Task 2

Handout 22: Evaluation of Networks

Why is it Important to Evaluate?

There are good reasons why you should evaluate;

1. It enables you to run an interagency that meets its aims and objectives.
2. It helps you to find out if there is anything happening that you hadn’t planned for.
3. It means that you can make changes effectively. These changes are planned rather than reactive.
4. It helps you to see the positive things you’ve achieved as well as the problem areas.
5. It gives a sense of direction and common purpose to the members of the network group.
6. It can be used to support funding applications.
7. It provides a form of accountability.

Types Of Evaluation

The evaluation process can be simplified if it is separated into 2 components -

1. **Process**
2. **Impact**

These 2 evaluation processes should be considered in the planning stages of any network group. They should also correspond with the objectives, and strategies of the group. There are no prescribed methods for evaluation as it largely depends on the culture of the group itself. Some methods worker better with some people than with others. For example if the workers in the interagency are really busy they probably will not have time to sit in long discussion about the good and bad things about the group A simple quick questionnaire might be better.

**Process Evaluation:**

Process looks at what the group does, its attendance, and what people think of the group.

This sort of evaluation provides specific information which will help you improve the format of the groups activities. For this reason process evaluation has also been called ‘formative evaluation’.

Process evaluation examines whether or not you are performing the activities or strategies as planned. The results are used to guide the groups meetings and may signal the need for modifications. This is the most basic level of evaluation and
should be a regular feature of the networks activities. Process evaluation considers things like the suitability of content, communication strategies, suitability of venue etc

**Impact Evaluation:**

Impact evaluation is concerned with measuring if the group is achieving its objectives

Impact evaluation examines whether or not the objectives of the network have been met and focuses on whether there has been change in the circumstances which led to the need for the interagency. For example if a disability network forum was established to lobby government about the nature of its policies and the impact this was having upon the clients of the workers an impact evaluation would be trying to see if the policies had changed as a result of their activities. The measurement of success would clearly be the change in policy to effect the client groups in a more positive way.

Measuring the effectiveness of what you do is dependent on having accurate information about the issues to be addressed. This may involve research before and after commencement of a particular activity by the networking group. This enables you to determine whether any changes have occurred due to your work. Hence, it is important to consider evaluation at the very beginning of the planning stages and to identify what other work is being done on that issue.

**Planning and Designing the Evaluation**

Before you undertake any evaluation there are a number of key questions that must be addressed.

1. **Who will be the evaluator?**
   - Which members of the networking Group will be involved? Will you bring someone from outside your group to assist with the evaluation?

2. **Who will be involved?**
   - All members or just some? This may depend upon the size of your network group and also the activities you are evaluating

3. **Who will use the evaluation (stakeholders) and for what purpose?**
   - Will the evaluation be used as a form of accountability?
   - Is the main purpose of the evaluation a means of directing change?

4. **At what stage will the activities of the network be evaluated?**
   - Will it be carried out at the completion of the activity or while the activity is occurring or on completion of the activity?
5. What can and should be evaluated?

- Will it be:
  - The projects and programs
  - The management/organisation performance

6. How to will the evaluation be conducted?

- Questionnaires
- Informal feedback
- Small group discussions
- Large group discussions
- Submissions from agencies and workers
- Phone survey
- Observation

Which model or technique you use will depend upon the culture of the group.