



Participatory Process and Rural Development: Lessons from a National Program

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Rural and Cooperatives Secretariat

- The Rural and Cooperatives Secretariat (RCS) aims to improve the quality of life in rural communities so these regions can compete in the global economy
- It also works to ensure that federal policies and programs respond to the needs of these communities
- In its lead role in the rural file, the RCS develops partnerships amongst federal departments, provinces and rural stakeholders in areas such as knowledge building, policy development and the implementation of rural development strategies

Models for Rural Development and Community Capacity Building

- February 2005: The Models Program
 - ❖ Designed to test previously successful community development models that addressed local challenges, and to replicate these models in other communities across Canada to identify the factors that contribute to successful replication
- Aims of Models Program
 - ❖ Inform future programming
 - ❖ Identify successful processes and approaches for rural development
 - ❖ Understand the impacts of government supports and interventions at the community level
- A research program that examined 21 models of rural community development, consisted of more than 60 sites involving nearly 300 communities from all provinces/territories (program ended March 2008)

Themes of Models Program

- Each model developed and applied their own frameworks for evaluating and reporting on:
 - ❖ Specific capacities enhanced in implementing their models
 - ❖ Various lessons learned as part of implementation
 - ❖ The impact of their model on their communities
- Themes explored for RCS:
 - ❖ Contributions of partnerships/networks to model replication
 - ❖ Extent to which community capacities were built at the site and model levels
 - ❖ Role of **participatory approach in implementation and evaluation**

Participatory Processes

- The Participatory Approach to Community Development
 - ❖ Response to top-down development paradigm of 1960s and 1970s
 - ❖ Those that reap benefits and costs of development are directly involved in and take ownership of decision-making process
 - ❖ Aims to be bottom-up, community-driven, empowering, educative, liberating
 - ❖ Aligns with place-based approaches – bottom-up, community driven, needs based, stresses partnerships, collaborations and shared ownership
 - Participatory Approach to Evaluation
 - ❖ Various language and terminology used in literature; we use definition similar to that applied to Practical Participatory Evaluation:
 - *Participative process aims to increase the use of evaluation results through the involvement of intended users in the design and administration of program evaluations*
 - *Participants may also share responsibility for evaluation report with external evaluator*
- (Smits & Champagne, 2004; Turnbull, 1999): 5

General Principles of Participatory Approach

- Model proponents required to adopt PA to model implementation and evaluation
- Various forms of PA adopted, but most followed general principles of PA
 - ❖ Shared purpose
 - ❖ Equal opportunity
 - ❖ Inclusive, not exclusive
 - ❖ Respect for different interests
 - ❖ Voluntary participation
 - ❖ Accountability and learning
 - ❖ Designed by those involved
 - ❖ Flexible
 - ❖ Time

Benefits of a Participatory Approach

- Participatory evaluation is an inclusive process, which fosters positive involvement of all stakeholders in the project
- Results are measured during the project, allowing for evaluation of changes over the life of the project, not just results at the end
- The path of the project can be altered or improved in response to on-going measurement of results, thus improving the final result
- Collaboration is furthered through the process of PA evaluation and the community ends up with skills that they did not have before (capacity building)
- Results from similar projects in other communities can be compared and measured

Challenges of a Participatory Approach

- Not all participants have the same power
- Some methods for evaluation will be new to some participants, familiar to others
- Different participants know more about different parts of the project
- It can take more time to work together
- Participants may not have a clear idea of what they need and want from the project and evaluation
- It is easier to measure how many people participated than what difference their participation made
- It is difficult to compare results with non-program communities
- Results from multiple communities need to be added up and compared

Research and Analysis of Models Program

- Model proponents provided research results and analysis within individual site and model reporting
- External consultants provided input, synthesis and analysis at various stages throughout the program
 - ❖ Special Consultant to RCS, Nelson Rogers
 - ❖ New Rural Economy Group
 - ❖ R.A. Malatest and Associates Inc.
- RCS Models Steering Committee facilitated the work of external consultants
- RCS Staff provided valuable feedback at an internal evaluation workshop and throughout the life of the program

Lessons Learned: Implementing the Model

- Access to information, tools and training
 - ❖ Proponents need information, tools and training to develop a comprehensive understanding of participatory approach (PA)
- Multi-stakeholder involvement
 - ❖ Involving all levels of community (seniors, youth, businesses, etc.) and other stakeholder groups (NGO's, government agencies, education/academic institutions) increases creativity, access to resources, expertise, and solutions
- Flexible timelines and funding arrangements
 - ❖ Flexible funding supports face-to-face meetings (incl. travel) necessary to foster partnership development and commitment by all participants, esp. rural
- Personal rather than institutional relationships
 - ❖ Personal involvement increases levels of trust and willingness to engage and cooperate; fosters ownership and generates empowerment

Lessons Learned: Implementing the Model

- Strong leadership and coordination
 - ❖ A full-time, paid coordinator at the start is key to maintaining 'big picture' vision, momentum for the PA process and success (e.g., models delayed due to lack of coordinator)
- Open and strong communication
 - ❖ PA requires strong and open communication between partners, proponents, community members and coordinators
 - ❖ Communication is enhanced via presence of coordinator who can arrange meetings and ensure communication is timely
- Mutual benefits
 - ❖ PA reduces barriers and demonstrates mutual benefits rather than competing for scarce resources; partners instead of competitors
- Community mobilization
 - ❖ PA results in strong ties between participants, increased buy-in and enthusiasm, and mobilization of community to create change



“There was a bit of difficulty sorting out at the model level what the participatory approach [should] look like. And although everyone understood the theory...it’s another [thing] to live it”

“Absolutely paramount was regular in-person, face-to-face meetings... The openness and dynamics of the group...people could air concerns without fear of reprimand”

Lessons Learned: Evaluating the Model

- Access to information, tools and training
 - ❖ Proponents need access to information, tools and training to develop a comprehensive understanding of participatory evaluation
- Time factor
 - ❖ Important to accommodate input from multiple participants and allow for participants to understand PA evaluation and develop an evaluation process (e.g., suitable language: 'evaluation' to 'valuing')
- Community applicability and utility
 - ❖ PA evaluation ensures results are useful to the community as participants from the community are developing and implementing their own evaluation
- Evaluation as learning not simply accountability
 - ❖ Reveals evaluation as a way to value and improve one's work, not as a measure of failure/success that may lead to denial of resources



“I think the biggest thing that the RS gave us was time... You don’t get that opportunity very much with government funding”

“Without the participatory nature people become wary about why this is happening and what’s in it for them. The participatory element really starts to answer those questions...It instills a sense of ownership among community...”

KII Respondents, Final Evaluation Report, R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd.

Lessons Learned: Implementing the Program

- Multi-year and flexible funding arrangements
 - ❖ 3-years allowed for flexibility (funding allocations and time for start-up and strengthening of partnerships)
- Streamlined and simplified reporting
 - ❖ Less complicated reporting systems (suggestions of a universal streamlined reporting system)
- Tools and support for PA
 - ❖ Streamlined and simplified participatory evaluation (universal) guidelines, early PA and evaluation training and ongoing PA and evaluation support (e.g., from ongoing participation from RS)
- Pre-planned exit strategies and follow-up
 - ❖ Follow-up after cessation of funding; analysis and communication plan before the implementation of the model
- Consistent government involvement
 - ❖ On-going communication with proponents; contingencies for staff turnover; personal involvement



“[The RS] participated as participants; they brought a voice to the table. Their voice was a contributor, they didn’t have an overly privileged position by virtue of being a funder. Nor did they request a privileged position.”

KII Respondents, Final Evaluation Report, R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd.

Lessons Learned: Evaluating the Program

- Community impacts/outcomes
 - ❖ Attribution of community-level impacts/outcomes to model activities tenuous; requires more time for community-level contributions
- Baseline data and instruments
 - ❖ Semi-structured, consistent and ongoing data collection (qualitative and quantitative) to capture stories and facilitate analysis, comparability and roll-up
 - ❖ Balance between community needs and needs of program evaluation
- Evidence-based analysis plan
 - ❖ At the outset, a clear and evidence-based plan for analysis of information from proponents, including roles and responsibilities of analysts
- Integrated program and policy goals
 - ❖ Analysis and results linked to overall goals of program and policy
- Support for program staff
 - ❖ Early and ongoing provision to program staff tools, resources, training and information for program requirements (e.g., PA), reporting, evaluation, etc.



“Come north and listen to northerners. If you are going to do business in the north you must streamline your process. You must also make everything available in the appropriate languages.”

“With so few people in a community, everyone has to wear more than one hat and contribute to different organizations in different ways.”

KII Respondents, Final Evaluation Report, R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd.

Implications for PA Programming

- PA time-consuming for proponents and program delivery – build flexibility into process, including flexibility to accommodate learning and changes due to evaluation feedback and for project to mature naturally
- PA in rural different from urban (e.g., geography, capacity issues) – consider travel and pre-assessment tools in funding arrangements; stress personal involvement over organizational; ensure consistency (e.g., have plan for staff turnover)
- PA can be complicated - important for agency implementing program and proponents to have a good understanding of PA concepts and process; provide access to support and training throughout
- Follow-up - prepare for some involvement with communities after cessation of program; pre-planned exit and communications strategies



Recognition of Participants

- Thanks to model proponents and participants, including those who participated in follow-up research activities
- Thanks also to RCS program, regional and NCR staff for their significant roles in facilitating program development, implementation and evaluation
- Thanks to all those who contributed to and participated in the research and evaluation activities

Questions

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