

Evaluation Planning Brief:

Cultural Humility and Responsiveness in Evaluation

Cultural humility in respects the practices and boundaries of a communities methods of doing and being. Culture is always changing and adapting, so cultural humility is an iterative and ongoing process. Cultural responsiveness incorporates cultural humility into the practice of evaluation.

Culturally responsive evaluation principles should be used from the start of the evaluative process, beginning during stakeholder analysis. Cultural responsive evaluations require cultural humility, a concept born from The Department of Health and Human Services definition of cultural competence as, “a set of academic and interpersonal skills that allow individuals to increase their understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and similarities within, among and between groups.”¹ Cultural humility moves beyond this definition, recognizing that an individual is never fully culturally competent. It requires evaluators to thoughtfully consider how they approach evaluation, drawing from a place of humanity to understand the lived experiences of the cultures you are working with. Culturally responsive evaluations work to actively include the perspectives and voices of the races and ethnicities that you are working with. Hernandez & Isaacs² have created the following actionable guidelines:

Develop specific cultural knowledge. Know the relationship between variables and behaviors in the group being evaluated. Only when the norms and values are clearly delineated can they be given proper consideration.

Explicitly examine the theoretical framework that is the foundation of your research. Clearly communicate your own values, beliefs, approach, and world view as the evaluator. Acknowledge and address how these may differ from the perspectives of the group to be evaluated. Whenever possible, have someone on the evaluation team who has knowledge and understanding of the group being evaluated.

Define and measure ethnicity in a meaningful manner. To the degree possible, also define and measure key constructs, such as socioeconomic status, that are known to be associated with ethnicity. If you suspect there is variability within a group, find out if other characteristics have an impact on the data. If other factors are involved, the socioeconomic status or additional factors need to be measured along with race and ethnicity.

Choose measures that are appropriate for all the ethnic groups in your study and/or check those measures you use for their equivalence across groups. Make sure the instrument you are using has cross-cultural equivalence. Do not assume factors correlate across different groups.

Make sure your analyses reflect study questions and that you have sufficient power to get accurate answers. The goal is to accurately interpret the experiences of groups of people to minimize errors throughout the study. For this reason, the evaluation team needs to be involved from the beginning of the implementation stage.

Interpret results to reflect the lives of the people studied. Have someone with knowledge of the group analyze the data alongside the evaluators to point out variables that should be considered.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). Practical Strategies for Culturally Competent Evaluation. Atlanta, GA: US Dept of Health and Human Services. https://www.cdc.gov/dhds/docs/cultural_competence_guide.pdf

2. Hernandez M, Isaacs M. Promoting cultural competence in children’s mental health. In: Promoting Cultural Competence in Children’s Mental Health Services. Baltimore, Md: Brookes Publishing Company; 1998:1-25.