

# Families Finding Their Voices: Family-Evaluator Partnerships to Improve Services



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# In this presentation:



- Presenters will share personal experiences and research findings on family involvement in evaluation.
- Participants will learn about ways families can have active, influential roles in developing studies and disseminating findings.
- Participants will be invited to engage in a learning exercise and to share their experiences in evaluation.



# Examples of family involvement in research and policy change

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- **Child Custody**
  - Affected state law
- **FAMPAR**
  - Affected JCAHO standards for residential treatment
- **Outcomes Roundtable for Children and their Families**
  - Affecting the development and financing of a national data infrastructure and a mandate for its use.



# Types of evaluation

- Individual evaluation/assessment
- Process evaluation
- Outcome evaluation
- Cost-benefit analysis
- Participatory, collaborative and empowerment approaches to evaluation



# Context of children's mental health and family involvement

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- Evolution of Systems of Care for Children's Mental Health since 1984 based on CASSP principles
- Emergence of family involvement movement and national Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
- Family roles in all levels of Systems of Care, including evaluation of services



# Comparing research approaches



Traditional	Participatory
Value-free	Explicit, integral values
Researcher is expert	All participants have expertise
Researcher makes decisions	Team makes decisions
Purpose is prediction and generalization	Purpose is to understand experiences in context
Objectivity via distance	Understanding through participation
Dissemination through scholarly work	Utilization of findings for program improvement



# Potential benefits of effective family-evaluator collaboration

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- Increases cultural sensitivity of study
- Improves the instruments/surveys
- Better retention of the study participants
- Incorporation of community context
- More authentic interpretation of the data
- Improves dissemination of the information

(Vander Stoep, Williams, Jones, Green, & Trupin, 1999; Osher & Telesford, 1996; Friesen & Stephens, 1998)



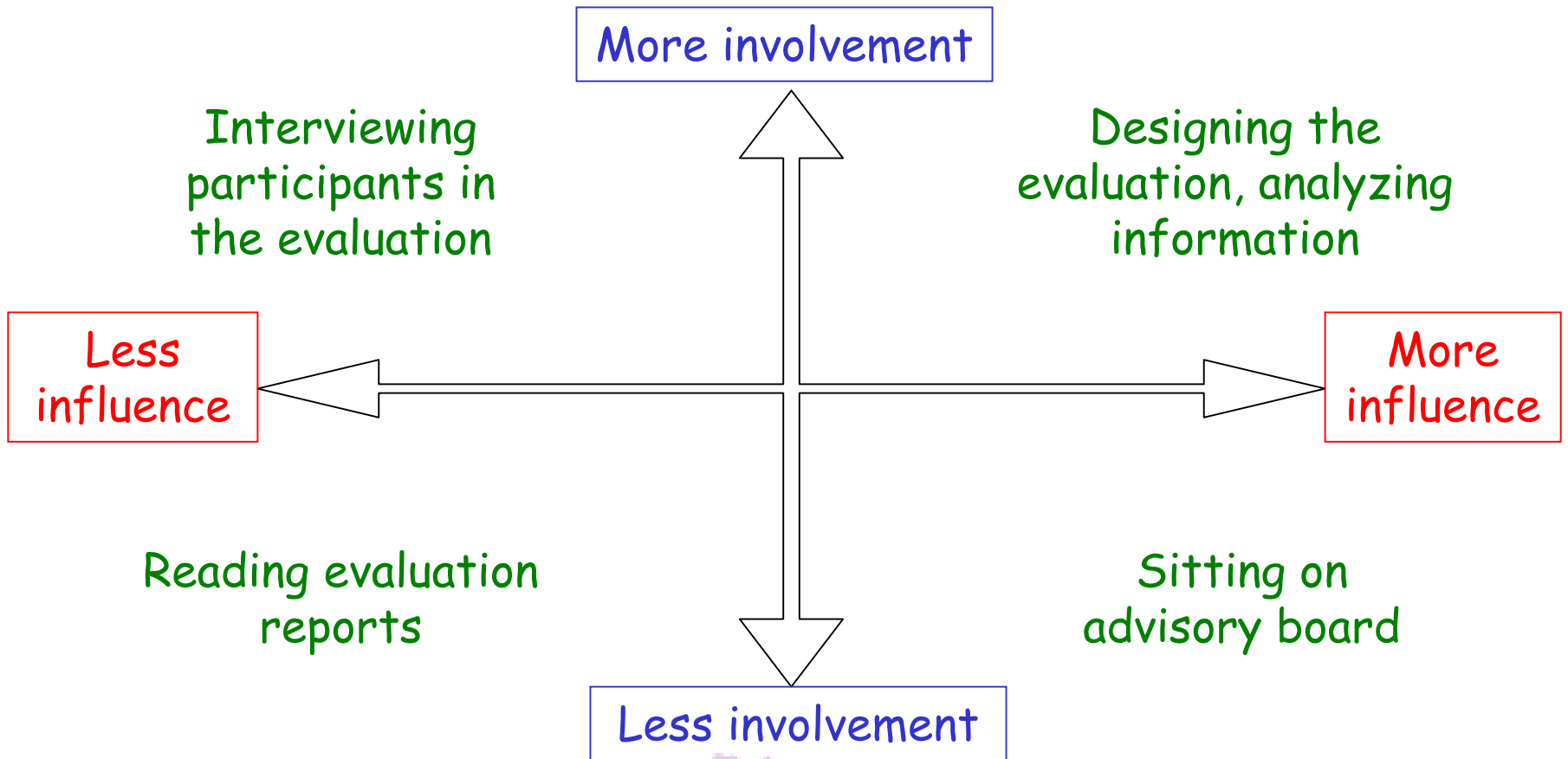
# Potential roles and activities of families in evaluation

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- Collaborate on project development
- Develop instruments/surveys
- Collect data
- Train other family evaluators
- Participate in the decision making
- Analyze data
- Interpret results
- Present data
- Disseminate results



# Involvement and influence of families in evaluations



# Continuum of families' levels of influence in research & evaluation

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- Family-led: Family is employer and researcher is employee
- Family-researcher team: Family and researcher are equal colleagues and make decisions as a team
- Family-assisted: Family is a helper to the researcher; "one-down"
- Professional-centered: Family is the subject and must adapt to the researcher's priorities

(Adapted from National Peer Technical Assistance Network's Partnership for Children's Mental Health, 1998)



# Achieving collaboration exercise

- Groups will decide how to evaluate a family support program in a school setting
- Questions for debriefing:
  - What were the sticking points?
  - How did the group manage disagreements?
  - Did anyone take on a facilitator role, and if so, what did s/he do?



# Example: different perspectives...



The primary description of the King County Blended Funding project from two different reports:

*“[The project] was designed to offer families of children with serious mental illness the unique opportunity to play a powerful role in creating needed supports.”*

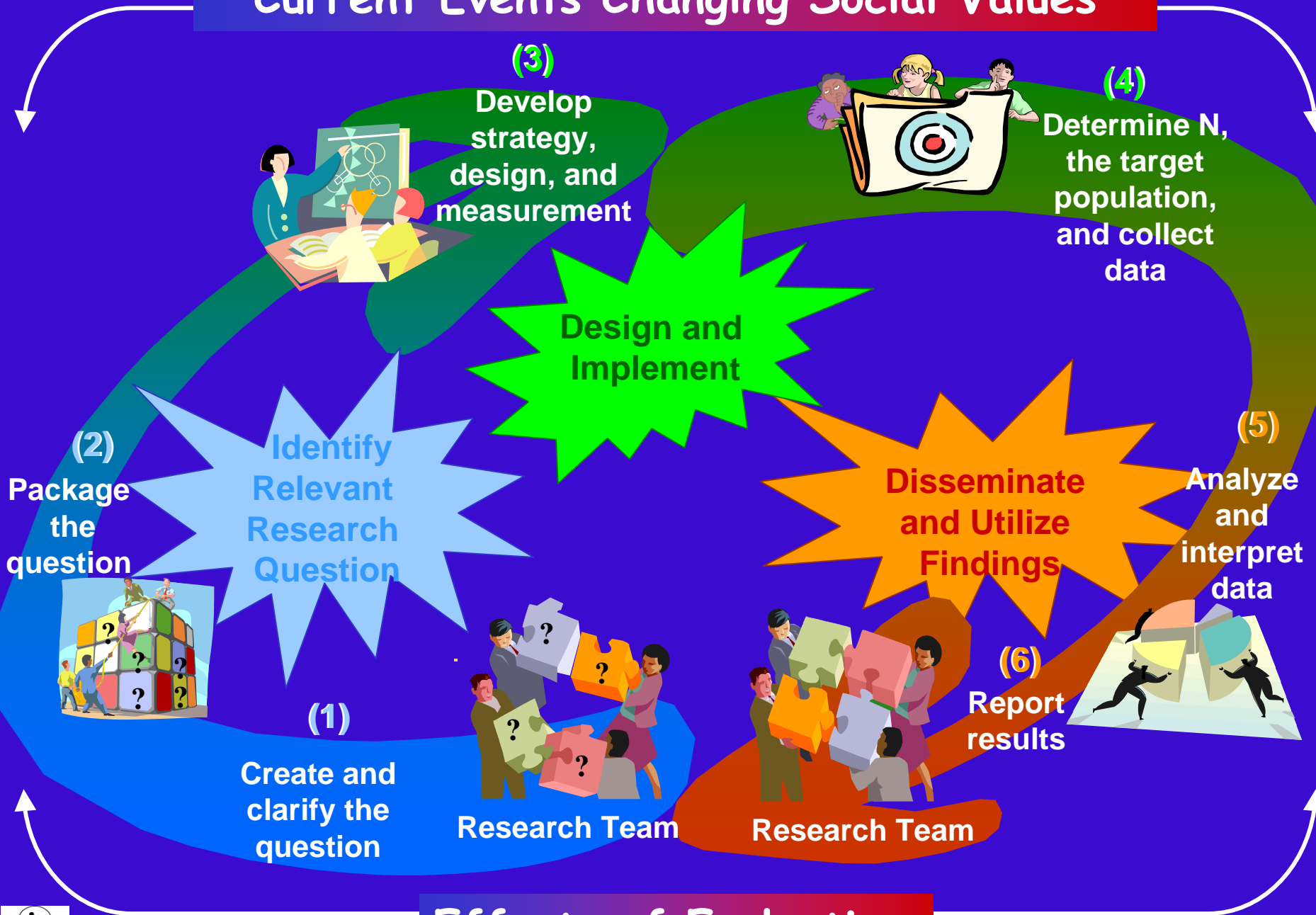
- Federation of Families Year 3 evaluation report.

*“The project blends funding sources and provides community supports.”*

- Department of Social and Human Services legislative report.



# Current Events Changing Social Values



## Effects of Evaluation



# Group dynamics

- "A pattern or process of change, growth, or activity."
- different perspectives of what is important--impact of the program
  - different levels of investment in program success
  - different goals--short term and long term, individual and group
  - different concepts of the cost of capturing information
  - different levels of accountability for and by different audiences and or participants
- The challenge is to create and foster an environment of collaboration.



# Challenges

- Evaluators were not trained to collaborate
- Family members were not trained to do research
- Need to pay family members for their time
- Tension between advocacy and research rigor
- Family related concerns
- Wider community reported to not respect family member input



# Strategies

- Provide training for researchers, evaluators and family members
- Need adequate funding to support collaboration
- Need ongoing discussion about advocacy vs. rigor
- Flexible scheduling and trust
- Professionalizing family roles
- Mutual learning



# Qualities for collaboration



- Evaluator
  - Expectations/intent to collaborate
  - Flexibility
  - Open to learning
  - Strength-based
  - Aware of assumptions
  - Accommodation to different learning styles
- Family member
  - Curiosity
  - Open to learning
  - Basic skills
  - Experience with service delivery system
  - Ability to step outside personal experience



# Family-evaluator collaboration



## Traits:

- Trust, respect, and tolerance for others
- Flexibility and openness to suggestions
- Creativity and curiosity
- Patience
- Honesty
- Willingness to take risks
- Warmth and empathy
- Willingness to share power

Adapted from Myers, Kaufman, & Goldman (1998)



# Family-evaluator collaboration



## Perspectives:

- Recognition that the complexity of the task requires collaboration
- Valuing others' knowledge and contributions
- Valuing diversity of culture, background, and communication
- Shared goals and philosophy
- Commitment to creating and maintaining a safe environment

Adapted from Myers, Kaufman, & Goldman (1998)



# Family-evaluator collaboration



## Knowledge:

- Clarity about roles, especially one's own
- Strategies for collaborative problem solving
- How to work on a team

## Skills:

- Group process and facilitation skills
- Communication skills
- Conflict management skills



# Implications of findings

Research findings and presenter experiences suggest needs for:

- Formal and informal support of family member roles in research & evaluation.
- Pre-professional and ongoing training for researchers & evaluators in collaboration.
- Training for family members in research & evaluation.



# Discussion and Questions



- What have been your experiences in participatory research and evaluation?
- Any questions for the presenters?



# Training resources



- Federation of Families "World of Evaluation" trainings
  - Contact Elaine Slaton, 703-684-7710, [eslaton@ffcmh.org](mailto:eslaton@ffcmh.org)
- Training for family-evaluator collaboration
  - Contact Pauline Jivanjee
  - For project and training updates look on our webpage:  
<http://www.rtc.pdx.edu/pgProjEvaluators.php>



# Contact Information



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