

AUCD Group Facilitation

Topic: UCEDD IMPACT EVALUATION

Facilitator: Christopher Smith, PhD, Director, Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities

Participants: Michael Knox (Rutgers), David Deere (Arkansas), Sharon Milberger (Wayne State), Teresa McCourt (West Virginia), Dan Zhang (Texas A&M), Tafa Tupuola (American Samoa), JoAnn Yuen (Hawaii), Karen Banuck (Einstein NY), Floyd Masga (Northern Mariana Islands).

Introduction: This facilitation focused on three broad-based questions to elicit discussion. These questions and discussions are outlined below, as is a sample of a new model we are working on here at the MCDD. This was a really dynamic discussion. I apologize for any shortcomings in my notes and memories.

1. What is the value of what we do?

This was perhaps the hardest part of the discussion. Most participants kept coming back to core functions as a measure of what we do rather than the measure of the value of what we do. There were mentions of things like decreasing the costs of government, prevention, excellence, training, leadership, and serving as a bridge between the academic and general communities. Participants saw UCEDDs as go-to programs and go-to systems of care, research, and training. One participant reminded the group that consumers, self-advocates and families might see the value of our programs differently, since our discussions of “value” were often at the “aerial” view rather than particular on-the-ground views. Some participants expressed frustrations with the fact that with size and diversity of projects/programs, it is harder for all staff and partners to know what we do much less what is the value of what we do. Overall, the group felt that it is much easier to talk about what we do rather than the value of what we do. Importantly, one participant suggested that she felt that the role of UCEDDs was much like a sentinel, keeping an eye out for resources, partnerships and innovation so that UCEDDs and their partners could stay a mile ahead of trends.

2. How would we know if we achieved our value?

As one could guess from the discussion of the first question, this one was even harder to discuss. Most participants felt that UCEDDs had been leaders in research and evaluation on a number of important disability topics, services and training efforts through the years. But it was also recognized that this leadership has not translated to broader understandings of overall UCEDD impact. In fact, it is the very flexible and dynamic funding from various sources with different evaluation demands that have often led to confusing and diverse understandings of impact. One participant reminded us of the different perspectives of impact and whether we achieved it based on who we asked. The question then would become something like would we know if we achieved our projected value if a consensus of consumers, partners, and staff agree? Or is there a more rigorous way to measure? One participant mentioned the importance of using qualitative

methods to reach out to constituencies over time. Another interesting discussion revolved around the difference between looking for impact in change in something versus achieving something. For instance, is the impact of training measured by pre-and post-test differences across a group? Or should we adopt a model similar to medical and law school where the success of the training is focused on the individuals in the group demonstrating competencies? Finally, participants discussed the need to conceptualize and get a handle on the counterfactual. What would happen if UCEDDs weren't doing what we do? Can we measure that?

3. What are any barriers to evaluating UCEDD evaluation?

Ultimately, most participants agreed that a number of barriers existed to arriving at consensus of any kind of the value of UCEDDs. First, participants noted the often short-lived evaluation efforts of projects and the lack of a long-term, broader focus on UCEDD impact. In addition, funders often want more and stronger methods for their investment, often leading to the need to continue to replicate projects for lack of generalizability across settings. In addition, there was a sense that we often lack good models for combining quantitative and qualitative evidence in our descriptions of UCEDDs. Finally, the group felt the need to keep people with disabilities and their families at the table universally in our efforts to improve our measurement of impact.

4. Example of a model for impact

Below is some information from the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities' planning process with its CAC and other partners in a year-long needs assessment. As a result, we have streamlined our thoughts on potential impacts or outcomes to include: a) Improved access to information (including our core functions of information dissemination, training and TA) and; b) Improved access to services (core function of services). The diagram here is helpful to us and our constituencies to simplify our work and to figure out how to measure its impact. I include this here because the participants asked me for information after I mentioned this work to streamline UCEDD functions and

MCDD 2017-2021 Conceptual Model

