Leading Public Health: Data-Driven Leadership

Episode 7: Contextualizing & Communicating Results

Liz Kidwell (LK): Welcome to Leading Public Health, a podcast from the Region IV Public Health Training Center at Emory University. Through this podcast, we explore current leadership challenges, strategies, and ideas to help build the capacity of the current and future public health workforce. In this series, Data-Driven Leadership, we explore the essential role leaders play in incorporating fairness into program evaluations. You'll gain valuable insights from experts who share practical tools and strategies for measuring and enhancing program impact. This series features prerecorded sessions from a Project ECHO Initiative, offered by the Region IV Public Health Training Center, the Injury Prevention Research Center at Emory, and Safe States Alliance. In our final episode of the series, we focus on contextualizing and communicating results, an essential but often challenging phase. We will hear from Cassandra Frazier, Senior Evaluator at the CDC, specializing in public health program evaluation and capacity building. She will discuss strategies for engaging communities in data interpretation, incorporating lived experiences, and using clear communication methods to make evaluation results meaningful and actionable. All resources shared in the episode will be linked in the show notes, so be sure to check that out after you listen. Let's dive in.

Cassandra Frazier (CF): I am so excited to be with you all this morning. I'm Cassandra Frazier, and I'm going to talk about practical strategies for effectively communicating evaluation findings. Really, the overall objectives for this presentation is to really help us all think differently about how we communicate our evaluation results, learn and understand why it's important to engage communities in this process, and also share some ideas and tips on how to engage the communities and thinking about different ways of communicating and visualizing our information.

I wanted to provide a little bit more context around how I came to focus on communicating evaluation findings and why for me it's such a passion. As mentioned, I have been an evaluator for 20 years now, and I've worked in various sectors, nonprofit sector, state level, federal level, small, very small evaluations, very large and complex evaluations. The biggest love that I have for evaluation and the biggest challenge and frustration has always been communication.

I produced the report. My very first professional report was over 200 pages long, and we hand-delivered it to our program staff and leadership in a binder format and we were quite proud of that. I would just say we've come a long, long, long way from that and a lot of lessons learned. The primary lesson is really understanding the purpose of communicating evaluation results and that is use. Use for informing decision-making, use for promoting the program, quality improvement, changing the program, and sometimes even ending the program. A dusty shelf report does not lead to achieving these objectives.

I'm sure you all are familiar with the CDC Framework for Program Evaluation, and the last step in that framework is acting on findings, and engaging our communities in that process can really help us achieve the step. I want to also just take a step back and frame what I mean by engaging in a community or defining the community. It depends on our context. It could be community from a geographic standpoint, community from a local standpoint, certain individuals that create a community. For those who might work, like for instance at the state or even a federal level where we have sub-recipients, the community could be our recipients. Like for myself, oftentimes community means the state, local, tribal, territorial, health departments that we fund a lot of the evaluation work centers around evaluating those cooperative agreements. Just keep that in mind as I talk about community, that it is dependent upon your own particular context.

So, engaging the community during the communication, interpretation, and communication process isn't only about action. Ideally, we are engaging our community throughout the evaluation process, the planning development process, all the way through to that very last step. And this helps to increase the understanding and effectiveness of our findings, of course, strengthen the buy-in of the findings, addressing aspects of culture and communicating our findings. And then I really wanted to stress nurturing trust-based relationships.

As evaluators, we oftentimes step into a space where there may not be, potentially not strong trust in the evaluation, the evaluation process, the purpose, and intent of the evaluation. And so, one of the key tenets of evaluation is engaging our key interested parties and community throughout those steps, and building that trust, strengthening existing trust and relationships. And that also carries through that communication process. And it also helps address the power dynamics and foster that sense of ownership and the evaluation, but also as we communicate and disseminate the key findings and messaging around the evaluation.

So, for this presentation, we're going to focus on three key areas to help communicate, and to facilitate action by engaging our community. First, engaging the community to help determine the message, co-creating communications, and then designing and visualizing appropriately.

So, let's start with the first, and that is engaging the community to really help us determine that message. And this starts in that interpretation phase, and interpreting the data, engaging the community to contextualize the data, understanding what it means, what the data means, why you're seeing what you're seeing, how does history, environment, social, structural, determinants, etc. influence what you're seeing in the data, and what do these data mean to the community impacted. Engaging the community will also drive identifying key takeaways. So as evaluators, we often come to the table as facilitators. We have our ideas, understanding, and thoughts about key takeaways and findings, but the community helps to determine those key findings. And then also helping to communicate to resonate, determining that sticking messaging and really understanding and identifying what you will say about the data.

So, I will just talk about ways to help facilitate that process. And one method that we've used that has been really successful throughout the years and been using it probably

around a decade now is a data placemat. Data placemats are basically what they sound like. It's taking a large sheet of paper, 9x11 or larger, and putting your data for on this placemat and bringing a group together to look at the information together to help synthesize, help interpret, understand, and really start to make those connections.

And what we found is a data placemat really brings forth the data. Sometimes when we have reports, when we're doing preliminary reports and we're sharing that and facilitating discussions around the findings, or even when we're doing presentations, sometimes it's hard to pull out and make those connections across all the different data points. But the data placemat really helps to visualize and bring forth that information. As the evaluator, you can help facilitate the interpretation by first, of course, laying out the foundation and the background for how you even drive to those data points and then ask those pointed questions to see what resonates, how are people sort of thinking about the data, and they actually start to make those connections too. Going through and really highlighting, "Okay, this is what we're seeing, help explain why we're seeing what we're seeing." So, it's just a great tool to really help engage with your community, to really help interpret the data and then to start moving in the direction of identifying key messaging and takeaways.

One thing that I should have mentioned earlier is, as part of the evaluation process, ideally, we have our evaluation group or a working group or a key group that is working with us throughout that evaluation process when it comes to interpreting and communicating the results. There are opportunities to bring more voices to the table, and a data walk is a great opportunity to do that. So essentially, you are sharing the data in a gallery format, so putting your data on the wall physically and people get to get up and move about, look at the information, you could have your guiding questions available for folks right there or you can bring them together later after they've looked at the data and facilitate the discussion.

But not only does it get them physically involved in reviewing the data, but it also helps to bring people together as they're gathering, congregating around the information and begin to converse about what they're seeing and why they're seeing it and what it means and really starting to draw out that meaning and interpretation really to the data. So the Urban Institute has a resource there that you could utilize to help you walk through or use this as a way to bring your community together to review, interpret, and again begin to start thinking about how do we even talk about this, our findings, how do we even talk about these messages that we're identifying here through this process.

So, kind of some tips that I wanted to share in terms of like approaches to including the community perspectives. And the first is establishing a non-evaluation engagement group or team. And again, like I just mentioned, ideally, we would have done this during that planning and development phase and carried that throughout the implementation phase into the interpretation and communication phase. And then this is also an area, like I said, where you can expand upon that if you do have a group to get more voices to the table.

It's also important to have a bi-directional communication and feedback loop. I know from some experiences I've had where we've had our evaluation working group and we

might have some sticky points that we're trying to figure out, like where we have some preliminary data and before we want to share it with the larger group, we're able to reach back to that group and get some ideas. But they also have the opportunity to share their perspectives as well. Because they're moving along with that evaluation with you as an evaluator, they also have insights that they can share. So, having that bi-directional communication and feedback loop is important and key to engaging the community. It's not just bringing them in at certain points but keeping that flow of communication and input.

Using the community to help ground your takeaways by building in that cultural context and really bringing relevancy to those findings and helping to, again, once you're moving into the messaging, that relevancy and bringing that culture and that context around that messaging. And then just one key point is that as we know with community engagement, a key best practice is to ensure that we are working with them in ways that are convenient to them and even considering utilizing incentives to help bring them to the table.

So, I want to move on to further discuss engaging with the community and the co-creation of communications. And again, this is an extremely important phase in establishing communication because by engaging with the community, you can determine the most appropriate method for communicating from a format perspective, from a style perspective. I think we have our toolbox that we go to for different ways of communicating information, but they might have a completely different way in which information is conveyed in a way that resonates and is accessible and, again, sticky that they can use that information. So really engaging the community to help determine the format and the style for your communications products really to evaluation.

And then also speaking in their preferred ways. You know, when you're dealing with, it's more obvious when you're dealing with different communities that might have different languages. And so being able to produce products that are in those languages, but it also could be vernacular, could be terminology, could be, again, just using their voice, understanding their voice, and speaking to them in their voice through those communication products. And it could be, it could look in a variety of different ways but engaging the community to really be able to pinpoint that and develop your communications in a preferred voice.

And that's also the case with visuals. So, ensure that you're using culturally appropriate visuals and that you're using inclusive visuals. So, it really does connect with the community in which the evaluation affects us. And then also utilizing the community to help convey the message and thinking about using the community to be the messenger. It goes beyond just the evaluator, presenting the information, sharing the information, being the one sort of driving the development of the communication, the dissemination of the communication, but involving the community to be able to help disseminate. Sometimes when those findings are coming from the community voice, a community member, it can resonate a little bit more.

And then creating accessible materials. And not only accessible in the sense of 508 compliance or visual compliance, but also accessibility in that it's presented in a way

that it can get into the hands of those who can utilize that information, utilize those findings.

So, I want to talk a little bit about messaging and potential for harm. And a key reason to co-create materials with the community is to mitigate potential bias and unintentional harm. So even as evaluators, we might have the best intentions, but we may inadvertently phrase the data and information in a way that might negatively reflect the community. So as a field, we're paying more attention to this. And there is a resource that CDC produced a couple of years ago called the Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication. And that's a great resource if you're not familiar with it that can help describe ways to reframe how we're messaging information, so we're not causing unintentional harm.

So, I'm just going to go through a couple of key principles. And then we're going to talk a little bit about this. So, the first is avoiding the use of adjectives such as vulnerable, marginalized, high risk, avoiding dehumanizing language and using person first language instead, avoiding saying terms of violent connotation when referring to people, groups, or communities, and avoiding unintentional blaming.

So, the first group of terms are marginalized group, hard to reach communities, underserved communities, high risk groups. So, it's kind of thinking about a person first, sort of categorizing the communities that don't necessarily reflect them or how they see themselves. Some ways that we can rephrase that are groups that have been marginalized, communities that are underserved by or with limited access to specific services and resources. So, again, it's the person first describing aspects we're trying to convey but not necessarily saying that these are the only aspects of the community we're referring to.

What about these set of terms, diabetics, inmates, victims of abuse, individuals, people or persons with diabetes, people who are incarcerated, survivors of abuse, cancer, violence? So again, sort of that deficit framing, you know, trying to avoid that as well. I'm going to go through the last one. So, people who refuse vaccine or behavior, it's almost blaming them, right? It comes across as assigning some sort of blame where it may just be that they're unvaccinated, so just sort of removing any sort of potential blaming or negative connotation. Or they just have not yet received it, haven't had the opportunity to receive it. So just reframing it to be more neutral. People first, human first, and avoiding unintentionally blaming or negative connotations.

So, I think one area that we're all sort of grappling with, especially since COVID, is, you know, what happens when you can't say health equity? And I wanted to bring to light a resource that was recently released, I think it was released this past summer by the Frameworks Institute. And it really helps us to think about, like, how we can balance the needs and feedback of the community when there may be restrictions and how we're able to communicate, especially when it comes to framing and language.

And so, the Frameworks Institute conducted an exploratory study using quantitative and qualitative brain testing, in 2022 and 2023. They did this with members of the public and interviewed public health professionals who have done a better understand how to

communicate about health equity and so we could better design framing, messaging, to help us move forward in addressing health disparities. So, this frame testing helped to identify ways to communicate, overcome challenges, and think about health equity. And they came up with five steps, so you can learn more. They have a nice resource online. They have a document online, but they also have a set of videos that help to explain each of these steps. But I'll go over each one very quickly.

So, the step one is leading with the idea of dignity, and this is really centering on the ideal of honoring people's dignity and valuing each person and their health across the community. So, it's really thinking about, you know, that communities are, you know, dignity, and we need to respect the dignity of those communities.

Step two is using explanations to expand people's ideas of health and health disparities, and this is where we offer an expansive explanation of health as well-being and highlighting the importance of access to specific resources to bring equity into view. So really helping to explain why these communities need these resources and thinking of it as overall health and well-being.

But also acknowledging, as part of step three, speaking to history and building motivation for change by explaining how history and past injustices really have harmed the health of specific groups. So really making those connections to the past for why we're seeing what we're seeing in the future, but not necessarily in a combative way, more so in a helpful explanatory way.

And then connecting the past to the future and speaking about history. So, it's making those clear connections to really serve as an entrance point to understand the proposed programs and policies that are designed to help those communities. And then for five, pointing to the future, using vision framing to point people toward the possibility of change.

So overall, the resource itself provides specific messaging, proposed messaging that you can use. And I think about reframing to sort of move away from using terminology that might sort of deflect from the purpose of the work that you're trying to do. And I noticed it's something we're all grappling with. So, I wanted to highlight this resource.

So, moving on to the last section, I visualized the results. Really, I want to use this section to just help generate some ideas of kind of thinking through the communications products that you will create. And again, this is co-creation development with the community to think through what types of communication products would resonate with them. And these are just ideas to think through what certain possibilities can be.

So, one is the arts. And this is something I know the American Evaluation Association has done a great job over the years of really helping to bring the arts and narratives and storytelling to evaluators toolbox as we're thinking about a communication. But if you're working with your community members, if they are, these are opportunities to think about sharing your key findings, your results in ways that can really help to, again, emphasize the sticky messaging and resonate.

Another is the media. And one thing that I just wanted to mention about media is that it's more than just using media to disseminate your report. I know this is done often where we might turn to social media, might turn to press releases, et cetera, to really point people to that larger report. But this is reframing it to use the media, whether social media blogs, et cetera, to share the findings and takeaways. You could do it from a visual standpoint; you could do it from a sticky message standpoint. And the other thing I wanted to just mention is that when we're working with communities, if there is like a local newspaper, a community forum, community Facebook page, Instagram, maybe blogs, that these are all venues that you can utilize to help share those findings as well. And your community members that you're engaging will help point you in those directions of like; this is the best mechanism, best method to be able to reach the intended audiences.

Another is visual storytelling. This is from an evaluation that I served on for a teacher training program in Haiti. And using pictures to really help explain where we're talking about as part of this evaluation and emphasizing the key findings that came out of the evaluation, one focusing on the teachers being engaged in that education process. You can see in front of pictures where they're focused on learning the Montessori method but also making that connection to who is impacted by the quality of these teachers and students.

You can use animation. This is actually an animation that was produced for the preventive block grant, preventive health and health services block grant. And it's like a 40 second animation that presents the key findings from one of the evaluation reports.

And then you can also use storyboards. This is a storyboard that was created by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. What they did was they took the evaluation findings from the block grant, and they presented it by featuring a click through story. And you could just go on and start clicking through, and you can see its very concise messaging. Visuals, lots of white space. They draw out some of the actual data from the evaluations. They pull out some of the narratives, some of the quotes that came from the evaluations to tell the story. Not only just like what are the findings from the evaluation, but also what does it mean helping to highlight the so what of the evaluations.

I just wanted to show this as you may be thinking about. Well, how do we present the data to reach the communities that we're intending to reach? And from a public standpoint, this is just another great way of being able to do that in a creative and easily accessible manner.

So, postcards are a great way to communicate information as well. They're quick and concise. They could be hand delivered or by mail. And of course, we're familiar with infographics. I wanted to show this one because it was created using PowerPoint. So, if you have limited resources, you can use Microsoft Suite to create these products as well.

One-page summaries are a great way to share information. And I really like the one on the left-hand side because it gives some data, has evaluation questions with quick takeaways and then the recommendations.

And then think about your reports. So sometimes we just can't get away from reports but think about how we're now living in a more digital age where we're sitting in front of our computers reading reports. So, reconsidering how we format our reports so they're easily accessible online as people are maneuvering through, like using landscape instead of profile, using more visuals to really highlight that information.

And then of course, we're familiar with dashboards, but they're always a great way to highlight key takeaways, key data. And this one was about using Power BI.

So just in summary, engaging the community in those key important steps of interpreting and communicating findings really helps to ensure that your findings are conveyed in a constructive and culturally responsive way, that you are disseminating findings that are incorporating those perspectives of those with full of experiences. And then think about your communications in a way where the language is accessible, easy to understand and mitigates bias and harm.

LK: We hope you enjoyed this episode of Leading Public Health, a podcast from the Region IV Public Health Training Center at Emory University. We value your feedback, so please take a minute to complete the evaluation located in the show notes. Thank you for joining us.