff around the globe can dive into learnings from the program. The team has also incorporated the bulletins into presentations and multimedia products, and for use as handouts or summaries of longer documents. Most importantly, decision makers can refer to these when determining where to allocate funds, as the bulletins are embedded in project design documents. Accessing short yet rigorously edited documents that have been subjected to a peer-review system at the grassroots level has helped boost the confidence of foundation representatives presenting information about the program to an external audience.

Many parts of the organization have expressed their enthusiasm for the bulletins, which have raised our profile and enhanced our credibility. Our willingness to share achievements — while also detailing the challenges, what we have learned, and what we would do differently — has demonstrated our commitment to improving and helping others to improve. Project officers indicate that they find documenting the future implications of what they have learned to be the most important section of any bulletin; the "next steps" content is often useful for other foundation sections.

The bulletins were developed as a tool for internal communication purposes, to allow frank and open discussion among staff about challenges and what didn't work well. But the demand for information from sources outside the foundation revealed the need to share the bulletins externally. Conversations about learnings can

now be shared with partners via the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet (2018), and form part of a broader knowledge-translation package.

Discussion

As practitioners sharing what we have learned with readers who may be considering developing similar bulletins, our key piece of advice would be to start small. Develop a bulletin based on a topic for which the information is readily available. Engage a small group in the production and create an appealing draft quickly. The timeliness, attractiveness, and ease with which you are able to craft the bulletin will generate momentum. Discussing the pros and cons of dedicating resources to developing bulletins may be an inevitable part of the journey, but producing an example that allows decision makers to grasp the potential of this tool is essential. In our case, it took only the first bulletin for management to see the potential benefits. The first topic was uncontroversial, but still captured challenges and learnings — and it opened a path for other, more divisive topics by demonstrating that such information would be handled respectfully. It was not long before demand for the bulletins was coming from the highest levels of the foundation, the necessary resources were allocated, and the bulletins became part of routine operations.

Translating evaluation information, evidence, and knowledge into products to have readily available for accountability, learning, and policy and practice influence proved to be very useful to and highly valued by a wide range of stakeholders in and outside the foundation. However, the value that had the most sustained impact on developing a culture of evaluation was found in the process of developing the bulletins. The process stimulated reflection among staff throughout all stages of the project. Opportunities for discussion and reflection became incorporated into routine operations, with time allocated to development sanctioned by management — not as an added extra, like some reflection activities can become.

The process also allowed program staff to engage and challenge management in a safe way. The power dynamic was shifted toward the

Using information, knowledge, and evidence in this way provides an example of how evaluation can be understood to be a change process, supporting the continuation of worthwhile initiatives while also prompting reflection about how and why things should change based on data, monitoring, and evaluation findings.

program staff and their knowledge was recognized, valued, and used for practical purposes (Nowotny, 2003; Hayman, King, Kontinen, & Narayanaswamy, 2016). Robust discussions about how the challenges were phrased were common as the perspectives of multiple audiences had to be considered. Draft bulletins become a beginning point for conversations: Program officers drafted the first version, then shared it with the internal evaluator. Managers then had an opportunity to hear the concerns and issues of the program staff, but make suggestions that framed the discussion in light of the broader policy and political context. The learning is an iterative process of back and forth until the achievements, challenges, and future implications are framed through the collaborative process.

Engaging relevant program staff also enabled the inclusion of community voices and on-the-ground realities into the bulletins, as these staff have unique connections with the communities in which the programs are implemented. This type of knowledge is important for developing future programs that reduce health inequalities.

The bulletins drew upon existing evidence and theory available in the published and gray literature. Developing the bulletins prompted staff

to consider what had already been published on the topic, what examples supported or contrasted with the proposed approach, and what theories might assist with understanding the situation. Rigorous evidence from the literature could either be used to add weight to programmatic decisions or demonstrate where the foundation could contribute to further developing the evidence base. The bulletins enabled theoretical models and concepts from the literature to be linked to relevant practical topics to extend thinking about specific topics. The bulletins, therefore, are also a "knowledge brokering" activity. They provide an opportunity for synthesizing knowledge for use in practice (Donnelly et al., 2014).

Using information, knowledge, and evidence in this way provides an example of how evaluation can be understood to be a change process, supporting the continuation of worthwhile initiatives while also prompting reflection about how and why things should change based on data, monitoring, and evaluation findings. The bulletins also enabled documentation of projects that had come to a natural end, so the learnings were not lost. Information reached the target audience in a timely way, enabling effective decision-making around advocacy and program planning. This meant that momentum continued to build and a culture of evaluation began to flourish. As the knowledge translation principles were incorporated, the participatory process of developing the bulletins became routine. Management allocated additional time and resources for the production of the bulletins, which meant more resources for monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Decision makers could see the value and responded accordingly.

Conclusion

Knowledge Translation of Australia (2018) states that "knowledge translation is about getting the right information, to the right people, at the right time, and in a format they can use, so as to influence decision making" (p. 1). We believe that real-time bulletins have given decision makers within our organization a means by which they can understand and use monitoring, evaluation, and learning information in ways that ultimately

contribute to achieving organizational goals. The process strongly aligns with a utilization-focused evaluation approach, where evaluation is "done for and with specific, intended primary uses for specific, intended uses" (Patton, 2008, p. 37). Developing these bulletins using a participatory approach is one tool that can facilitate evaluation literacy. These appealing, accessible, timely, and readily available products have resulted in increased motivation and ability for our colleagues to access, understand, and use information. We believe that these bulletins are helping to incorporate evaluation into routine operations and developing a learning culture. Showcasing evaluative information using a variety of multimedia communication tools may be possible in the future, but for now the bulletins are a step toward building further capacity for improvement and success, making evidenced-based decisions, and ultimately ensuring more positive outcomes (Gill, 2010).

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