

Collaborative Workshop: Embedding evaluation into higher education programs

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Abstract

With a seemingly diminishing pool of funds, STARS practitioners are acutely aware of the need to have and demonstrate impact to maximise the likelihood of ongoing funding streams. While research can provide support to assertions of impact, evaluation provides a more holistic framework through which the complexities of program activities, outputs and outcomes can be accurately reported and acted upon. This workshop will outline applied learnings from the successful implementation of an embedded evaluation model into an effective outreach program. It will provide STARS practitioners with knowledge around differences between evaluation and research, program theory and logic, and how evaluation can be embedded within programs and institutions. Participants will exit the workshop with the necessary knowledge and skills to develop their own program logics and solid evaluation frameworks in their own contexts.

Introduction

With the cessation of OLT funding still fresh in many STARS practitioners' memories and the pending conclusion of HEPPP funding in 2020, people working to improve outcomes in the sector are understandably wary of funding continuity and ongoing positive impact. In this context, managers and practitioners involved in this work must understand their impacts, how they can be reported and how information about program efficacy can be used to show the effects of their work to funders. They should also be able to improve programs as they are being delivered.

In the academic context, the role of evaluation is often not as visible as research, but it is crucial in achieving and measuring program objectives in higher education. This is reflected in the inclusion of evaluation statements in guidelines governing HEPPP (Higher Education Support Act 2003 - Other Grants Guidelines (Education) 2012 (DIISRTE), 2012) and conditions of grant documents governing many competitive tenders. Although program managers do discuss evaluation when designing higher education programs, it is often in a post-hoc context and rarely in ways that contribute meaningfully to program design and implementation.

Properly undertaken, however, evaluation traces a link from funding through to the program outcomes, providing a capture of all of the steps along the way. Evaluation thus has the ability to contribute to program design, negotiate complex pathways and environments, and support assertions around causal chains linking funding to outcomes. It can also shift program focus from deliverables and the number of people programs reach (outputs and audiences) to the actual program impact (outcomes). Evaluation sets in place critical thinking around differences between correlation and causation, and creates a context in which program staff are not satisfied with simply correlating results and reporting them as outcomes.

To channel John Hattie, our fundamental task must be to evaluate the effect of our work on students' success in higher education; to 'know thy impact' (Hattie, 2012, p. 19). However, knowing thy impact is not simply a matter of deciding to evaluate a program. There are many

choices to be made, including whether a program will be evaluated internally or externally Conley-Tyler (2005), and the methods involved. While evaluative thinking has not yet evolved fully within higher education, the lessons learnt from leading sectors in evaluation such as health and through the evaluation profession allow a great deal of insight into what is likely to work.

Workshop description

Now in its fifth year, Charles Sturt University's (CSU) HEPPP funded Future Moves widening participation program has succeeded in not only meeting key long term outcomes related to improved enrolment among students from partner schools, but also as a model of how to successfully implement evaluation at a program level. Through embedding an evaluator into the Future Moves program (Downing & Rogan, 2016), the manager and program staff were able to adapt the program as it developed and successfully achieve its desired outcomes. Originally funded by a two year HEPPP competitive grant, the program now continues under CSU's HEPPP formula allocation.

This workshop will outline the development and implementation of the Future Moves 'Embedded Evaluation' model as originally outlined within Downing and Rogan (2016), and provide participants with the opportunity to begin developing their own embedded evaluation models for existing or future programs. The facilitator will bring knowledge from the evaluation profession around 'the theory, practice and use of evaluation' (Australasian Evaluation Society, 2016) into the STARS sphere, providing important contextual knowledge around how governments use evaluation in decision making, as well as realistic ways in which good quality evaluation can be undertaken in the STARS context.

STARS themes

This workshop is aimed at improving the ability of participants to measure outcomes against all five topic areas in the STARS context and react to these findings. More specifically, this workshop will expand on 'application of learning analytics' within the *Success* topic to broaden an understanding of success into one which takes into account the value of a program against its funding and its intended outcomes. In this context, the workshop will explore the 'application of evaluation' to the student experience and program development.

Intended audience

The intended audience for this workshop is all people who are working in the STARS context, with a focus on those with responsibility for budgets and program outcomes. This includes but is not limited to program managers, coordinators, directors and senior university leaders. Those interested in engaging external evaluators are welcome, as are practising evaluators working within the STARS context. Researchers who wish to understand how evaluation could frame research within a broader, funding-specific context may also benefit.

Workshop learning outcomes

The immediate learning outcomes of this workshop will be:

- Participants will have improved knowledge in:
 - How evaluation is interpreted and used by decision makers
 - Key differences between evaluation and research
 - The role of program theory and program logic in program design, implementation and evaluation

- Developing program logics, including defining and understanding their components: Inputs, activities, outputs, audiences and outcomes
- The embedded evaluation model, including how it could be implemented in participants' own contexts

Following the workshop and in their own practice, participants will be able to develop and implement basic program logics relating to their own programs.

Intended impacts of workshop

The intended broader, long term impacts of this workshop are to:

- Increase the level of quality evaluation practice in STAR-aligned higher education programs
- Increase the utilisation of evaluation findings in the ongoing improvement of program quality
- Enhance the quality of internal and external compliance reports through a focus on reporting outcomes

Resources provided

The facilitator will distribute resources digitally by email prior to the workshop with sufficient time to print hard copies if desired. A limited number of hard copies will be made available on the day. Participants are encouraged to use laptops or mobile devices during the workshop to view resources, complete activities and take notes.

Participants will be provided with digital copies of the following relevant, key evaluation texts (classic and modern – see References for details):

- Clifford, D. L., & Sherman, P. (1983). Internal evaluation: Integrating program evaluation and management. *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, 1983(20), 23-45. doi:10.1002/ev.1349
- Conley-Tyler, M. (2005). A fundamental choice: internal or external evaluation? *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 4(1/2), 3-11.
- Downing, L. (2017). The emerging equity evaluation landscape in higher education. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 17(1), 11. Retrieved from <http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;res=IELBUS;dn=651667981009884>
- Downing, L., & Rogan, S. (2016). Evaluation as an integrated management tool: Embedding an evaluator into a program. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 16(2), 4-14. Retrieved from <http://search.informit.com.au/fullText;dn=083530054376107;res=IELBUS>
- Huber, E., & Harvey, M. (2016). Project evaluation in higher education: A study of contextual issues. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 16(1), 19. Retrieved from <http://search.informit.com.au/fullText;dn=839065458678074;res=IELBUS>
- Sonnichsen, R. C. (1988). Advocacy evaluation: A model for internal evaluation offices. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 11(2), 141-148. doi:[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0149-7189\(88\)90005-5](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0149-7189(88)90005-5)
- Volkov, B. B. (2011). Beyond being an evaluator: The multiplicity of roles of the internal evaluator. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 2011(132), 25-42. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ev.394/pdf>

Participants will also be provided with templates to use in their own evaluative work, including:

- Program logic
- Program logic mapping tool

In addition, participants will be provided with a series of electronic ‘cheat sheets’ outlining key evaluation concepts covered during the workshop.

Workshop outline

Elapsed time	Minutes	Activity	Educational objective / Aim
0:00	5	Facilitator introduction	
0:05	10	Participant introduction: ‘What does evaluation mean to you?’	- Ice breaker: Facilitator to gain understanding of participants’ contexts
0:15	12	What is evaluation?	- How evaluation is interpreted and used by decision makers - Key differences between evaluation and research - The role of program theory and program logic in program design, implementation and evaluation
0:27	10	The Embedded Evaluation Model: Overview	- Understanding of the embedded evaluation model, including how it could be implemented in their own context.
0:37	45	Applying evaluation to your own context	- Developing program logics, including defining and understanding their components: Inputs, activities, outputs, audiences and outcomes
1:22	8	Summary and evaluation	- Reinforcement of key points - Next steps for participants - Evaluation of session
1:30		END	

References

- Australasian Evaluation Society. (2016). About the Australasian Evaluation Society. Retrieved from <https://www.aes.asn.au/about-us.html>
- Clifford, D. L., & Sherman, P. (1983). Internal evaluation: Integrating program evaluation and management. *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, 1983(20), 23-45. doi:10.1002/ev.1349
- Conley-Tyler, M. (2005). A fundamental choice: internal or external evaluation? *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 4(1/2), 3-11.
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- Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*: Routledge.
- Higher Education Support Act 2003 - Other Grants Guidelines (Education) 2012 (DIISRTE), (2012).
- Huber, E., & Harvey, M. (2016). Project evaluation in higher education: A study of contextual issues. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 16(1), 19. Retrieved from <http://search.informit.com.au/fullText;dn=839065458678074;res=IELBUS>
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