How to Develop a Plan to Communicate Program Findings

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Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program grantees are charged with collecting data for their state needs assessments, benchmarks, CQI projects, and evaluations. These data are used to assist with program improvement and, as noted in the November 2014 MIECHV TACC Newsletter, may also be used to strengthen MIECHV and early childhood systems by informing family engagement and retention, staff training, and community collaboration efforts.

Grantees are making great strides to ensure the quality of their data, yet some grantees have questions about how to communicate finding from that data. In preparing for the joint Region IV-V meeting in September 2014, a few grantees came together to develop a breakout session on this very topic with the goal of helping their peers share what they are learning from their data with key stakeholders. The grantees noted that as a whole, grantees may fall along a continuum of how they are using and communicating their findings. Some grantees may be working on getting data collection protocols and basic reporting established and may be sharing program findings in limited ways, while others are developing dissemination practices to stakeholders, and others are actively sharing findings with stakeholders. Regardless of the stage that a grantee may fall along this continuum, the grantees felt that all grantees would benefit from developing a plan to communicate program findings. The tips in this articles are based on the ideas generated by these grantees.

Step #1: Bring Together Program and Research Staff

The first step in creating a plan to communicate your findings is to bring data and program staff together to discuss their goals for data collection and use. Program and research staff members bring important perspectives to the table regarding data collection strategies, professional development requirements for data collection and program implementation, understanding of policy and programmatic requirements, and ways in which data can be used for program improvement and highlighting successes of the program. Nevertheless, at times it can seem like the program and research teams are speaking different languages. This is why it is so critical that program and research staff have the opportunity to come together to discuss how to communicate programmatic findings.

Here are some ways that the grantees suggested you can bring program and research staff together to collaborate and learn from one another:

- Make time during staff meetings to think about ways that programmatic and research staff can support each other and LIAs as it relates to implementation and data collection. Also, consider opportunities for sharing data.
- Set aside time at management team meetings for data presentations.
- Convene a data workgroup to set the data agenda and review existing processes related to data collection and research (e.g., MIS, data feedback loop between grantee and LIAs, evaluations).

A number of MIECHV grantees have already established data workgroups. Participation in the workgroup varies among grantees, however participants often include: the state MIECHV lead, state data lead, LIA representatives, model representatives, external evaluators, and other home visiting stakeholders. Such groups can be instrumental in developing the data collection protocols, reviewing data, and determining how results are shared among internal and external stakeholders.

Step #2 – Together, Develop a Plan for Communicating Findings

After you've brought together program and research staff to share ideas and collaborate around sharing your program data, the next step is to develop a concrete plan for how to communicate your findings. Working through the following questions will be help you identify what data to share, with whom, in what format, and when:

- **Purpose** – *Why do you want to share your findings?*
  It is important to explore the reason why findings should be shared. The purpose for sharing findings is likely to be influenced by the stakeholder group. The purpose may be to inform/educate, persuade, use for continuous improvement, etc.

- **Stakeholders** – *With whom do you want to share your findings?*
  Potential stakeholders with whom grantees may share findings include LIAs, policy makers, other funding agencies, community referral partners, etc.

- **Venue** – *In what setting should the findings be shared?*
  Potential venues in which findings may be shared include community forums, board meetings, CQI meetings, etc.

- **Format** – *What is the most effective way of sharing findings?*
  Program findings may be shared via newsletters, reports, handouts, presentations, etc. The format may change depending on the purpose for using the findings, the stakeholders with whom you are sharing the findings and where and what format they look for information, or the venue in which findings are shared.

- **Data** - *What data are needed to accomplish the identified purpose?*
  Consider how the purpose for sharing findings, stakeholder group, or venue may influence what findings are shared. The type of data – qualitative or quantitative – and level of detail may be influenced by these factors. For example, policy makers or other funders may be interested in hearing high-level takeaways as well as a "success story" associated with the findings. On the other hand, if findings are shared with evaluators, it may be more salient to communicate detailed findings.

- **Data sources** – *Where are the data stored?*
  Identify where the required data are stored. Data may be captured in a central database, multiple databases, or captured by hand at LIAs.

- **Data steward** – *Who can provide you with this data?*
  The data steward is the person responsible for overseeing these data. This may include the MIECHV data lead, LIA director, evaluator, etc.

- **Data analysis** – *How will data be analyzed and by whom?*
  To create useful findings, it is important that qualitative and quantitative data are analyzed and summarized into succinct and meaningful messages. A research analyst/epidemiologist/evaluator can often analyze the data and summarize the data, though

some grantees may choose to employ a communications specialist for crafting the message that will be shared with stakeholders.

- **Vetting process** – *Who needs to be involved in creating the final product?*
  Identify who will need to review the drafts of your product before it is shared with stakeholders. This may include involving individuals close to the findings that can provide additional context or those who work more closely with stakeholders that can assist with messaging.

There are numerous opportunities for sharing findings among LIAs and stakeholders. To make sure that the most salient findings are being shared in the most effective manner, it is critical for grantees to bring their MIECHV teams together to create a data sharing agenda that meets the needs of program and research. Be sure to check out the DOHVE Communication Toolkit provides excellent resources and examples for sharing information with stakeholders, including include template talking points, graphs, fact sheets, and presentations.