



Evaluation Hui

Toward Guidelines for Culturally Responsible Evaluation and Research

Overview

What is culturally responsible evaluation? Should a set of standards for evaluation and research be developed to better serve the Hawaiian population? Are the current approaches and methodologies for program evaluation and research appropriate for the Hawaiian population?

These were some of the questions discussed at a recent gathering of evaluators, program administrators, researchers, and educators serving the Hawaiian population. The Policy Analysis and System Evaluation (PASE) department at Kamehameha Schools and the Kohala Center, a privately funded, independent academic center, sponsored the event on January 10, 2003 as a forum to address these pressing issues.

This paper presents PASE's interpretations of the main issues that emerged at the hui and is intended to be a catalyst for further discussion.

Meeting Format

This first meeting of the Evaluation Hui consisted of a four-hour session that allowed for both small group discussion and large group reporting. Participants divided into eight groups to address specific questions distributed prior to the meeting regarding the usefulness of nationally recognized principles for evaluation. Each group exchanged ideas about cultural sensitivity and evaluation methods, and discussed protocol for evaluation in the Native Hawaiian population and other native cultures. Representatives from each group then shared highlights with the entire hui.

Why is Culturally Responsible Evaluation Important?

Participants generally agreed that defining what is meant by "Hawaiian-focused evaluation" is of critical importance. The question has many different answers and underscored all of our activities. One group of participants ventured the following possible definitions for Hawaiian-focused evaluation:

- Evaluation done by a Hawaiian evaluator. (Would evaluators bring their own culture into the process? Would a Hawaiian or Western paradigm be followed?)
- Evaluation of the Hawaiian population done by a non-Hawaiian evaluator.
- Evaluation of *programs* that target Hawaiians, done by either a Hawaiian or non-Hawaiian evaluator.

Our counterparts, the Maori Evaluation Hui, have offered a definition of Maori-focused evaluation: "... the tools, processes, existing models, resources, and in particular, evaluation findings, that can be better utilized by Iwi and Maori service providers."

Based on this working definition, PASE suggests that Hawaiian-focused evaluation could be defined as "frameworks, measures, and procedures that most fairly represent the experiences of Hawaiian peoples and that yield information most useful to them." The challenge would then become identifying what – concretely and specifically – is unique to the Hawaiian experience, history, and culture that would make good evaluation practice within the Hawaiian community distinct from good evaluation in any other community.

The idea of evaluation training was also discussed: where it happens, who does the training, and how it plays a role in culturally responsible evaluation work.

Principles and Standards

The American Evaluation Association (AEA) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) both have sound professional principles and standards that their members follow. The main purpose of these principles and standards is to protect the population being served and to maintain the integrity of research.

Participants felt that the existing professional principles and standards should be upheld, but that we need to consider several additional thoughts for Hawaiian-focused evaluation. Among these, the

responsibility and accountability to not only the funding agency, but also to the Hawaiian community, should be foremost. Group participants argued that evaluators working with the Hawaiian community need to have an understanding of and respect for the Hawaiian culture. Evaluators working with the Hawaiian population should be culturally competent.

Overarching Considerations for Evaluation of Hawaiians

Procedures for conducting evaluations usually include defining the questions carefully, using valid and reliable measures and data collection methods, and interpreting findings appropriately. Participants pondered issues regarding proper procedures or protocols to observe for Hawaiian-focused evaluation. Many felt that a set of acceptable Hawaiian-focused evaluation procedures should include and respect language, culture, and relationships. For example, procedures should be established to accommodate language variations (Hawaiian, pidgin, etc.). Regional differences should also be expected and understood. In addition, participants recommended that procedures be set to establish relationships between “program deliverers” and “program subjects.”

Participants emphasized that clear roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities must be explicit in the procedures. Because evaluation is most effective when applied to improve programs, it was recommended that procedures be set for long-term program evaluation studies and/or long-term effects. The chief concerns were that evaluators be informed about unique Hawaiian culture and concepts, and that evaluators possess the knowledge of the community or target population as a starting place for cultural competency. Vital to this process are procedures for obtaining the target population’s perspective throughout the evaluation process. Evaluators should also utilize appropriate, unbiased evaluation tools that are both reliable and valid.

Hawaiian-focused Evaluation Framework/Model Design

Current approaches to program evaluation range from the “friendly consultant” models preferred by some to the “gold standard” of randomized designs. Recognizing that evaluation design must be appropriate to the circumstances, participants formulated suggestions specific to Hawaiian-focused evaluation that may be useful for designing evaluation frameworks.

The broad themes discussed included trust, long-term relationships, long-term studies, evaluation participants, local involvement, the importance of interpersonal relations, empowerment, participatory evaluation frameworks, and the need for flexibility and fluidity.

Participants suggested that evaluators explore the quality of relationships between “program deliverers” and “program subjects.” Participants felt that interpersonal relationships may resonate with the Hawaiian population. Aside from possessing the necessary technical evaluation skills, the evaluation design should be comprehensive from a Hawaiian culture perspective. Furthermore, when formulating evaluation questions, the evaluator should consider the “context” of the Hawaiian community and choose questions appropriate to that context.

Sample Selection: What is “Hawaiian”?

Sample selection and study participant descriptions are important for generalizable results and meta-analyses. Participants discussed the definitional issues or possible guidelines regarding how “Hawaiian” is defined for the purpose of evaluation. Concerns arose on how federal agencies may use different definitions in their own studies. It seemed the common consensus for an immediate guideline was, “Ma ka li’ili’i loa: it (the definition of Hawaiian) should be made clear.” That is, the definition of Hawaiian should be clearly defined from the beginning of the evaluation process.

Some participants raised the issue of what constitutes a Hawaiian. Is it blood quantum, value-based, or perpetuation of culture? Is being Hawaiian a regional definition, or can it be defined as a race, an ethnic group or by ancestry? The group recognized that defining Hawaiian is an ongoing controversy in the current political environment.

Participants also discussed demographic considerations unique to Hawaiian-focused evaluation, indicating that generic measures, such as poverty indicators, have failed to be as meaningful as some research would convey. Whereas most evaluators use the federally established poverty line as a reference point for measuring financial well-being, income may not necessarily be the only indicator of wealth or quality of life for the Hawaiian population

Other participants questioned why evaluation studies compare the Hawaiian population with other ethnic groups when Hawaiians have unique

characteristics. The question was raised, “Why not compare Hawaiians to Hawaiians?”

Outcome Measures

Outcome measures are often challenging, but are essential to program evaluation. Participants discussed the unique aspects of outcome measures for Hawaiian-focused evaluation, and expressed that outcome measures should be culturally appropriate. In addition, participants said there is a need to understand and include goals and definitions of successful outcomes from the population being evaluated. According to some participants, Western measures may not always be fair or representative. Some participants expressed that affective measures need to be revisited, and that cognitive measures only capture certain aspects relevant to the Hawaiian community. In Hawaiian culture, values such as spirituality, quality of relationships, and internalized learning may not be measurable, but are meaningful and should be taken into account.

Participants also agreed that evaluators must be aware that great diversity exists within the Hawaiian community. For example, methods that work in the Waimanalo community may not work in Kalihi or on Ni’ihau. Furthermore, the logic model in program evaluation can be viewed as a “closed system,” and may be inappropriate for some Hawaiian programs, but a useful starting point for others. Overall, outcomes for Hawaiian-focused evaluation should be project-based and meaningful.

In measuring the effectiveness of Hawaiian cultural programs, culture awareness and/or perpetuation of culture are ideal outcomes. Participants generally agreed, however, that before cultural awareness and/or perpetuation of culture can be examined, Hawaiian culture must first be defined.

Participants ventured that cultural awareness and perpetuation of culture can be measured by setting specific, measurable outcomes that demonstrate knowledge of Hawaiian culture. This may be done orally or through focus groups. Again, participants emphasized that Hawaiian culture should be viewed holistically and comprehensively, and recognized that it will always encompass certain aspects that may not necessarily be measurable.

Data Collection

Good evaluation depends on reliable data-collection methods and meaningful, valid

information. Participants discussed possible Hawaiian cultural protocols for data collection, and maintained that certain methods may work better than others. Participants emphasized how language plays a role in data collection. Evaluators must be mindful that Hawaiian is an official language of the state, and that pidgin is commonly used in the Hawaiian community.

Participants discussed different methods that work for the Hawaiian community. Preferred formats include informal settings, focus groups, and “talk story” sessions. Confidentiality is critical. Allowing for open-ended comments and intergenerational involvement may also enhance data collection.

The hui also discussed the benefits gained by including members on the evaluation team who have relationships with or a similar background as the Hawaiian community. If the evaluator is an outsider, utilizing a cultural “bridge” (person or group) may be empowering. The Hawaiian community liaison may help inform the outside evaluator. Potential conflicts may arise with this method; however, a long-range plan may be to empower members of the community by training them about evaluation.

Proper protocol must also be observed. For example, food is an important tool to connect people, and cultural norms guide who speaks first in group settings. Participants again stressed the importance of showing respect – trust and flexibility are fundamental in obtaining quality data from the Hawaiian community.

Data Analysis/Interpretation

Data analysis and interpretation present many challenges, such as questions about how to compare findings across sites, new research and analytic designs with small sample sizes, and integrating qualitative and quantitative designs to contextualize information. Participants discussed unique considerations for Hawaiian-focused evaluation with regard to data analysis and interpretation, and possible solutions or practices other evaluators may have adapted.

Participants mentioned that human subject reviews (by culturally sensitive review boards) prior to analysis may provide some assurances. When funded by various government and/or external sources, the final purpose and release of the evaluation must be established at the start of the study. Participants agreed that considerable caution should be used in

intergroup comparisons. Some suggested that intragroup comparisons and the goals of a specific group should be considered in data analysis. Comparability across sites or studies may not always be possible.

Some participants also pointed out that the data collection model itself (collect data, analyze, and interpret) may not be appropriate for Hawaiian-focused evaluation because it does not allow for intuition, and not everything is always quantifiable. Participants highly recommended using both quantitative and qualitative methods, at minimum. Multiple sources of data for multiple purposes are needed to form the “whole picture” of the target population.

Communicating Results

In the political arena, communicating results to different audiences can be challenging, especially if the findings and recommendations suggest a need for change. Participants discussed unique aspects of communicating results from a Hawaiian-focused evaluation, approaches that have been effective in conveying the message, and the need for establishing culturally sensitive guidelines for communicating results.

Several recommendations were made. First, a key guideline is to involve the stakeholders throughout the evaluation process (e.g., with methods). Second, open communication helps facilitate trust and reciprocity. Third, power and trust are factors in communicating results. Being aware of who has the power is vital. Fourth, communication must be delivered in a way that is sensitive to the audience and to the population being evaluated. Participants suggested that the use of metaphors and stories in conveying results may be appropriate. Ideally, decision-makers should be present to communicate both good and bad news.

Participants also discussed the need for greater balance. Evaluators must examine and communicate strengths as well as opportunities for improvement. Too often, Hawaiians have been pathologized and discussed in terms of negative outcomes.

Communicating and using findings for improvement are ongoing processes that do not end at the “results” stage of evaluation. Describing the purpose of the evaluation, how results will be used, and the opportunities to provide input should be part of the communication process. Finally and most importantly, relationships with stakeholders are key to future research and must be treated with respect.

PASE's Role

PASE supports Kamehameha Schools' mission to create educational opportunities in perpetuity to improve the capability and well-being of people of Hawaiian ancestry. To this end, PASE conducts scientific studies that determine the impact of Kamehameha Schools' policies and programs. PASE also informs the community about the well-being and educational needs of people of Hawaiian ancestry through various research activities.

PASE believes that reliable and valid measurement, meaningful statistics, solid research, and genuine collaboration are fundamental for creating high-quality knowledge. Furthermore, PASE strives to perform these tasks in a culturally responsible way.

PASE maintains that culturally responsible evaluation and research must go beyond the Western paradigm. We believe current methodologies for program evaluation and research may not always be appropriate for the Hawaiian population. Our goal: to work with other organizations to consider the needs of Hawaiian and indigenous populations. Our quest: to create and begin using a set of culturally responsible evaluation and research standards, procedures, and methodologies developed collectively by members of the Evaluation Hui.

Next Steps for the Evaluation Hui

PASE proposes that the journey toward developing guidelines for culturally responsible evaluation and research can begin with the following steps:

1. Form an Evaluation Hui planning committee.
2. Draft guidelines for culturally responsible, Hawaiian-focused evaluation and research.
3. Reconvene the second meeting of the Evaluation Hui to present draft guidelines.

From the great turnout and the stimulating discussion at the first meeting, we hope that these important issues will attract even more participants for the next Evaluation Hui in fall 2003. We welcome other viewpoints and hope to receive feedback and responses from other organizations serving the Hawaiian community. If you would like to be included in the hui or want more information, please contact Dr. Shawn Kanaiaupuni at Kamehameha Schools at (808) 541-5365 or shkanaia@ksbe.edu or Betsy Cole of the Kohala Center at (808) 885-8858 or bcole@kohalacenter.org. For a full accounting of the hui's proceedings, go to http://www.ksbe.edu/services/pase/pdf_lib/AllGroups.pdf.