Guide | January 2026

Guide to Participatory, Community-Engaged Evaluation: Moving From Principles to Practice

Introduction

Participatory and community-engaged evaluation methods amplify community voice to infuse the perspectives and needs of people impacted by an intervention. There are many ways to involve people affected by the child welfare system in evaluation—from training lived experts to collect and analyze data to creating a community-based advisory group that guides decision making.

This guide introduces evaluation principles and practices common among participatory and community-engaged evaluation methods such as Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). It does not reflect any single method. Readers can navigate eight basic components (see **exhibit 1** on page 3) to—

- Think about what it means to approach evaluation from community-centered and participatory perspectives
- Plan effective child welfare evaluations using collaborative principles
- Build understanding of key concepts, phrases, and considerations
- Identify resources to explore topics in more depth

The guide also uses definitions of lived experience, living experience, and lived expertise based on the literature (see **Lived Experience**, next page).

Key Terms

Although the ideas discussed in this guide apply to research and evaluation in child welfare contexts, we refer to just evaluation for the sake of simplicity. We do, however, distinguish between participatory and community engaged—two terms with distinct but related meanings.

What do we mean by participatory? Community members actively participate as team members and collaborators throughout an evaluation, but they might not represent their community as a whole. For example, an evaluator works with a small group of young adults with foster care experience to codesign an evaluation to identify opportunities for helping other youth transition out of the child welfare system.

What do we mean by community engaged? Evaluations align with community-level values, needs, and interests by engaging a broad range of community representatives. For example, an evaluation team engages workgroups to codesign an evaluation that also identifies opportunities for helping youth transition out of the child welfare system. Workgroup participants could include young adults with foster care experience, youth currently in foster care, independent living specialists, foster parents, caseworkers, mental health service providers, educators, policymakers, and local employers.

In both instances, a codesigned evaluation is one in which community members take part in the same activities as evaluators and participate fully in decision making.

This guide also distinguishes between evaluators and evaluation teams. Evaluator refers to individuals formally trained or with a professional background in evaluation work; evaluation team refers to all individuals who help implement an evaluation, including those without formal training.

Lived Experience

Evaluation teams can use these definitions as guidelines to customize their own efforts. Collaborate with individuals whose voices should be amplified to account for shared evaluation goals and priorities. Consider the range of perspectives needed to understand the breadth of child welfare's impact and whether your team's definition is exclusionary. For example, do you focus on families with direct experiences such as removal and out-of-home placement instead of families who received in-home services or were the subjects of unsubstantiated mandated reporting calls?

Lived experience describes individuals' personal experiences with social conditions, institutions, and systems that contribute to firsthand knowledge and insights. For example, a young adult who navigated group home and independent living placements as a teen can reflect on their lived experience in these child welfare settings.

The broad concept of lived experience aligns closely with living experience and encompasses lived expertise.

Living experience refers to individuals currently experiencing certain social conditions or living in certain institutions or settings, such as youth in independent living programs.

Lived expertise emphasizes the application of lived experience and the development of deeper knowledge and skills to advocate for change in child- and family-serving systems. For example, a parent with lived experience in the child welfare system can help shape more effective methods for collecting data from other parents and improve caseworker training.

Lived experience or expertise refers to past experiences with lasting impacts. Those with living experience may be actively engaged with the systems they seek to change, potentially resulting in a more immediate response. Evaluation teams should be prepared to address potential trauma responses among those with lived/living experience and vicarious trauma among its members.

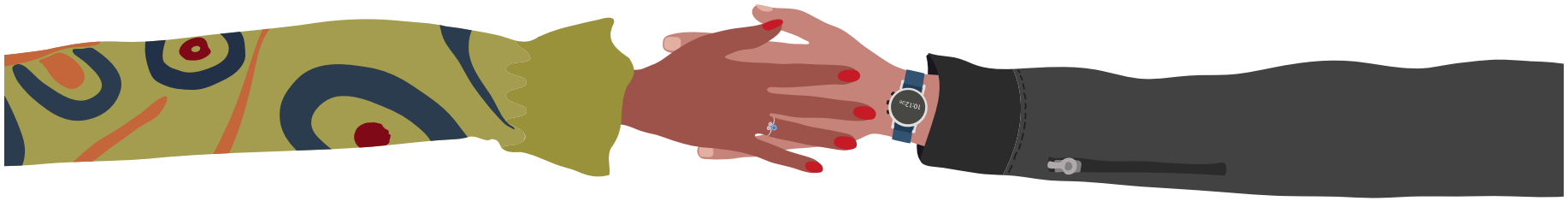


Exhibit 1. Components of Participatory and Community-Engaged Evaluation

How to Use This Resource

Click a section within the diagram to learn more about that component and potential actions to consider. Each section also includes a corresponding visual, conversation starters for evaluation teams and community members, reference list, and resource suggestions.

Community

Defining community is a first step in participatory, community-engaged evaluation. Although all communities share some characteristics, the definition of community will differ across evaluation projects.[1] Individuals might also have different perspectives on the defining features of a specific community. Evaluation teams should work collaboratively with evaluation participants and collaborators to define what community means to them.

General Characteristics

Most communities share the following characteristics[1]:

- **They include multiple individuals**. Communities reflect a type of group, not one person.
- **Community members share something in common**. Individuals must have at least one commonality to be a community. Possible points of connection include physical location, language, culture, beliefs, experiences, or interests. The connection among members of one community can be completely different from the connections in another.
- **Individuals regard themselves as members of a community**. A group of people must consider themselves members of a community due to a shared interest, affinity, or other connection.
- **They are not homogeneous**. Despite sharing at least one commonality, community members may still differ in their values, identities, and social positions and may even belong to other communities. There can also be communities within communities.

Conversation Starters

Do the concepts of insiders and outsiders (see exhibit 2) make sense when trying to understand who belongs in the community you are working with?[3] Are there better ways to think about community membership in your project?

Examples in Child Welfare

In the context of child welfare evaluation, communities may be defined by their relationships to or experiences with child welfare systems. Examples include—

- **Neighborhoods or other geographic areas** impacted by public child welfare systems.
- **Individuals and families with experience** related to the child welfare system, including adoptive, kinship, or foster families; families who have been investigated; and children who have been removed and placed into out-of-home care.
- **Youth who have current or former experience in out-of-home care** (e.g., independent living, congregate care, foster care, kinship placement).
- **Child welfare communities of practice** (e.g., social workers, child protection workers, family preservation workers).
- **Native American, Alaska Native, and Indigenous children eligible for protections and supports** under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).
- **Dually involved youth** with experience in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Exhibit 2. Insider versus Outsider Perspectives

Insiders (i.e., community members) might have different perspectives on what defines a community compared to outsiders (i.e., non-members).[2] Involving both groups when defining community can help complement their respective strengths and minimize their limitations. Remember that some people may be insiders and outsiders depending on their place and roles within a community.

	Insider	Outsider
Definition	• *Individuals who are recognized as members of a community with knowledge informed by being part of—and participating in—the community*	• *Individuals who are not a part of a community, with knowledge informed by observations and learning from the position of a non-member*
Examples	• *Individual community members* • *Community leaders* • *Community organization members*	• *University-based evaluators* • *External consultants* • *Funders*
Strengths	• *Have knowledge and insights that can only be gained by being a community member* • *Have access to information and knowledge restricted to members* • *Can identify informal community leaders unfamiliar to outsiders*	• *Can identify characteristics that are unnoticed by members* • *Can bring new ways of thinking about community without imposing their own assumptions* • *Can help facilitate discussions in which insiders describe their identities and priorities*
Limitations	• *May not be aware of key characteristics or connections among community members* • *May have varying perspectives from member to member*	• *Do not have access to knowledge and insights restricted to community members* • *May have perspectives that do not align with those of community members (should defer to insiders when defining community)*

References

1. Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., Becker, A. B., Allen III, A. J., & Guzman, J. R. (2008). Critical issues in developing and following CBPR principles. In M. Minkler & N. Wallerstein (Eds.), *Community-based participatory research for health: From process to outcomes* (pp. 47–66). John Wiley & Sons.
2. Eng, E., Moore, K. S., Rhodes, S. D., Griffith, D. M., Allison, L. L., Shirah, K., & Mebane, E. M. (2005). Insiders and outsiders assess who is "the community": Participant observation, key informant interview, focus group interview, and community forum. In B. A. Israel, E. Eng, A. J. Schulz., & E. A. Parker (Eds.), *Methods for community-based participatory research for health* (pp. 77–100). John Wiley & Sons.

Resources

- ***What Is Community Anyway?*** **by Chavis & Lee**. A guide describing community characteristics for defining a target community.

Frameworks

Although participatory and community-engaged evaluation frameworks have unique differences,[1] most are guided by similar values and principles. Understanding these can help guide discussions about which framework is most appropriate for your project.

Values

There are three core values that guide participatory and community-engaged frameworks[1]:

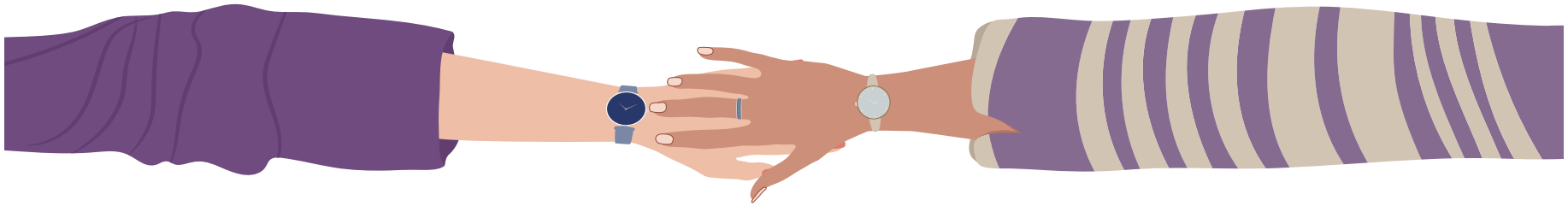
1. **Participation** of community members as team members and collaborators occurs throughout the evaluation.
2. **Action** that results in positive change for a group or community is a primary goal of the evaluation.
3. **Community** needs, values, and interests inform and are addressed by the evaluation.

While participatory and community-engaged evaluations are guided by these three values, projects might emphasize some values more than others.

Examples

Frameworks are evaluation models or approaches that recommend specific community engagement and evaluation activities (e.g., data collection, analysis, dissemination) for a defined purpose. Examples include—

- Youth-Led Participatory Action Research[1]
- Human-Centered Design[1]
- Democratic Evaluation[1]
- Empowerment Evaluation[1]
- Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE)[2]



What are the differences between community-engaged evaluation and community-based participatory evaluation?

Although the terms community-engaged evaluation and community-based participatory evaluation are often used interchangeably, they differ in important ways.[3]

- **Community-engaged evaluation** broadly describes evaluations involving community participation at various levels; it is not a specific model or design (see **Community Engagement**). One example is an evaluation designed and led primarily by external evaluators who engage community members to provide input on different components.
- **Community-based participatory evaluation** is a coalition-based evaluation framework/approach or method to foster and sustain change.[4] Evaluators and community members work collaboratively to identify a problem or need that can be addressed by evaluation. An example is an evaluation built from the ground up, with community members actively partnering with evaluators throughout all phases.

Principles

Additional principles that commonly inform participatory and community-engaged frameworks include[5]—

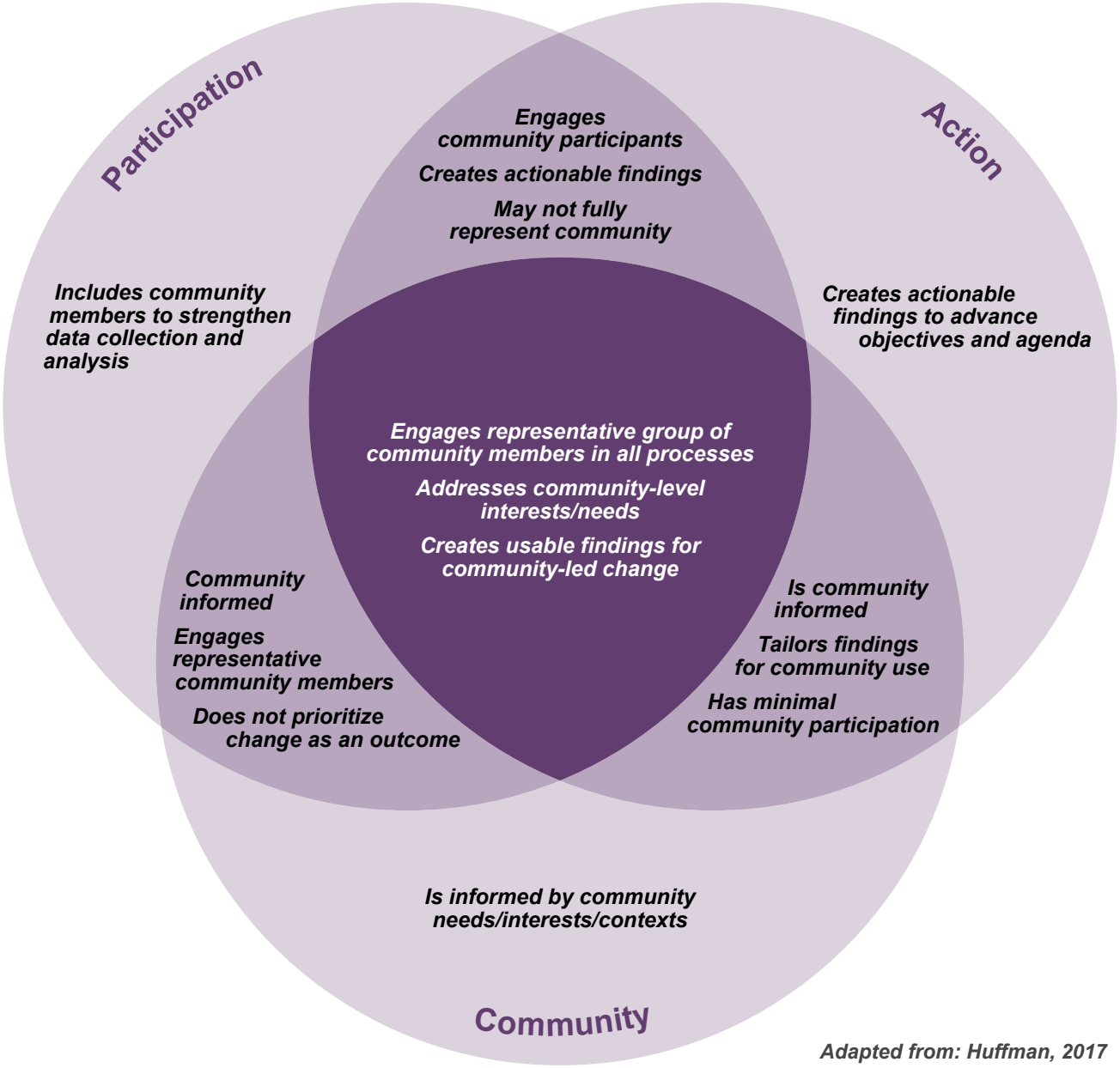
- **Collaborative partnerships** between evaluators and communities.
- **Colearning** between evaluators and community members throughout the evaluation process.
- **Empowerment** of communities to have more power and control over the decisions and actions that impact them through evaluation.
- **Acknowledgment** of harms that communities experience or have experienced.

Conversation Starters

Does your project prioritize some values (participation, action, community; see exhibit 3) over others? What other values or principles does your project prioritize? How do they shape your evaluation design? Do they align with your desired level of community engagement?

Exhibit 3. How Core Values Inform Evaluations

Although participatory and community-engaged evaluations incorporate the values of participation, action, and community, projects may prioritize some values over others.



Adapted from: Huffman, 2017

References

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2. Patton, M. Q., & Campbell-Patton, C. E. (2021). *Utilization-focused evaluation*. Sage Publications. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/utilization-focused-evaluation/book268943
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Resources

- ***Community-Based Participatory Research Principles*** **by Detroit Urban Research Center**. Website that identifies and outlines key principles of community-based participatory research.
- ***Participatory Research Methods–Choice Points in the Research Process*** **by Vaughn & Jacquez**. Article with table describing 23 different participatory evaluation frameworks, variations/differences in terms, and key sources of information.

Benefits

Evaluations make a difference. When planning and designing an evaluation, discuss and agree on the project's potential benefits.[1] Maintain a community-centered perspective to build a sense of trust with the community and learn what *this* community prioritizes. This approach will help the project effect change that benefits the community and its partners.

Benefit Types

Evaluations can yield multiple, overlapping benefits. Develop goals with community partners—making sure to emphasize benefits—so they align with partners' values, beliefs, and visions for themselves and their communities. Communities are not the same. They include individuals with different backgrounds, identities, and needs (see Community). Consider these three benefit types when tailoring goals to reflect and respect each community and the preferences of its members:

- **Mutual benefits** provide value to both evaluators and the community. Examples include mutual learning, such as when an evaluator enhances their capacity to collaborate while community members learn the language and process of evaluation.
- **Indirect benefits** typically have no direct, immediate impact but rather result in something of value to the broader community, often over time. One example is a community deciding to scale up an intervention based on findings from a robust outcome study.
- **Direct benefits** include tangible outcomes or goods that provide direct, immediate value, such as obtaining an educational credential or creating sustainable funding streams to support community services.

Is compensation a benefit?

Is compensation (e.g., a direct cash payment) considered a benefit, incentive, or gesture of appreciation for community members' time and knowledge?[2] When viewed through the lens of participatory evaluation, compensation is primarily meant to acknowledge the value of community members' skills and expertise and involves several steps to ensure fairness and transparency. Teams should agree on compensation processes and amounts, considering whether different types of participation (e.g., attending meetings, responding to emails) should be compensated differently and at what rates.[3] Teams should also minimize delays and paperwork to ensure prompt payment, for example, by setting up an escrow account.[3] Compensation practices should meet community members' needs and prioritize their well-being, comfort, and agency.[3]

Exhibit 4. How Benefits Play Out

Benefits affect groups and individuals differently.

Conversation Starters

How have community members participated in decisions about what benefits the evaluation will yield? Is there agreement? How do you know?

Evaluators

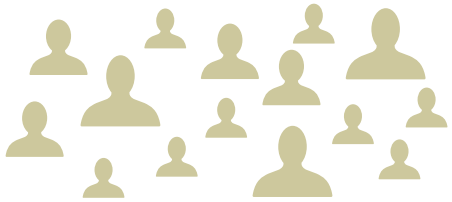
Learn about community challenges and strengths, grow skills and knowledge to partner more effectively

Larger Community

Builds collective capacity to engage in and shape evaluations, becomes empowered to influence change, builds a sense of collective ownership of the evaluation and how to use findings

Individual Community Members

Develop skills and experience for career opportunities, grow social and professional networks, become coauthors on publications, practice leadership and share knowledge



Child Welfare and Society at Large

Grow understanding of the child welfare system's strengths and areas needing improvement, build knowledge about those directly impacted, improve policy and practice, account for community needs and contexts, build transparency and accountability into child welfare programming, advance acceptance of community-based methods

References

1. Urban Planning Partners. (2020, November 23). *Does it pay to pay? Exploring what it means to compensate outreach participants.* https://www.up-partners.com/news/2020/10/16/does-it-pay-to-pay-exploring-what-it-means-to-compensate-outreach-participants-cyfz2-jwgn6-x8srm
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Resources

- **A Framework for Ethical Payment to Research Participants**, New England Journal of Medicine, by Luke Gelinas, Ph.D., Emily A. Largent, J.D., Ph.D., R.N., I. Glenn Cohen, J.D., Susan Kornetsky, M.P.H., Barbara E. Bierer, M.D., and Holly Fernandez Lynch, J.D.

Community Engagement

Community engagement involves more than just working together.[1] It includes partnering to discuss evaluation concerns, codeveloping a vision aligned with community values and needs, and building long-term relationships. Community engagement can look quite different across projects and within different communities; it also changes over time (see Maintaining Collaboration).

Role of External Evaluator

The external evaluator in a community-engaged and participatory project can fill one of several roles[2]:

- **An initiator** contacts communities and actively increases their engagement in evaluation activities as the project progresses.
- **A consultant** is contracted by a community to complete activities, for which the community holds them accountable.
- **A collaborator** partners with community members to design and implement an evaluation. Power is shared and partners' unique skills and knowledge are valued.

Social Dynamics

Consider whether the following social dynamics are limiting engagement:

- **Tokenism** refers to superficial or performative community involvement in which evaluators limit community participation to minimal, insubstantial tasks like reviewing a document instead of deciding what to include in the document and how to disseminate it effectively in the community.[1]
- **Elite capture** occurs when a group within a community dominates an evaluation effort by advancing its own agenda. When a community's voice seems unified, it might signal imbalanced internal power dynamics.[3]
- **Gatekeeping** involves community members or evaluators who control access for logistical or intentional reasons, thus affecting the evaluation's scope and activities. Logistically, evaluators might make decisions without community input to expedite the IRB review process or meet a reporting deadline. Intentionally, community members might restrict an outside evaluator's access to cultural practices like religious ceremonies.
- **Resistance** manifests as pushback from community members or evaluators. Community members may be reluctant to participate fully in an evaluation or may want evaluators to handle most responsibilities and be accountable for outcomes. Evaluators may be hesitant to share power with the community.

Authentic participation occurs when decision making accounts for multiple perspectives, power differences, and contextual constraints. Building relationships with the community is a precursor to authentic participation.[4]

Are you unsure how community engagement is going?

The evaluation team should reflect on how its actions might facilitate or limit community engagement. Administer a survey or hold a listening session to gather insights on strengthening participation (see Establishing Collaboration and Maintaining Collaboration).

Exhibit 5. Continuum of Community Engagement

The level of community engagement in an evaluation follows a continuum. Participatory approaches prioritize collaboration, as reflected by the points on the right side of the continuum.

Conversation Starters

Where is your team in the evaluation process (e.g., site selection, evaluation questions, recruitment)? Where do you fall on the engagement continuum? Do team members agree on where the team is currently? Is it where you want to be? If not, what can you change?

Increasing levels of community participation

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Information is provided to the community.	***Input is obtained from community.***	***Evaluators work directly with community.***	***Community is partner in evaluation process.***	***Community leads evaluation decision making.***

Increasing levels of evaluator control

Adapted from: Key et al., 2019; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020

Evaluator-led project

The evaluator controls decision-making. Community members may contribute information (i.e., **consult**) or feedback (i.e., **involve**) but the project is driven by the evaluator.

Community-engaged or community-driven evaluation

The community has primary decision-making power over key activities. The evaluator facilitates and supports the project, for example, by providing feedback on community-written reports (i.e., **collaborate**) or training community members as data collectors or analysts (i.e., **empower**).

References

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Resources

- **Participatory Research at AmeriCorps by AmeriCorps**. Insights from researchers and grant recipients on their experiences with participatory evaluation.
- **Participatory Evaluation Measurement Instrument by National Academy of Medicine**. Instruments and conceptual models for measuring evaluation participation; can be used to structure a discussion around what is working and what can be improved.

Evaluation Team

Participatory and community-engaged evaluation teams should reflect multiple perspectives and engage community members and program participants in all phases of the evaluation process. Be intentional when choosing who should be on the team, defining team member roles and responsibilities, and deciding what investments can facilitate team participation.

Member Selection

Identifying team members for participatory and community-engaged evaluation is just as important as choosing data collection tools and methods. Teams should reflect an array of lived experiences, careers, and perspectives. When selecting members, consider how—

- **To build in time** to develop relationships, create opportunities for bidirectional learning, and engage with and understand communities of focus.[1,2]
- **Team members with specialized skills can collaborate** with community members to apply their expertise in a meaningful way. A statistician might be primarily responsible for analyzing data, for example, but they can also partner with community members to interpret and apply findings so they are relevant and appropriate. Similarly, an individual selected for their lived experience may have another skill useful for the evaluation.[3]
- **Team members will represent a range of community backgrounds** to enrich the evaluation process. Each potential team member brings knowledge, skills, and contributions. Practice and encourage others to engage in self-awareness and respect different perspectives.[1]
- **To center and continually revisit their plans, goals, and capacities** to help them focus on their priorities.
- **Historical context will affect their participation**, especially if they belong to groups exploited or harmed by research or evaluation projects.
- **To create an environment in which everyone's input is valued**. For example, establish and agree on expectations for working together fairly.

When selecting members, acknowledge the power dynamics that exist between and among evaluators and people with lived experience. These imbalances can lead some voices to overshadow others. Implement strategies that protect and amplify everyone's voice to ensure that decision making does not default to the most-dominant voices—often those of the evaluators. One example is using consensus-building methods like voting to capture opinions anonymously (see **Power Sharing and Dynamics**).

Roles and Responsibilities

Establish team member roles and responsibilities early on by—

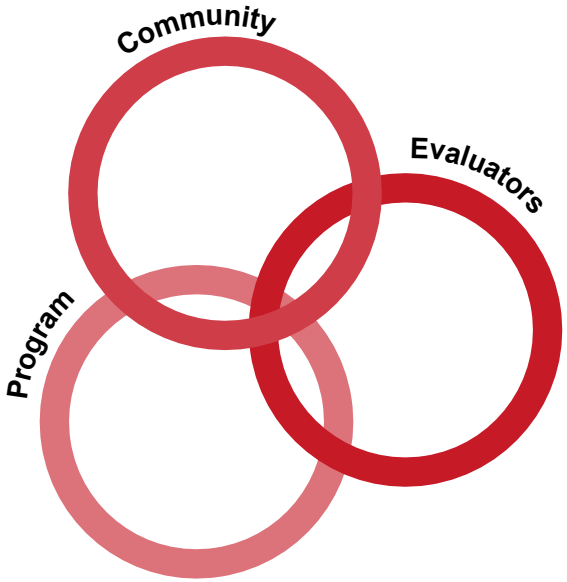
- **Negotiating positions** clearly and defining flexible roles that do not limit team members to narrow responsibilities.
- **Assigning tasks** based on skills, experiences, strengths, and expertise. Create training or mentoring opportunities to grow skills and reallocate tasks as members strengthen their skillsets.
- **Aligning roles and responsibilities** with core principles of participatory, community-engaged evaluation. This will allow team members to contribute meaningfully to research design decisions, take part in data collection and analysis, and be involved in reporting and dissemination.
- **Acknowledging and addressing the burden** associated with engagement. Be prepared to mitigate challenges related to work schedules, parenting/caregiving, and household duties when team members take part in evaluation activities.[1,4]

Conversation Starters

How can you move beyond offering an invitation to participate in authentic collaboration? What are some ways to empower and build the skills of individuals with lived experience at each stage of the evaluation process?

Exhibit 6. Participatory vs. Non-Participatory Teams

Team member roles differ more in non-participatory evaluation teams; however, as teams become increasingly participatory and community engaged, their roles begin to overlap. This shift happens when teams commit to skill and relationship building, compensate community members (see Benefits), and establish clear lines of communication. These steps ensure that community members have a voice and that their voices matter.



Non-Participatory or Non-Collaborative Evaluation

Team member roles are distinct.

Commitments

- ***Skill building for community members***
- ***Relationship building between community members and evaluators***
- ***Compensation for community members***
- ***Flow sheets to coordinate team activities***
- ***Clear communication***

Participatory and Collaborative Evaluation

Team member roles overlap.

Example: A team member may also belong to the community being evaluated. This dual role does not necessarily create a conflict of interest, but it does introduce complexity. Do not assume that a team member's role as a community member will automatically grant access to or trust from the community.

References

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Resources

- ***Working With Lived Experience Researchers: A Practical Framework*** **by Australian Evaluation Society**. Reflections by people with lived experience on the realities of being a peer researcher and evaluator.

Establishing Collaboration

Building capacity to cocreate an evaluation requires time, effort, and intentionality. Despite these investments, the benefits of codesigned evaluations are many. Codesign promotes open dialogue, aids in conflict resolution, and adapts to changing plans, timelines, and goals. Collaborative evaluations also tell more effective and meaningful stories about history, values, and experiences.

Relationship Building

Collaborative partnerships are grounded in supportive, consistent relationships built by—

- **Fostering connection, communication, team building, and networking** among team members.[1]
- **Using democratic decision making and activities** focused on creating a shared mission and vision to ensure all voices are heard in the decision-making process.
- **Mutually developing standards** that hold team members accountable to each other and aware of how to advance the team's best interests.

Power Sharing and Dynamics

Power imbalances are always present in an evaluation, but they can be mitigated or neutralized by—

- **Naming and addressing power imbalances among team members** while providing opportunities for training (e.g., human subjects research training) so community members and evaluators can share in evaluation tasks.
- **Collaboratively establishing clear decision-making processes, procedures, and expectations** at the beginning of an evaluation.
- **Expecting shifts in team dynamics over time** and preparing to address challenges and barriers.
- **Practicing self-reflection** to grow as collaborators.
- **Considering and anticipating the hidden and explicit agendas** of collaborators, community members, and others interested in the evaluation.

Safety and Trust

All team members should feel a sense of safety and trust; help create this experience by—

- **Acknowledging the community's experience with exploitation** by other evaluators and researchers.
- **Engaging experts and community practitioners** to provide therapeutic support and address community trauma, if needed.
- **Setting up rules around confidentiality and privacy** to protect the identities of team members and organizations.[1]
- **Codeveloping expectations** for working with one other that promote colearning.

Openness and Transparency

Effective collaboration stems from meaningful and honest communication; transparent environments promote shared learning by—

- **Establishing procedures** to ensure project-related decisions are shared with all collaborators.
- **Involving community members in meaningful ways throughout the evaluation process**, such as cocreating evaluation questions, conducting interviews, and piloting instruments (see Methods).
- **Providing opportunities for team members to take part** in product development and dissemination.
- **Creating pathways** for clear communication with feedback loops for sharing information.

Conversation Starters

What are some ways to create opportunities for feedback across the evaluation process? How can you set your team up for success related to communication, shared decision making, and project expectations?

Exhibit 7. Establishing Collaboration

When team members engage with each other intentionally, they can improve their capacity to cocreate. Meaningful collaboration acknowledges power dynamics and community history, in turn building strong relationships, fostering trust, and promoting shared learning.

Relationship Building and Power Dynamics	+	Safety and Openness	=	Improved Capacity to Cocreate
• *Use consensus-oriented mission/ vision activities to create shared goals and strategies* • *Anticipate that collaborative team dynamics will shift over time* • *Practice self-reflection (evaluators)*		• *Center community involvement in building evaluation products and processes* • *Build and test feedback loops* • *Practice transparency* • *Recognize community experiences with exploitation by evaluators or academics*		• *Engage in ongoing discussion and conflict resolution in response to shifting plans, timelines, and objectives* • *Align with community history and values* • *Ensure decisions are democratic* • *Share data collection, analysis, and interpretation tasks with community members*

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Resources

- ***Fostering Partnerships for Community Engagement: Community Voice and Power Sharing Guidebook*** **by Shakesprere et al**. Description of partnership building for successful community-engaged projects.
- ***Power*** **by Institute of Development Studies**. Identification of different types of power in participatory evaluation, including descriptions of each and strategies for responding.

Methods

Any evaluation methodology and its data collection methods can be made participatory by involving community members. Evaluators and community partners can work together to select methodologies that align with a community's needs, skills, knowledge, and desired level of participation.[1]

Characteristics

Meaningful community participation in selecting, designing, and implementing an evaluation methodology involves several principles[1]:

- **Community members determine how they will participate and contribute** to an evaluation's methodology. Evaluators should discuss with community members their interests, skills, and comfort with evaluation methodologies to distribute roles and responsibilities equitably.
- **Community partners remain involved across all phases of implementation**, including making decisions about major evaluation activities, codesigning data collection tools, and providing feedback and guidance on deliverables.
- **The evaluation methodology is tailored to the contexts and needs** of the community and evaluation participants.
- **Community members engage in data collection activities** that communicate their thoughts, experiences, and reflections. For example, an evaluation could include storytelling if traditional knowledge and oral history are central to the community's identity.

With these characteristics present, any methodology—from a quantitatively oriented, experimental design to a qualitative case study design—can be participatory.

What does participatory data collection look like?

Quantitative and qualitative data collection methods can be made participatory by involving community members in their design and implementation. Examples include—

- **Focus groups** for which evaluators and community members collaboratively develop a script that asks questions relevant to the community and uses familiar language, terms, and references. Community members facilitate focus groups and work with evaluators to analyze and interpret findings based on their experiences.
- **A community needs survey** developed by community members who identify what types of needs should be assessed and a preliminary list of questions. Community members work with evaluators to refine preliminary questions and turn them into survey items that effectively assess each type of need.

Visual and Narrative Methods

Visual and narrative methods put data collection in participants' hands, enabling them to shape the process without relying on direction from evaluators. Because community members decide how data are collected, organized, and interpreted, the following techniques can yield powerful visual and narrative insights that reflect specific contexts and priorities[2]:

- **Photographs** use images as data sources to facilitate reflective discussion. Individuals can take photographs they deem meaningful or select an image that elicits a reaction. For example, foster parents could share photos that represent what being a foster parent means to them. Photographs in this context are related but distinct from Photovoice, a participatory needs assessment method to represent a community and engage in dialogue about it.[3]
- **Visual mapping** entails community members and other project partners creating visual or spatial maps to inform project decision making and identify community resources. For example, the River of Life is an Indigenous reflective tool designed to help collaborators visualize and plan the journey of their partnership.

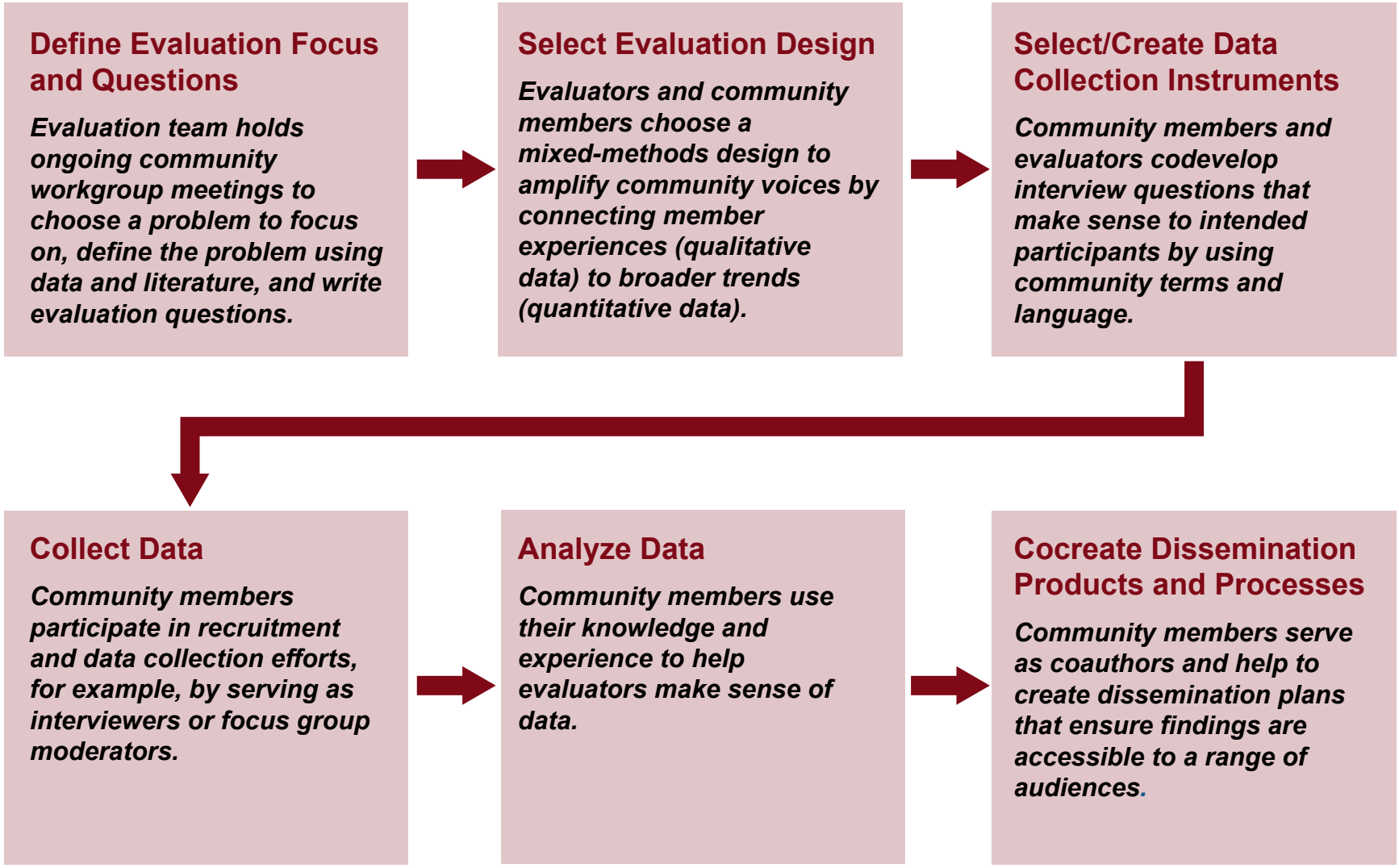
Conversation Starters

Do community members want to be involved in all design and implementation phases of your project's methodology or just some of them? What strategies can you use to be responsive to the community's interest in participating?

- **Participatory art making** asks community members and evaluation participants to create pieces of art, such as paintings, drawings, sculpture, comics, digital projects, and collages, and reflect on and interpret their meaning. For example, drawing can provide a way for participants to "see" and articulate experiences that might otherwise remain unexpressed.[4] Participatory art making can also be used as a fully articulated civic engagement methodology.[5]
- **Storytelling, oral history, and theater** focus on crafting and sharing narratives to prompt community dialogue and make meaning of experiences. For example, Forum Theater is an interactive performance technique where the public is invited to participate by testing ideas that could lead to solutions for the social problems depicted on stage.[6]

Exhibit 8. What Makes a Methodology Collaborative

A methodology is collaborative when communities are actively involved in its design and application, with each phase of implementation giving communities opportunities to participate.



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Resources

- ***A Practical Guide to Getting Started With Community-Engaged Research*** **by Child Trends.**
- ***Community-Engaged Research With Community-Based Organizations: A Resource Manual For Researchers*** **by the Clinical Translational Science Institute Community Engagement Program, University of California San Francisco.**

Maintaining Collaboration

Good collaborations change over time. Address conflict and resistance, foster trust, and support full participation throughout the evaluation to keep collaboration strong.[1]

Conflict and Resistance

Conflict, while often uncomfortable, can strengthen relationships, improve decision making, and facilitate meaningful discussions. Communities with negative evaluation experiences may resist collaborative efforts. Address conflict and resistance to limit their negative impacts on group dynamics and to promote collaboration.

Collaboration Over Time

Continue to engage participants in meaningful ways by—

- **Establishing ongoing opportunities to collaborate**, such as cocreating a shared vision/mission statement, training team members to grow specific skills (e.g., data collection), or anticipating evaluation activities that team members may like to manage or direct.
- **Conducting regular collaboration assessments** that support long-term collaboration and identify emerging issues at every stage in the evaluation process. Assessments can take place formally via questionnaires and surveys or informally during meetings or debrief sessions.

Note that collaboration does not have to be consistent to be meaningful. Some collaborators may prefer to engage in certain stages (e.g., defining evaluation questions) or when they have the energy and time to participate.

Trust

Cultivate an environment of trust by building relationships early in the collaboration process. Follow through with commitments and provide explanations when group decisions are not feasible. Foster trust by—

- **Demonstrating the value of community partnerships** by listening to everyone's ideas, views, and perspectives.
- **Being transparent about the purpose, goals, and potential risks** of the evaluation.
- **Creating an environment in which team members feel comfortable sharing** within established, realistic expectations around privacy and confidentiality.
- **Building flexibility** to adapt the evaluation process according to the needs of community members.

Shared Participation

Sustain the collaborative process by creating opportunities for participation throughout the evaluation. Support shared participation by—

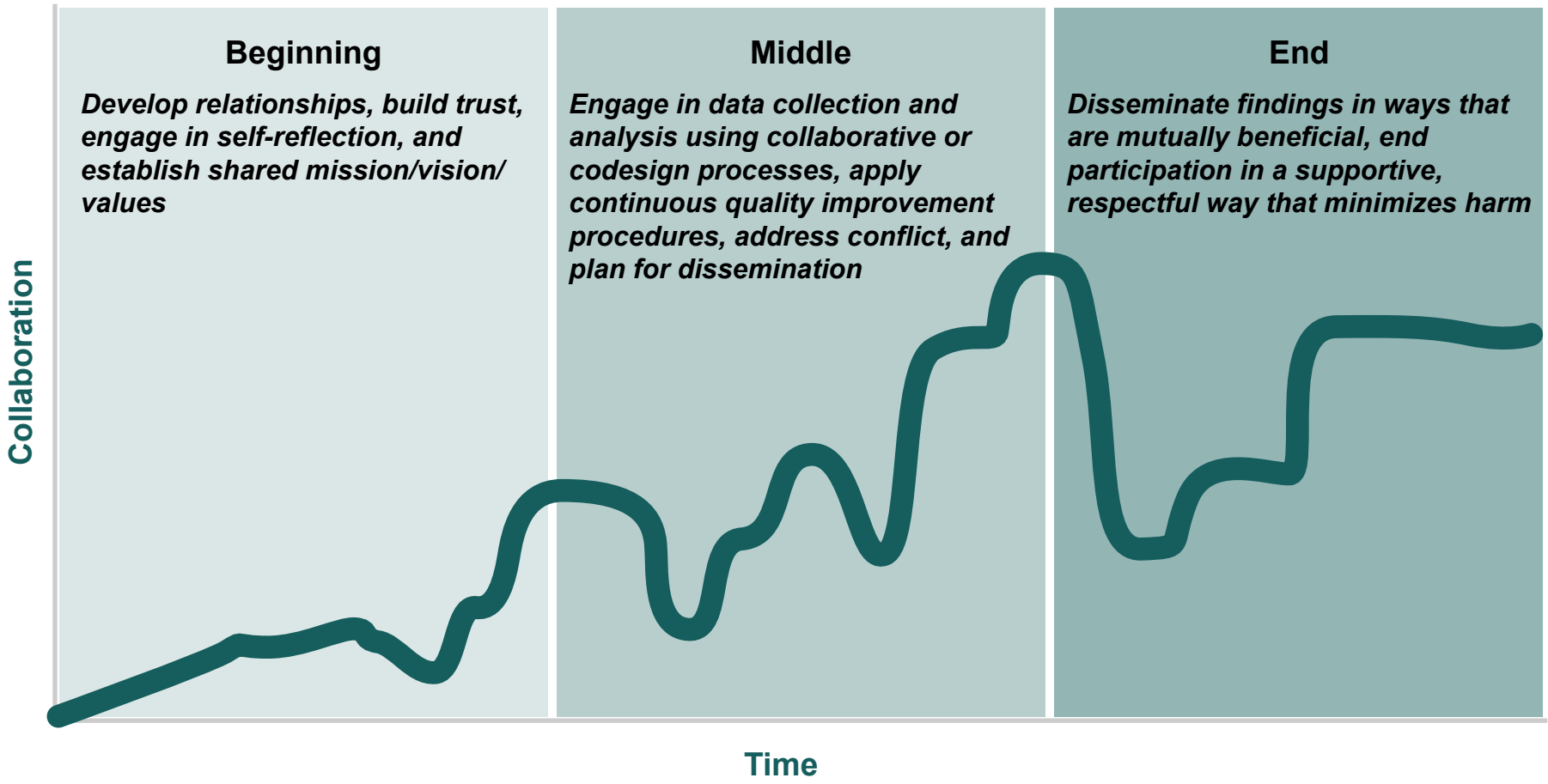
- **Working with key informants or community partners** to design the evaluation and the engagement process.
- **Being flexible and adjusting evaluation activities and plans** in response to emerging challenges.
- **Reflecting on how power dynamics affect participation** at each stage of an evaluation and encouraging colearning and skill development.[2,3]

Exhibit 9. Changes in Collaboration Over Time

Working with community collaborators is not a linear process. The experience is highly relational and changes over time. Expect ebbs and flows in response to factors such as the timing of activities, conflicts, and resistance. Be flexible and adapt collaboration efforts and engagement throughout the evaluation.

Conversation Starters

What does it look like to foster trust throughout the evaluation process? How can your team cultivate trust in evaluation among community members?



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Resources

- ***Collaboration and Team Science Field Guide*** **by Bennett et al**. Guidance on creating and maintaining trust, managing conflict, and strengthening team dynamics.
- ***Team Effectiveness Questionnaire*** **by University of Colorado**. Questionnaire to assess eight dimensions of team effectiveness: purpose and goals, roles, team processes, team relationships, intergroup relations, problem solving, passion and commitment, and skills and learning.
- **Collaboration Assessment Tool by Marek et al**. A seven-factor measure of effective collaboration.
- **Collaborative Effectiveness Assessment Activity by Prevention Institute**. Exercise to stimulate thinking about elements of effective collaboration.

Conclusion

This guide introduces participatory and community-engaged evaluation principles and key considerations for applying them in child welfare contexts. It presents eight components of participatory and community-engaged evaluation, with each section providing a brief explanation, questions to spur conversation, and related resources. Readers can identify strategies to help foster intentional decision making within evaluation teams and collaborative relationships that meaningfully engage people with lived experience.

Authors

Kate Golden Guzman, Ph.D., Michael Henson, Ph.D., Ashley Bucher, M.P.H.

Elliott Graham, Ph.D., Joelle Ruben, M.S.W., Kristine Neurauter, B.A., James Bell Associates

Submitted to

Tracy Y. Fields, M.S.W., M.A.

Child Welfare Program Specialist, Children's Bureau

Administration for Children and Families

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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Prepared by

James Bell Associates

2000 15th Street North, Suite 100

Arlington, VA 22201

(703) 528-3230

www.jbassoc.com

Elliott Graham, Project Director

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