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Debi Lang and Sharon Grundel on Youth Program Ingredients: How to Measure Success and Tell the Story

We are **Debi Lang** and **Sharon Grundel**, with the [Massachusetts Area Health Education Center Network](#) (MassAHEC) at the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Center for Health Policy and Research. MassAHEC supports health career exploration programs for diverse youth. Through four community-based AHEC Centers and 19 chapters of HOSA - Future Health Professionals (a national student-led membership organization), over 1000 students statewide participate annually in experiential and academically enriching curriculum.

Given the range of long-established program activities that align with differing community needs, we were challenged to develop an evaluation approach that could be standardized among all the youth programs to effectively 'tell our story' and position ourselves to seek additional funding.

Lessons Learned:

- **Establishing uniformity** - Initially, we considered developing uniform curriculum across youth programs, as has been done with other MassAHEC projects. However, the Centers expressed the belief this would compromise their responsiveness to locally-based health career training needs and the successful activities they worked hard to develop. This meaningful dialogue led to defining five core competency areas that were applicable to all MassAHEC youth programs and the HOSA chapters.
- **Acknowledging uniqueness** - After reaching consensus with AHEC staff on core competencies and aligned goals, we met with the Youth Program Coordinators to define a set of measurable, flexible, learning objectives for each goal reflecting the unique activities of their individual programs. The opportunity to listen to each other as the Coordinators described their individual programs, and to collectively design the learning objectives was powerful. Not only did the experience cement staff investment in tying program activities to these competencies, goals and objectives, but all agreed there is value in ongoing collaboration, especially for new staff.
- **Collaborating toward a shared purpose** - This process of developing youth program goals, objectives, and assessment tools demonstrated the ability of evaluators and program staff to successfully work together toward a common purpose of gathering the evidence to demonstrate how the various youth programs positively affect participating students. Going forward, student learning will be assessed using pre-and post- tests based on program-specific learning objectives. Aggregated data will hopefully demonstrate how MassAHEC youth programs impact high school students' knowledge of, interest in, and ability to pursue education and careers in the health professions.

Rad Resources:

AEA365! The [Youth-Focused Evaluation posts on AEA365 in September 2013](#) were extremely helpful in providing examples of existing evidence-based assessment tools; e.g. the locally-developed youth assessment efforts described by the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa, and the Youth Experience Survey used by Good Shepherd Services. We also discovered the Rural Youth Development Evaluation Toolkit, which modeled a pre and post-assessment of youth involved in community projects.