

Kari:

Hello and thank you for tuning in to the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development Podcast. My name is Kari Robideau and I'm an extension educator. Today I'm joined by Betsy Olson Minard, also an extension educator from the Center for Youth Development. Betsy is on this podcast today to discuss evaluating the collaborative efforts our programs rely on for success. Thanks for joining me today, Betsy.

Betsy:

Well, thanks for having me, Kari and it's wonderful to be in the same cyber room as you.

Kari:

Well, I appreciate that and this isn't the first time we have been in this room together. Listeners may recall that you've had a couple podcasts with me and all of them are helping us to increase our evaluative lens in our youth development programs. In episode eight you shared five ways to measure youth adult connections and then in episode 24 you gave us tips for increasing youth voice in our programs.

Kari:

I'm really interested in today's topic because I don't think that we spend enough time thinking about those important collaborations that we have that make our youth program successful in terms of evaluating those relationships. So, you will be sharing five elements on how to evaluate those collaborations in our youth programs and making sure that they are successful and ways to improve them.

Kari:

So, I'm going to pass the mic over to you, Betsy, so that you can share your background, in case we have any listeners out there that haven't heard your podcast before. We want to know who you are and tell us about your passion in evaluative work and then how you became interested in this particular topic.

Betsy:

Sure. So, I've worked with 4H and youth development for 11 years. First in Wisconsin as a 4H educator in the fabulous Grant County, and then for about six years as an extension educator here in the Northern Metro in Minnesota. The thing that has always drawn me to evaluation is, I guess I'll say, the potency of data. When you're able to accurately collect data and communicate data effectively, it can help us really understand our programs and the world of youth development in a very different way.

Betsy:

And that understanding can really inform meaningful actions that impact the young people that we work with. And what excites me about evaluating collaboration is, just as you said, it's such an important part of our work and a growing part of our work, seeing youth development really understand that to serve youth, working together is a great way to do that. And I've seen youth development organizations just continue to be really generous with each other and work and share resources in a way that is really powerful. Those collaborations often reach young people that organizations are not able to reach independently. And so making those collaborations effective is a really critical part of making sure that those audiences receive powerful youth development programming.

Kari:

So, let's dig even deeper into that and talk even more about those collaborations. Who and what might that be? Give us some examples.

Betsy:

Yeah. So, some of the examples closest to me are the Center for Youth Development and County 4H programs working with afterschool youth development programs. One example is a NOCCA County 4H worked this summer with Youth First, which is an out of school time, a service provider in Ramsey, Minnesota. And they offered summer teen teacher training, which was really impactful.

Betsy:

The teens came to the program really thinking that they would hang out and get to see their friends and that kind of stuff and they ended up becoming skilled teachers over the summer, and really loving that. That's one example. There are lots of collaborations, I think right now, in 4H between parks organizations and 4H organizations. So, 4H brings that youth development expertise and parks brings a location that's really a great place to have interactive and experiential learning opportunities for young people. We have some collaborations with school districts, particularly during the school year, so I just see youth development organizations partnering really across the landscape right now to meet youth needs better.

Kari:

And using each other's expertise in whichever area that is, you gave the example of the parks and rec crew and the 4H youth development, experiential learning, positive youth development, along with all of the activities and expertise they have in parks and recreation. What a great collaboration. I'm guessing others who are listening to this and are in youth development, they can say, "Yeah, Oh yeah. We connect with this group and we each bring this to the table."

Kari:

But do you ever evaluate that relationship? So, let's move into those six elements that you have defined suggesting to programs who are collaborating with each other that here are six things that you may want to look at when you're evaluating these programs. So, your first one is recognition. Recognize partners for their contributions. How does this work?

Betsy:

Yeah. I think it's something that as we're working together we often forget about, and it can be one of those things that really us sets up partnership tension, is when one partner doesn't feel recognized by the other, or sometimes both partners don't feel like their work is really recognized and understood by the other organization that they're working with. And it's just really so important to help organizations understand their contribution and feel like they're appreciated for that contribution.

Betsy:

So, if parks is providing space and a natural environment for youth development programs and some staff to help 4H work with those young people, that's a significant contribution. If 4H is providing curriculum and activity planning and supplies, that's a significant contribution. Both of those things are important to the program and I think as we're working, often it starts to be, "Oh I wish this facility had

better bathrooms and I wish this curriculum had more activities." And those are the kinds of things that we focus on rather than the things that are being brought to the table and recognizing each other's contribution in a tangible way so that the other partner really understands and knows. And I think this is one of those things that you can feel slipping away and evaluating it helps us just check in and reaffirm that that kind of recognition is happening.

Kari:

And I would think too, as you change up staff, it also confirms for all of the parties involved why that collaboration is happening.

Betsy:

Exactly. It can start to become habit over time and new people often just see the partnership happening and don't get that history of, "This is how we came to this." This is the strength that this other organization brings. Not just, "Oh cool, I don't have to worry about that part of the program." No, this is something I need to recognize.

Kari:

The second element is respect.

Betsy:

Yeah. And this is a really hard one to evaluate. It is one that we feel and I think the biggest part of why it's important to evaluate collaboration is we can all feel when it's not working. We've all been in those organization, well maybe not, hopefully not, but many times we have been in partnerships that aren't working well and we feel it.

Betsy:

And an evaluation can really help us identify what is the piece that we're not doing. Is it that our partner doesn't feel recognized? We thought we were recognizing their contribution. That they don't feel respected? And that they don't feel valued for their resources, perspectives, and knowledge? And that's just an important question for us to know the answer to. And it can be hard to say to a partner or an organizational partner, "I don't think you respect what we do." But you can feel that.

Betsy:

And so this is a time to step back and look at the data and again, give the potency to the data so that it can answer that question for you and really without having to be vulnerable in that way about respect. You can let the data really guide your conversation around that.

Kari:

Your third element is role.

Betsy:

Yeah. And by role it just means that each partner understands their work, what it is, and how it contributes to the end game.

Betsy:

So, for partnerships where you have one partner, maybe recruiting young people, doing the enrollment process for those young people, and then the other organization does the program. There are many steps in between. Who takes on those roles? Who's communicating with the family? Is it both? Is it either? Is there one partner thinking, "Oh, well of course the group that does the registration is going to continue to communicate with those families. They have all the information to do that." And is the registration folks thinking, "Oh, now that they're in the program, our role is done."

Betsy:

So, just making sure that if there are roles that aren't being completed, is it because of a lack of understanding or a lack of information passing or what is getting in the way of people carrying out their distinct role and their contribution to the partnership?

Kari:

What you're evaluating is what is your perception of what your role is, and then taking time to cross-reference that and making sure everybody's clear on those roles and agree on those.

Betsy:

Exactly, exactly. And this is a part where you really can see some disconnect sometimes if you're evaluating partnerships that are having trouble working effectively. This is often a place where you see, "Oh. No one knew that monitoring the budget was their responsibility. No wonder the spending is wonky here." Yes. So, it can be very eye-opening for both parties.

Kari:

And moving us on to number four, relationship. I can imagine that is related to this.

Betsy:

It really is. And organizational partnerships are theoretically a relationship between two organizations. But in reality, are a relationship between individuals in those organizations. And as we have staff turnover and as we have change in staffing or change in the roles and jobs of those staff members, it gets more complicated to manage and it can be really helpful to look at these interpersonal relationships and the elements of interpersonal relationships so that when you start with a new staff member in an existing partnership, you have to develop trust with that person.

Betsy:

You have to develop a communication strategy with that person. You have to do all the things that you do at the beginning of any interpersonal relationship. "Oh, this person likes to hear from me via text. This person likes to hear from me via email." All those things change as does the understanding of that person, the skills that that person brings to the partnership.

Betsy:

So, it can mean, "Oh wow, this person really has an accounting background. I was the one monitoring the budget before, but now the skills really lie in my other organizational partnership. How does that mean I need to change things?" So, evaluating how well we're doing at fostering that person to person

connection can really be enlightening for partnerships, especially those that have been going on for a long time.

Kari:

Yes, and as you're describing this, I'm really thinking about the roles and relationships of those longterm collaborations as you bring in different people. Perhaps as you're evaluating the roles of each organization, there are different skills that are being brought in by those organizations and that might need to change. If you don't ever evaluate that it might ruin the relationship or strain the relationship or it doesn't feel like it's as successful anymore. So, those two in particular seem like they're really important to evaluate together.

Betsy:

Agreed. Agreed. Then you wonder, "Why doesn't this organization trust me anymore?" Because you didn't develop trust with the new person that's working there. Those things sneak up on organizational partnerships. Especially, as you said, in those that I've been going on for a long time. Start to take that relationship for granted and it needs to be fresh and each time there's a new staff person.

Kari:

It will need to change.

Betsy:

It does. Yeah. And for the better often.

Kari:

Now moving on to number five you have reward.

Betsy:

Yeah, so this is just sort of taking that step beyond recognition and making sure that each partner is getting the outcome that they are looking for. Each organization has really specific goals that are critical and important to them. Are the outcomes and the impacts that we're seeing from the program, do they match those goals that the organization has come to the table with? Or do we even remember what the initial goals were? And how long has it been since we checked in on how well we're doing at accomplishing those?

Betsy:

And just making sure that each organization has that outcome data that they need to share with their stakeholders so that they can say, "We're getting what we need out of this program. We're having the impacts that we need to have. This is working for us."

Kari:

And that moves us right into your final element. Number six: Results.

Betsy:

Exactly. And these really are a pair. Often the reward for organizations are the results that we have on young people. These two things really pair well together. Short term and longterm impacts of the collaboration is what you're looking for in that results section and making sure that both partners are comfortable with the way that the outcome evaluation is happening and gets access to the results. Sometimes this is a surprising part of the partnership process because often we don't talk about at the beginning of a partnership what's going to happen with our evaluation data, who's going to collect it, and who's going to distribute it.

Betsy:

And then we get to the end and partners sometimes get some ownership over the data. "These were my impacts. I'm the one that did this part of the program. So this is mostly the thing I did." And we forget, again, those contributions that both have made to make it work and how we need to be sure that then both organizations really have buy-in to the outcomes that we're measuring and how we communicate them to our stakeholders.

Kari:

Although evaluation happens at the end, think about it and talk about it and make all those decisions in the beginning, right?

Betsy:

Yes.

Kari:

As an evaluative person, I thought ... Look, she's clapping. You can't hear her.

Betsy:

That statement is making me very excited, Kari. I agree 100%.

Kari:

I've learned something from you, Betsy.

Betsy:

No, that's really true. And it can be a really secret part of the partnership and it's much better if it's a transparent part of the partnership that you're thinking about. And those outcomes, as I said, can be rewards for both organizations. So it's something to be really cognizant of.

Kari:

So I have a question that bubbles up for me, Betsy. Sometimes in doing this evaluation, in looking at these six elements between the two organizations, perhaps it's multiple organizations, who are working together, does it ever result in an ending of a collaboration?

Betsy:

I don't think that that's out of the realm of possibility. But I do think that more often it ends because you don't look at these things. So, I think often in my experience with organizational partnerships, we really start to take our organizational partner for granted and we stop recognizing the contributions that they make. We definitely stop rewarding them for the contributions that they make. And it makes it hard for us to really consider the specific roles, and it feels like the role is heavier on our side and they might be feeling the role as heavier on their side and it starts to be working a side by side rather than a partnership.

Betsy:

And by checking back in on these things, sometimes instead of ending it makes us think, "Oh yes, this partnership really does work because you're sending out that newsletter in that way. This partnership really does work because this space is great and I can access this space because of the work that we do together." Those things sort of come to light and it also can be, "Oh, I didn't know that you thought that was my role. Yeah, I better start doing that." So, it can really result in those kinds of conversations that help you sustain the partnership rather than ending it.

Kari:

Yes. So, evaluating this partnership nurtures it, strengthens it, and makes it more likely to continue. That makes a lot of sense.

Betsy:

Done well, it really can. It really can.

Kari:

Great. All of those elements really helpful. I want to thank you for sharing those as we think about evaluating our collaborative efforts with our youth programs. And again, those six elements are recognition, respect, role, relationships, reward, and results.

Kari:

To sum it up, make sure when you are collaborating, partnering with other organizations, you're not only evaluating the impacts on young people, but that you are evaluating the collaboration between the two organizations.

Betsy:

Right. It will pay off big time to think about and be really intentional about measuring, considering how you engage with your partner will help you be successful and be able to sustain a partnership over a long period of time. I think it adds just a lot of strength to our organizational partnerships.

Kari:

You can hear the excitement and interest and expertise that Betsy has in this area. She has a blog on this topic in our youth development insight blog and I would encourage you to head on over to our blog, read what she has to say there, and then comment and start a discussion of ideas you have of evaluating the collaborative efforts you have with other organizations to just make the best programming we can for young people in our communities.

Betsy:

And there's a lot of great research on collaboration, the elements of collaboration that's linked there to the sources that I cited from Tom Wolf and Ghilleen Kay and Ira Resnick are all there too, so pop one in and check it out.

Kari:

Thank you, Betsy.

Betsy:

Thank you so much, Kari.

Kari:

Now before we bring this podcast to an official close, I'd like to remind you to visit our website at www.extension.umn.edu/youth. There you will learn information about training, education, and tools for youth workers, and you can check out our Minnesota 4H program if you aren't already involved. Thanks again for joining me today, Betsy.

Betsy:

Thank you so much for having me. It's a real pleasure.

Kari:

Well, this is Kari Robideau from the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development. Please tune in again soon.