

What is participatory evaluation?

People learn at a very early age how to evaluate and then use the information we gather to make decisions, actions or changes in our life and in our world. We evaluate things like food, music, activities and community issues everyday. Sometimes the lessons learned result in small differences being made (listening or not listening to a certain kind of music) and other times the information we gather and the lessons we learn result in bigger changes in our life (joining a local movement to fight poverty in your community).

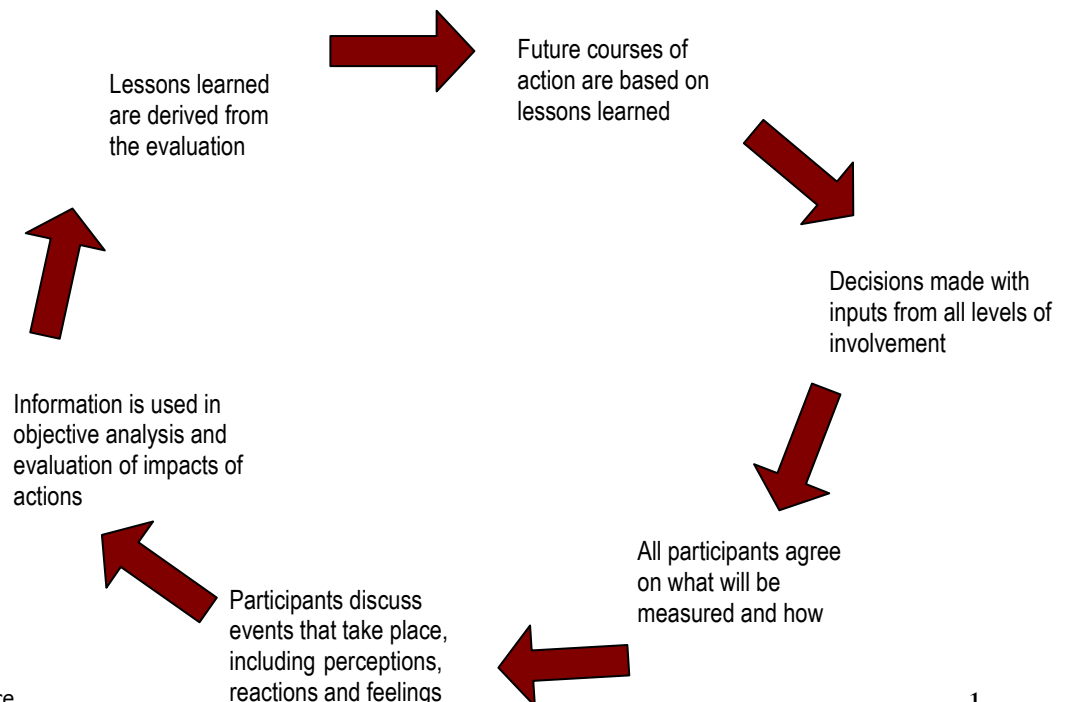
Participatory evaluation really is just the same activity, but it is done collectively with a group of people. As a group, a focus is identified, questions are developed, methods of collecting information are chosen, information is collected, analyzed and summarized and the lessons learned from this process are communicated to others to initiate strategies, action and change.

Participatory evaluation is motivating because you are:

- Asking your own questions
- Gathering your own information
- Formulating your own strategy

When the questions you ask and the information you seek produce the knowledge you want – that is participatory evaluation!

The Cycle of Participatory Evaluation



The Role of Consumers in the Evaluation Process

Participatory evaluation looks at the consumers of services or stakeholders in a different way than traditional evaluation methods. In traditional evaluation methods stakeholders often don't participate in the development of the evaluation framework. During traditional evaluation processes the framework is built around the needs of the funder or the management. The community does not own or direct the evaluation process. In traditional evaluation the focus is on accountability and not learning.

In contrast, participatory evaluation is built on diversity of the participants. Participatory evaluation includes all levels of participation in an issue, activity or event. Stakeholders, managers, funders, partners, everyone sits together to decide what will be evaluation, using what methods and how what is learned will be used to effect future action and change. Participatory evaluation sees diversity as a means to gather a wider perspective on the issue, creating more knowledge and richer lessons learned in the process.

Types of Knowledge Gathered in Participatory Evaluations

There are two types of knowledge generally gathered in evaluations, knowledge about activities and knowledge about outcomes. Knowledge surrounding activities has to do with what people actually do. This type of knowledge is very objective and the data is usually reported through information regarding numbers, frequencies or duration of activities. Questions are asked like "What were the activities? How many people attended? How many meetings were held? Who were the participants?" The information gathered is straight forward and clear, but only tells a small portion of the story needed to create lessons learned and action or change. The fact is however, that many program or funding decisions get made on activity information alone.

Outcome knowledge is about the effects or impacts that result from activities. Effects can be at an individual, organizational or community level. Questions are asked like "What were the effects of the activities on the participants? What did they learn? What did they do with the learning? What changes resulted?" With outcome knowledge we are usually looking for changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills or behaviors in stakeholders or participant groups.

The Participatory Evaluation Framework

To assist you in developing a participatory framework with other stakeholders, we have enclosed the following format for you to follow. Choose one of your most recent evaluation experiences, and use this example to walk yourself through the format below to increase your familiarity with participatory evaluation and the benefits of working for change collectively in your community!

Participatory Evaluation Template

| 1. Get Organized | |
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| What do you want to accomplish? What is your evaluation goal? | |
| Who should be on the evaluation team? Who will invite them to the table? | |
| What is the timeline we are working within? | |
| 2. Develop the Evaluation Questions | |
| What would be the change or result that we would like to see in the short term, in the long term? | |
| How can we gather answers to these questions? How can we measure or success? What are the questions you want to ask? | |
| 3. Methods of Gathering the Information | |
| What methods will you use to gather the answers to your questions? Who has all the information? | |

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| 4. Gather the Information | |
| What is the plan for the gathering of information? Who will gather it? By when? | |
| 5. Making Sense of the Information | |
| What does the information tell us? What are the themes? What are the patterns? What conclusions can we draw from the information? | |
| 6. Share Information with Others | |
| What is our communication strategy? Who needs the evaluation information and lessons learned? What is the best way to get this to the people who need it? | |
| 7. Taking Action | |
| What did you learn? What actions will you take? What changes will you make? | |