

SYNTHESIS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Carrie Farmer, Ph.D.

RAND

REMINDER OF WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO TODAY

- Optimism about the continuation of the SSgt Fox Grants program
- Dr. Miller asked us to
 - Engage in a discussion to provide feedback on what VA can do better
 - Identify opportunities to improve program start-up and implementation
 - Identify best practices in program evaluation
 - Consider how to work scientifically within a framework of effectiveness = cost + outcomes

PROGRAM DESIGN

- Program planning:
 - Eligible target population
 - Recommendation to take a population-based approach and include all veterans (not just those at risk)
 - Program activities should address veterans at various points along the “risk river”
 - CBOs have different capacity/ readiness, consider different types of grants, to build capacity (implementation grants) and strengthen or expand activities
 - Consider length of grant and sustainability
 - Lesson from GLS: longer term funding has better impacts. If funding ends, the impact ends.
 - Funding and grant timelines need to include more than program activities: outreach/marketing, evaluation, and communication/ dissemination
- Grantee selection considerations
 - Commitment to engaging in evaluation
 - Quality/ strength of partnerships

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

- Have common data elements, but don't collect data you don't need
- Creating community among grantees has multiple benefits
- Program infrastructure is critical to grantee success
 - Comprehensive technical assistance to build capacity
- GLS team-based approach: each grantee had grant office, TA expert, evaluator that joined all meetings
- Establish collaborative relationship with grantees, listen/ understand grantee barriers, always try to reduce burden
- Consider what requirements can be flexible

BEST PRACTICES FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

- Develop/ revisit theory of change and logic model for the overall program
- Use a nested evaluation model to tell bigger story of collective impact
 - Shared logic model design, focus on grantee activities and outputs, and collective effect on outcomes
 - Requires common core metrics
- GLS example demonstrates the need for evaluation evolution as program matures
 - Implementation evaluation (outputs, process indicators) has been critical for impact evaluation (outcomes)
 - Impact evaluation of the whole grant program: youth suicide attempts and deaths, program costs
 - Indicator for program implementation at county level
 - Comparison group
 - Short-term and long-term impacts

BEST PRACTICES FOR MULTILEVEL EVALUATION

- Meet grantees where they are – need for technical assistance, might need to start with “why evaluate?”
- Prioritize data that can be used both at the grantee level and at the program level
 - Be clear about why data is being collected, how grantees can use it
 - Centralized data repository
- Common data elements are critical: ensure definitions are aligned, aim to maximize use of data
- Data needs to feed back to grantees for program improvement and communicating impact
- Consider categorizing grantees, with subsets of measures based on category
- Cohort approach can allow grantees to learn from each other
- Participatory evaluation approaches can ensure program gets needed results and builds grantee capacity to continue evaluation long-term

DEFINING AND COMMUNICATING SUCCESS

- Identify goal and theory of change for communication
- Think about communication strategy from the beginning
- Who is the audience? Decision-makers, veterans, general public?
 - Know values and beliefs of key audiences
 - What do you want them to think, feel, or do? What do they need to know?
- Who should be the communicator?
- Data storytelling – what is the narrative arc of your program?
- Use quantitative and qualitative data visualization
- Evaluate communication strategy to ensure messaging reaches target populations (and customize communications as needed)
- Consider multiple publication types
 - Policymakers need results quickly (and briefly); match data with stories
 - Balance academic need to publish journal articles with accessibility of research to public