Community Participation Evaluation Tool

This tool is designed to be used as one way of evaluating the processes and outcomes of community participation. It is best used in combination with other data sources such as minutes of meetings, informal feedback from partners and consumers and other things such as documents, media and other reports. Evaluation questions have been adapted from a review of the literature on evaluation of community participation and are divided into three sections: preparation and planning; process evaluation; and impact/outcome evaluation.

1. Preparation and planning for community participation

Planning and evaluation are closely linked so evaluation of community participation will be much more effective if a careful planning stage is included. Key themes in planning community participation and questions for organisations are listed below (adapted from National Resource Centre for Consumer Participation in Health, 2004):

- commitment
- purpose
- who to involve
- how will community participation be implemented and supported?
- use and feedback

These themes and associated questions for organisations to use in planning for community participation are explored below.

Commitment

The first step for an organisation is to reflect on the commitment and attitude to community participation at organisational and individual staff levels.

- What is the management and staff commitment to community participation?
- What are the attitudes of staff and management to community participation? What are the attitudes to various groups of consumers?
- Do we know why we want to involve community members?
- What aspects of the organisation's history may impact on community participation? How will this be addressed?
- Are we really prepared to commit the time, patience, energy and resources to making community participation work?
- What staff and financial resources will be available?
- What are the staff concerns? How can they be addressed both practically and financially?

Purpose

Next the organisation needs to be clear about why community participation is important, and how the participants and the organisation will benefit.

- What do community members want from the organisation?
- How and why do community members want to participate in our organisation?
- What does the organisation want from community participation?
**Who to involve**
For each program or for the service overall, are people being asked to participate as individuals or as representatives? If as representatives, guidelines are needed about which communities of interest are included and how representatives are accountable to their communities. Organisations also need to understand the diversity of consumer and community views, and how to reach out to those who may be less accessible.

- Do we know who our consumers and communities of interest are?
- How will the organisation reach out to community members? How will the organisation reach out to people who are not attending the service?

**How will community participation be implemented and supported**
From the beginning, community members should be involved in planning for community participation, they will know best how to make it work for them. There is a need to provide support, skills training and recognition for participation. A range of methods and opportunities for participation should be offered and realistic time frames set.

- How will we support community members who provide their time and expertise to the organisation? Will they be paid?
- How will the organisation cover attendance costs? (e.g. hire of equipment, transport, childcare etc)
- In what ways are the organisation’s structures alienating for community members? (administrative, management, structure, service delivery, relationships with other organisations etc). How can we make changes to improve these structures?
- How will the organisation accommodate circumstances that could make it difficult for community members to participate effectively? (e.g. meeting times, stress of meetings, health etc)
- What kinds of skills will be required by community members and staff to do this work and how can the organisation support community members and staff to work together?
- What opportunities will there be for community members to discuss issues on their own?

**Use and feedback**
The organisation needs to consider how input from community participation will be used and what barriers there might be to making changes. Participants should be provided with feedback on how their input was used and the results. Some attempt should be made to follow up on people who drop out.

- How will we make the organisation more open to ideas initiated by community members?
- How will what community members say be listened to and acted on by management?
- How will the organisation communicate to community members about the changes that have occurred due to community participation?
- How will the organisation respond if community participation flags, or attendance drops?

**2. Community participation process questions**
Ideally, evaluation questions should be asked along the way so that organisations can identify and address issues as they arise. It is unlikely that resources will available to answer all the possible evaluation questions. Questions will need to be prioritised according to local need and resources.

**Extent and scope of community participation**
- What proportion of the service’s programs/activities include opportunities for participation?
- How many people attended this participation activity?
- What was the socio-demographic distribution of people that attended the program/activity? Does it reflect the community of interest for the program/activity?
- Was participation inclusive of all stakeholders groups and interests?
- Was diversity in participants encouraged and valued?
- What barriers were there to participation and how were these addressed?
- Have community participants persisted or have they gone away after a few meetings?

**Working together**
- Is the organisation and the community ready to work in partnership?
- What do community members say about their experience of being involved?
- What has the organisation and staff learnt and what needs to be changed to improve participation processes?
- Are all stakeholders satisfied with the quality of involvement?
- Has there been efficient and effective communication between all stakeholders?
- Has all relevant information been shared with all stakeholders in an accessible way?
- Have community participants been involved in planning and evaluating participation strategies?
- Are the participation strategies appropriate?
- Has there been a partnership approach to working with communities?
- How is conflict managed?

**Capacity and support**
- Are participants satisfied with the level of support received?
- Do the staff have appropriate skills, knowledge and confidence to support community participation? If not, how is this addressed?
- Do the participants have appropriate skills, knowledge and confidence to engage in participation? If not, how is this addressed?
- Are participants recognised for their input and expertise?
- Is there sufficient organisational capacity for community participation?
- Is there sufficient community capacity for community participation?

**3. Community participation impact and outcome questions**

**Influence**
- What changes have been implemented as a result of participation and community member-staff collaboration?
- Have the changes that participants wanted to see been implemented?
- If changes were not able to be made, was this explained to the satisfaction of participants?
- What barriers to implementing participants’ changes were identified and how were these addressed?
- Were participants satisfied with their opportunity to be heard and influence decisions?
- Where on the ladder did the participation mostly occur?
- How did participants or the community benefit from the participation?
- Are there new, beneficial relationships and partnerships between the community and the organisation?