THE IMPACTS OF USING A COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION APPROACH IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF LOCAL YMCAS PROVIDING COLLEGE ACCESS SERVICES

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Abstract

JOHNNAVE E. CAMPBELL: The impacts of using a collaborative evaluation approach in higher education: A case study of local YMCAs providing college access services
(Under the direction of Dr. Rita O’Sullivan)

This dissertation offers a case study of the YMCA of the USA’s pilot Higher Education Service Project (YHESP) with 61 local YMCAs on how the collaborative evaluation approach functioned to facilitate an organizational culture around evaluation and reinvention strategies of YMCAs as college access service providers. Multiple data collection sources were used following this two-year pilot project cycle. Analysis of survey data, interviews, and archival information allowed significant themes to emerge and described YMCA participants’ experiences of key aspects of impact of this collaborative evaluation approach that compel (or inhibit) YMCA organizations to willingly change the course of their program planning and implementation. The survey analysis revealed strong influence by the collaborative evaluation approach to support capacity building, evaluation knowledge, evaluation use, and stakeholder engagement. Especially significant from interview analysis was finding agreement by YMCAs of varying size and initial capacity to the use of collaborative evaluation as a tool to challenge dominant discourses of YMCAs as “swim and gym” facilities. Thus, program impact in this study was characterized by collaboration and capacity, with those staff who had limited initial evaluation capacity showing the greatest involvement in the evaluation and experiencing the greatest overall impact.
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Position Statement

A longstanding history working with college access and educational opportunity programs acted as an impetus for this dissertation study. To start, in 2005 as a national liaison with educational opportunity programs, the researcher became intimately familiar with the aftermath of the national evaluation study on the effectiveness of Upward Bound programs conducted by Mathematica. In fact, the repercussions of such negative publicity and experiences with evaluation led many local constituents to resent evaluation and its uses. Fast forward two years later, as the Deputy Director for a national college access program, much of the evaluation work conducted for the national initiative was done through an external consultant who had several years’ experience working in research and higher education. The work alongside the evaluation consultant sparked the research and evaluation interest of the researcher. That said her evaluation methods were extremely relevant, responsive, and inclusive of program staff as well as of the local constituents.

Since those initial evaluation experiences, the researcher has worked in an evaluation office under the leadership of a modern trailblazer in the field of responsive evaluation, Dr. Rita O’Sullivan who uses the collaborative evaluation approach and has done so for the past 15 years. Her work and training have supported the researcher as a graduate assistant through four years of doctoral studies. It is precisely this experience with responsive evaluation methods that has led the researcher to utilize these methods in her professional work as an external evaluator. The decision to conduct her dissertation research on evaluation was a way to understand the impact of Dr. O’Sullivan’s collaborative evaluation approach and methods on a multisite project coupled with the researcher’s ongoing interest in college access and educational opportunity programs.
As lead research assistant during the evaluation work conducted with the YMCA Higher Education Service Project, the researcher had an internal, participant perspective with the evaluation conducted and thus the research being studied. Her supervisor, advisor, and mentor was Director of the external evaluation project and thus, also had a participant perspective with the project. Under her leadership the team used the collaborative evaluation approach that had been used previously on numerous projects.

Though it is clear that many other evaluation methods exist, in her own evaluation work, the researcher has chosen to use responsive evaluation methods. These methods include cultural responsiveness, collaborative evaluation approaches, and evaluation capacity building strategies to assist programs and organizations in understanding the role and uses of evaluation to program development and implementation. Therefore, professional experiences with more traditional distanced methods are limited. This dissertation work is an attempt to engage her journey as an evaluator and to make sense of professional experiences in responsive evaluation frameworks and their impact on program constituents.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past 50 years the field of higher education has experienced a growing movement that introduces marginalized students to college culture, concepts, and opportunities to increase their likelihood of postsecondary enrollment. College access services are defined as those efforts of social, academic, or financial supports provided by organizations, higher education institutions, foundations, schools, and private entities to increase student college enrollment. Access efforts’ reliance on both financial resources and strong program design require the use of adequate evaluation and program planning skills. This study adds to existing evaluation and program planning literature that examines the evaluation practices of organizations providing college access services. This dissertation, a case study situated in the field of higher education, focuses on community organizations that provide college access services. Specifically, in an effort to contribute to the literature and advance the strategies currently used to evaluate such programs, the purpose of the current study is to explore the influence and impact of the collaborative approach to evaluation adopted by 61 YMCAs implementing higher education service projects. The study opens by positioning the current challenges facing college access programming within an extended analysis of the historical and social literature on compensatory and Title IV programs. Next, focusing on specific aspects of a collaborative evaluation framework, the role of evaluation within college access programming is addressed.
1.1 Background

Studying the effects of program evaluation on organizations is not a novel concept. It has been studied in the context of its utility as well as in its role in relation to capacity building from the perspective of organizational development (Patton, 2008; Weiss, 1997). For over 30 years evaluators have been addressing the desire for programs to make greater use of evaluations, to increase program impact and expand their influence (Alkin & Taut, 2002; Henry & Mark, 2003; Kirkhart, 2000; Patton, 2008). Although there are several working definitions, Patton’s (2008) definition of program evaluation speaks to its role coupled with its use:

Program evaluation is the systemic collection of information about activities, characteristics, and results of programs to make judgments about the program, improve or further develop program effectiveness, inform decisions about future programming, and/or increase understanding. (p. 39)

This definition focuses on collecting evaluation data that are intended for use in program improvement and decision making. This perspective of creating evaluation for the purpose of its use is the common thread for alternative approaches like utilization-focused, participatory, empowerment, and collaborative evaluation. According to Alkin’s Evaluation Theory Tree (2003), these four approaches are all considered smaller branches on the major branch focused on “Use” in evaluation. Where the origins of the tree typify the work of the government in terms of a focus on accountability and control, the alternative approaches, as they will be called here, focus on how and who will use the evaluation.

Since Stake (1980) initiated the responsive evaluation approach, alternative approaches have been distinguishing themselves in how responsiveness manifests in an evaluation with variation in stakeholder engagement and evaluator control. Participatory, empowerment, and collaborative approaches maintain position differences of whether
evaluators maintain control, have no goals of control, or resist control in the evaluation process (Cousins & Earl, 1995; Fetterman, 1997; O’Sullivan, 2004). There also seem to be subtle differences in the level and types of stakeholders engaged in the evaluation.

As such, the engagement of stakeholders in the evaluation process as a means of increasing evaluation use is key. Specifically, the collaborative evaluation approach strategically engages stakeholders throughout the process, where it is not just the participation that matters but the facilitation of such collaboration in all aspects to the level the stakeholder is capable that drives the work (O’Sullivan, 2004). Collaborative evaluation is still growing in the field and as such benefits from studies that focus on its use in particular programmatic and organizational contexts (Rodriguez-Campos, 2012).

Because the researcher’s formal education and work experience are in higher education and program evaluation, YMCA organizations embarking on the development and evaluation of Higher Education Service Projects serve as the lens through which program evaluation and its impact on improvement will be investigated. In many ways a new effort, the YMCA of the USA higher education national program director conducted a two-year pilot study with local YMCAs by awarding them funding to provide college access services through partnership and expansion. Although identifying the role of collaborative evaluation to program improvement is the proximal goal of this study, the distal goal is to contribute to improving college access services and opportunities. The quality of these services and opportunities has been proffered as an indicator of equity in higher education. Unfortunately, alternative program evaluation approaches are areas not often considered by current college access reform efforts. However, YMCAs are a plausible setting for examining alternative program evaluation on program improvement. The college access work done by the YMCAs
through this initiative has afforded them several other opportunities to obtain funding and expand their college access services on a national level. In addition, the role of evaluation in this program development process aligns with the tenets articulated in the collaborative evaluation concept.

Although a nationally organized effort with headquarters in Chicago, Illinois, local YMCAs are non-profit organizations funded by grants and membership fees and led by local executive boards. Each YMCA association varies in size, employees, and budget. Another factor separating YMCAs is whether they are traditional or non-traditional. Traditional YMCAs are gym-based centers with efforts to promote healthy living through activities, workshops, and trainings. Another strong area of focus includes youth development. For traditional YMCAs, children and youth are incorporated into the facility through childcare, camps, and swimming. Non-traditional YMCAs focus on student-centered activities that generally relate to self-esteem and leadership development. For example, university YMCAs are housed on college campuses with a specific objective to engage students in service leadership. Regardless of the projects, general oversight of YMCA program planning and evaluation is conducted through program staff under the supervision of CEOs and board members.

This study uses multiple sources for data collection to address the influence of evaluation in YMCA college access work. This approach suggests understanding the broader context in the YMCA Higher Education Service Project through surveys, then narrowing the focus of the investigation to a selection within that community that will offer insights through interviews that may be appropriated back out to other areas within higher education access service work. Results from this research extend the conceptual understanding about the link
between evaluation and program processes, activities, and culture in community organizations doing college access work. It also frames practical opportunities for pursuing program evaluation that focuses on program improvement in the broader college access community. The following sections detail the context and rationale under which this study operates.

1.2 Context and Rationale

Organizations conducting college access services have been around for over 40 years. For many of these organizations program evaluation has primarily been used for the purpose of obtaining and sustaining funding (Carmen, 2007). Thus, a focus on program evaluation as a way of improving program development and implementation is fairly new but necessary (National College Access Network [NCAN], 2012).

Essentially, this research seeks to explain how, if at all, collaborative evaluation influences participating community-based organizations to develop higher education programs for students grades K-12. The researcher takes the collaborative evaluation concept popularized as a “stakeholder-centered” approach to program evaluation in the literature by O’Sullivan (2004; 2012) and uses it as the foundation upon which to develop a survey instrument and interview protocol for examining its impact on college access program work in local organizations. Collaborative evaluation represents a belief that evaluation quality hinges on knowing the organizational culture and program context, engaging stakeholders strategically throughout the process, and providing them with expanded knowledge and relevance to make use of the findings in which the capacity for individual and program evaluation continuously expands. In collaborative evaluation, the evaluation process and leadership foster an environment where knowledge acquisition, creation, interpretation,
transmission, and application drive program reflection and professional development and improvement (Patton, 2004). This claim should be further examined because knowledge management has been cited as a key to organizational development and change (Cummings & Worley, 2005). The use of collaborative evaluation embraces and supports human agency and the role of program staff in facilitating or hindering desired outcomes through their awareness, capacity, and interactions within their internal and external environment.

The researcher is interested in understanding how to enhance the influence of evaluation on programs doing college access work, especially given their cultural and political history. Local community programs once held complete program control in terms of development, improvement, and evaluation where they were held accountable only to community members and other stakeholders. Although positive on many fronts, desegregation spun minorities (more specifically African Americans) into a perpetual cycle of mainstream-dominated perspectives of access (Shuja, 1994; Symonette, 2004). Funding streams and oversight have allowed, and some may argue required, programs to marginalize these populations even further by minimizing and penalizing the role of stakeholder engagement in programming and evaluation efforts (Johnson, Kirkhart, Madison, Noley, & Solano-Flores, 2008; O’Conner, 2010) and by using traditional evaluation methods punitively (Scriven, 1990; Tyler, 1991).

When determining evaluation approaches to assess program progress and merit it’s suggested that programs and funders also consider how compensatory programs are located within a dominant paradigm that perpetuates a notion of deficit-based communities (merit as neutral) and thus supports structural inequalities (Bensimon, 2009; De Silva, 2007). By exploring these phenomena further of which programs and how those programs are
considering the discourse of evaluation and program planning, the researcher seeks to bring program stakeholders’ ideas and voices to the field. To integrate participants into the evaluation plan for increased relevance and use, the study of collaborative evaluation hopes to expand options for programs to regain some control without sacrificing technical quality of their evaluation. Embedded case study profiles focusing on capacity, reflection, and improvement were analyzed in depth.

1.3 Significance of the Research

Implementing collaborative evaluation for college access programs and services involves understanding organizational culture, program structure, and community context. It involves engaging stakeholders from beginning to end of the evaluation process (Patton, 2008). It enhances evaluation use by maintaining open communication, building rapport, and ultimately considering the needs and perspectives of various parties involved in the program (O’Sullivan, 2004). From parents to policymakers, from staff to funders, stakeholders are key to transformative program changes resulting in increased access, preparation, and capital for student participants. Alternative approaches to evaluation in college access work are shifting past understandings of the relationship between program implementation and evaluation. The collective work of evaluators and organizational development experts has yielded tangible change (Preskill, 1991; Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Flesher & Christie; 2009), and the field is ripe to create an even greater impact.

According to Rodriguez-Campos (2012), a leader in collaborative evaluation, there has been increased work in the field since the American Evaluation Association (AEA) created the Collaborative, Participatory, and Empowerment Topical Interest Group (CPE TIG) in 1995. The growth in this area of evaluation is happening at a steady rate. Besides the
increase in dissertations, articles, presentations, and books highlighting the benefits of utilization-focused and stakeholder-engaged approaches, the real evidence is in the increased capacity and use of evaluations by program staff. Programs are becoming better equipped to understand and advocate for necessary program changes.

Such a transformation in program awareness and capacity to make decisions is based on the ability of stakeholders to reflect on their program through a lens of reality; Patton (1997) calls this “reality-testing.” Evaluation can facilitate a process of questioning and reflection on organization’s basic assumptions about itself and its culture, meanings, and structure (Preskill, 1991; Patton, 2004), which results in a stronger evaluation with more relevance to the program. The process itself of gathering and feeding back information can also impact individual and organizational behavior in other ways. This mere reflection inherent in the evaluation cycle has often been referred to as process use (Patton, 1997; Preskill, 1991; Weiss, 1997).

Conducting research on a multi-site collaborative evaluation study can provide the college access, not-for-profit, and evaluation fields with empirical data on the potential ways in which alternative evaluation might be beneficial or might fail to impact an organization in the implementation of program activities. Survey results from 61 YMCA organizations and interview data from five purposively selected local YMCA staff offers insight into effective strategies funders and organizations can promote to maximize the potential of evaluation use. In addition, by examining the impact of such a growing approach in the field, these data advance the understanding of stakeholder-engaged approaches in organizational contexts, particularly higher education access initiatives. Further, the insights gained can have implications for funding agencies, program staff, and evaluators in terms of the possibilities...
for changing how they currently operate. A possible outcome might be the increased value of alternative evaluation approaches as 1) evidence in measuring program outcomes, 2) building program capacity, and/or 3) improving program practices.

1.4 Research Questions

The overall purpose of this study is to explain how collaborative evaluation has influenced the YMCA during their program implementation of higher education service projects. The Higher Education Service Project is a pilot effort to incorporate college access work into existing YMCA program efforts. The study draws on a two-year evaluation commissioned by YMCA of the USA national program staff at the beginning of this pilot effort. To fulfill this purpose the following research questions have been identified:

1. How have the components of collaborative evaluation influenced program reflection, planning, and implementation on:
   a. Program participants, activities, and outcomes.
   b. Evaluation capacity of individuals within the organization.
   c. Organization culture (around evaluation?).

2. How are program stakeholders within the organization using evaluation?

3. What is the role of collaborative evaluation as implemented with 61 YMCAs in planning and implementation of college access program services within their local organizations?
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

College participation rates of the school-aged population in the United States reinforce the need for research that informs an understanding of college preparation for students and their families and ways in which it can be improved. Indeed, many students experience a lack of preparedness in terms of access to the necessary financial, academic, and social supports needed to enroll and persist through college, particularly underrepresented populations—which are predominately racial minorities, low-income, and first-generation students (Hooker & Brand, 2009; Orr, Alcántara, Frazier, Kalinka, & Kaplan, 2007).

These populations have been historically underserved in U.S. schools and as a result programs to promote college access have been funded from federal (HEA, 1965), state, institutional, and community sources to offer these services. College access encapsulates the programs and services provided by non-profits, community groups, foundations, and institutions through which an individual gains the knowledge, skills, or support necessary for college aspiration, qualification, application, and enrollment (Cabrera, 2006). An increasing number of organizations are developing college access programs to reduce a 19.1% gap between students who participate in college from higher income families and those from low-income backgrounds and underrepresented populations (College Board, 2010; Mortenson, 2010; Nichols, 2010).

For all programs offering college access, but particularly those from within targeted communities, evaluating program services is a complex process that is central to
understanding effectiveness to improve program development (Bensimon, 2009). Traditional evaluations relied on to provide evidence of merit and worth are inadequate to truly reflect on programs doing college access services, subsequently students served, at their level of implementation (Zulli & Frierson, 2004). Alternative evaluation approaches like collaborative (O’Sullivan, 2004), utilization-focused (Patton, 1997), empowerment (Fettermen, 2001), and participatory (Cousins & Earl, 1995) offer program strategies to engage in the evaluation process that lead to an increased understanding of what does and does not work in their college access services. Few funders, however, require or even encourage this form of evaluation. Instead funders measure program effectiveness through required annual performance reports focused on monitoring data, including service statistics with total participant counts and budget reviews highlighting how the funds are being spent (GAO, 1998b). At times funders also might commission a third-party distanced evaluation to identify summative findings. When formative evaluations are included by programs to highlight how programs can improve on both process and immediate objective outcomes (Scriven, 1997; Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991), they often lack local context. To conform to funders’ accountability requirements, programs will hire out evaluation services with limited reflection to its impact on program planning (Parrish, 2004).

Research demonstrates the increased challenges associated with program sustainability and development (Hoole & Patterson, 2008) for not-for-profit organizations. Thus, college access program planning and implementation and its relationship to evaluation must be studied, acknowledging the complexity of the evaluation needs for individual programs (Zulli & Frierson, 2004). Moreover, there has been a recent push by funders to require more reflection by program staff of their evaluation findings (Orr et al., 2007).
Unfortunately for many college access programs, this level of reflection is difficult when it is an afterthought and staff is not a part of the evaluation process. To address this discrepancy in funder expectation and program feasibility, a presentation during the data and evaluation strand at the 2011 National College Access Network (Erisman, 2011) conference highlighted the following suggestions for funders:

- Offer evaluation technical assistance as part of grant;
- Consider grantees’ existing evaluation capacity in planning for assistance;
- Develop strategies to customize technical assistance to grantee need;
- Offer evaluation assistance early and often; and
- Provide opportunities to share best practices with specific focus on evaluation.

These suggested efforts highlight the specific questions and concerns associated with college access work and its evaluation, which have not been clearly studied so far. First, due to its social and historical origins, evaluation of college access requires a particular cultural responsiveness to political and community agendas, so engagement of stakeholders is essential. Second, college access services vary in format, content, and delivery; this variation poses a challenge to traditional evaluation methods that focus on preset common indicators. Third, program evaluation capacity has lots of variation, and part of working for program improvement is identifying the variation in readiness and meeting the individual needs of each program (O’Sullivan, 2004; Preskill & Boyle, 2008). This literature review addresses the areas mentioned including barriers to evaluation most widely impacting college access programs: 1) negative experiences with external evaluation (Gandara, 2002), 2) limited relevancy to program needs (Hoole & Patterson, 2008; Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001), and 3) a lack of expertise in conducting or designing their own evaluations (Johnson, Kirkhart, Madison, Noley, & Solano-Flores, 2008).
Critical to the study of specific evaluative needs and challenges impacting programs offering college access services is understanding the social and historical contexts that evaluators and evaluation approaches must respond to in college access. Therefore this literature review will first define college access service and then provide context for how that translates into such wide variation in college access programming. Next, the literature review will discuss where evaluation currently fits with college access and those implications. Last, it examines how collaborative evaluation is situated as a feasible alternative to traditional approaches used for evaluating college access programs.

2.2 An Historical Perspective on College Access

This section offers both a social and historical context of programs providing college access services. The first part describes the beginnings of college access services in the field of higher education. In the second part, the author discusses the funding streams for these services, and the role of programs in delivery of those services is also addressed. This view of these services provides the context for how a collaborative evaluation approach may fit within college access implementation by understanding where the programs are situated in a larger paradigm.

2.2.1 College Access Beginnings

College access has its origins in academic preparation and workforce development. As a way to resolve issues related to poverty, war, globalization, technology, and outsourcing, there has been increased effort to build a college-educated and skilled workforce (Parrish, 2004). Recent efforts in college access have focused largely on financial supports as tuition costs continue to rise and grant award amounts stagnate. Moreover, a review of literature shows that although the support has varied over time, services traditionally take the
form of financial grants, social and cultural programs, college preparation services, marketing campaigns, and academic enrichment activities (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). Research shows that middle- and upper-income Caucasian families are participating in college at significantly higher rates than lower-income and minority populations (The College Board, 2010). Capitalizing on opportunity costs, political and economic agendas began including funding efforts to support low-income, first-generation, and minority students to enroll in college. Consequently, organizational program efforts, undergone to increase access to postsecondary education, have targeted these marginalized populations.

College access services can be understood as the supports in place to eliminate or minimize specific barriers—financial resources, academic preparation, family involvement, college application, and cultural transition—to postsecondary enrollment for students. Provisions began nearly seven decades ago by institutions, agencies, and communities. During the post–World War II era enrollment in higher education surged due to the GI Bill and as separate educational facilities were deemed unequal. Thus, after declining slightly during the 1940s, the proportion of young adults with four-year college degrees grew dramatically in the 1950s, at an average annual rate of about 7.6%. Seeking ways to support states and workforce development, the federal government passed an Emergency Work Relief Act (Thelin, 2004). The grassroots effort by Minnesota to use federal funds intended for “work-relief” activity on a student program was one of the catalysts for the first program to enrich student lives and provide greater access to higher education. The program soon became national and “aimed at keeping students off the labor market and had immediate widespread acceptance, even by those who had been skeptical of federal action in the area of higher education” (Henry, 1975, p. 24).
Although the past four decades show access efforts for underrepresented populations reflecting a mainstream agenda, historically those practitioners from within the targeted communities provided the implementation and development of these services (Arendale, 2002; Fullinwider & Lichtenberg, 2004; Thelin, 2004). For this reason, minority-serving institutions, community groups, and church leaders played a critical role in equalizing educational opportunity in terms of access for poor people, minorities, and women (Brown & Bartee, 2007; Farmer-Hinton & Adams 2006). From within the community, there has always been a genuine interest in developing academically, socially, and financially responsible citizens who contributed to society via talent and skills (Howe, 1997). Moreover, program design, services, and implementation were based on the best interests of the community and its members. The community tied outcomes to reciprocity and thus in many ways program staff and community members were self-accountable in terms of evaluation. In fact, when universities did attempt college access services to boost enrollment at predominately white institutions, many failed due to lack of cultural responsiveness on the part of program developers (Thelin, 2004). This was a continuous struggle because the second Morril Act land grant allowed public funds for the establishment of higher education for Blacks when access for African Americans “lagged far behind that for whites” (Thelin, pg. 232).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 had major implications on equal educational opportunities, or the lack thereof, for blacks, minorities, women, and low-income families. Although there were many advocates for equal opportunity in education, spanning pre-K through college level, there were naysayers as well. Although many liberals saw desegregation of schools as a move toward equality, others thought it was a step backward for access (Irons, 2002). For example, prior to desegregation many blacks were guaranteed
access to black schools and given proper social and cultural support to graduate. So though the 1960s experienced an influx in programs directed toward “at-risk” students, many attempts to equalize educational attainment for these students failed due to its contentious beginnings, thereby reducing the pool of students eligible to attend college. These federally funded efforts of 1965 were the beginning of college access as known today.

2.2.2 Funding Streams

Federal support for compensatory education grew out of two legislative acts: the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act established Title I programs, and the Economic Opportunity Act established the Upward Bound Program (as well as Head Start). Title I funding created what are now known as compensatory programs, supplemental instruction, or special education programs. Then, as now, these programs aimed to compensate for any existing or future deficits based on culture, income, language, or behavior problems (Hamovitch, 1997). Similarly, the Upward Bound (UB) program—trailblazer of TRIO programs (UB, Talent Search, and Student Support Services) and future college access programs—was created to alleviate the deficit among minority and low-income families in preparation for college, offering academic supports. The term “deficit” became disturbing to many blacks (and some whites) because it perpetuated a notion of intellectual, social, and cultural superiority by dominant whites in mainstream society. Now most programs claim the added value of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) versus compensating for academic or cultural deficit.

By 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson had announced over 30 bills related to educational activity (Henry, 1975). Many institutional, local, and state leaders had begun creating their
own approaches to access and quickly rallied around the administration’s equal opportunity efforts to expand access for all. These acts represented an attempt to address two major barriers to college for low-income students. The first of which, Heller (2002) stated, was “to ensure, at a minimum, that the decision of lower-income students to attend either a two-year or four-year public institution full time would not be unduly constrained by high unmet need and consequent necessity to work or to borrow excessively” (p. 8). The second is described as an attempt to increase achievement levels and access to mainstream schools to address the perceived deficit in culture and academic preparation (Tierney et al., 2005). Today, these bills—economic- and educational opportunity–based—largely represent the conception of national college access programs and their services.

Through shifts in administrative agendas and congressional office changes, TRIO programs were vulnerable as the leader in providing access support services among policymakers. Although $600 million dollars was appropriated to TRIO programs in the Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorization of 1998, they were still serving less than 7% of the eligible population (Retrieved on August 5, 2011, from http://www.coenet.us). Rather than disburse a larger amount to serve more students, a new program was developed under the Clinton Administration. The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) was appropriated $120 million during the 1998 reauthorization of HEA. Though precollege TRIO programs provided college experience for high school students by allowing students to regularly visit and in some cases live on college campuses, offering advising, and establishing academic enrichment activities to prepare them for college, GEAR UP followed a selected cohort from 7th grade until high school completion.
Grants were competitively awarded to state and local agencies that required them to partner with a local school, a community organization, and a university or college.

States like Florida and California created their own version of college access programs, appropriating state monies to college access work. To show greater investment in issues of equity at the college enrollment level, Florida’s CROP (College Reach-Out Program), Indiana’s 21st Century Scholars, and California’s CalSOAP (Student Opportunity and Access Program) programs were supported by state and local legislators (Tierney et al., 2005) to increase access to colleges for students in their states. Private funders, however, also were investing in non-profit organizations to implement programs and services to expand access for low-income students and other underrepresented populations.

Other groups began distinguishing themselves from traditional access programs, working with students after class, on weekends, and/or in the summers. An example of this is Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). Initially created in the 1980s, it grew to more than 45 states in a span of 20 years. AVID’s role in access was unrelated to that of previously administered outreach programs. AVID wasn’t a college outreach program. Its approach was to embed services and expectations within school culture and curriculum. The program’s approach to college access, which resembled more of a college preparatory academy, still offered many of the same access services (i.e., financial aid and admissions counseling, tutoring, college visits) but required local- and district-level leadership and buy-in (About AVID, 2011).

Although Pell Grants—financial grants distributed by the federal government based on need determined by the Free Application for Federal student aid application (FAFSA)—were incentive, the rising tuition costs increased at a disproportionately higher rate and many
low-income families, regardless of preparation, were still less likely to enroll in college and apprehensive about taking out student loans (Douthat, 2005). Those who did were largely thankful to college access staff for increased college and financial aid awareness, readiness, and preparation provided through their program (Engle et al., 2006). College Access Programs were thriving—there was an exponential increase in the 1990s as student loan agencies were encouraged to provide educational services to underrepresented students. One of the largest state-led efforts was in Ohio with the Ohio College Access Network. The founders of the network expanded to Washington, DC, and incorporated a national organization known as the National College Access Network (NCAN). Today, NCAN boasts a network of over 2500 college access programs, funded both privately and publicly, and has become a national coordinating body of organizations doing college access work. To be considered for entry as a college access program in their directory, programs must meet the following criteria:

- Provide potential students with college access services beyond the listing and/or awarding of scholarships, grants or loans;
- Provide students with advice about postsecondary admissions, financial aid, careers, etc.;
- Serve more than 50 students each year;
- Provide services on an ongoing basis (more than one or two days per year);
- Offer services beyond those that are web-based;
- Offer information about more than one institution of postsecondary education;
- Provide basic services at no charge (nominal fees may be charged for such things as field trips, books and event tickets);
- Have an annual budget of at least $50,000; and
- Be classified by the Internal Revenue Service as exempt from taxes because the organization is a non-profit organization or a public entity.

Services provided to students vary from program to program, but most adhere to the stipulations described above. In spite of its controversial beginnings, there is consensus in higher education on the value of providing support services to increase college access (Goldstein, 2011). Most scholars even agree as to the spectrum of services that should be provided (Cabrera, A., Prabhu, R., Deil-Amen, R., Terenzini, P., Lee, C., & Franklin, R., 2003; Engle et al., 2002; Hayward, G.C., Brandes, B.G., Kirst, M.W., & Mazzeo, C., 1997; Pathways to College Network (PCN), 2004; Tierney, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Yet, with the exception of protocols and mandates placed upon programs by funding agencies, how these services are delivered is determined by the program staff and/or organization responsible.

2.2.3 Program Delivery

Several types of organizations conduct college access programming: federal initiatives, state education offices, universities and colleges, local community centers, schools, churches, loan affiliates, and foundations (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005), often in partnership with one another. The variation in programming in large part is due to what and how college access services are delivered. Although among policy makers the term “access” has become synonymous with access to financial aid (Obama Speech, 2007), program stakeholders still recognize the importance of comprehensive support services. Research on college access among low-income groups demonstrates that cost is one of the greatest barriers but that life skills and academic skills are also critical, so many programs offer supports in all three areas (McDonough & Gildersleeve, 2005; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Recent studies provide evidence that participants in programs that offer academic and social supports in addition to financial supports are more likely to be engaged in school, take
advanced courses, apply for financial aid, enroll in college, earn post-secondary degrees, and find employment (Engle, Bermeo, & O’Brien, 2006; Hooker & Brand, 2009). The delivery of these services happens on many levels—a one-on-one format, group setting, and a hybrid of both. Because the difference in program delivery influences costs, outcomes, and impacts, funding agencies are increasingly interested in the value they get for their money.

Little research is available about how this variation in delivery is influenced by factors like staff choice, community, organizational structure, or mission (Zulli & Frierson, 2005). Instead, the focus has been on reporting services to participants and, to some extent, program outcomes. However, current research does highlight that underrepresented students respond positively to the degree of relationship they have with service providers, accuracy of information disseminated, and accessibility to academic resources (Engle et al., 2006).

One of the most problematic issues here is whether local program context and culture are reflected in the traditional evaluations done. The widespread variation surrounding who conducts these programs and how, considered as context in implementation, must be considered for any sound evaluation (Weiss, 1998). Program implementation is a dynamic process requiring a great deal of reflexivity and contextual understanding as plans are modified (Bisset, Daniel, & Potvin, 2009). The use of evaluation throughout this implementation process is the foundation for performance measurements and impact evaluation (Labin, 2011). Moreover, the use of impact evaluation without consideration of process and implementation accuracy is limited (Labin, 2011). By making evaluation more transparent and responsive, evaluators who use alternative approaches are trailblazers for the future in the new direction of client-centered evaluation (Labin, 2011). However, understanding the context in evaluation of program implementation efforts, important as it is,
is understandably challenging for most evaluators (Bisset, Daniel, & Potvin; 2011). Theoretical framework, methodological program knowledge, historical climate, socio-cultural factors, and, of course, political systems must be considered and accounted for to understand program processes, outcomes, and impact (SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson, 2004). Therefore, evaluators adopting a collaborative approach or similar empowerment approaches that use ongoing open communication and strategic engagement in the evaluation cycle are better equipped to increase familiarity and framework for the relationship of contextual variables to actual implementation strategies (Miller & Campbell, 2006). When embracing variation across multisite evaluations, knowing how context impacts program implementation, evaluation influence, and evaluation use throughout the process is not only beneficial but increases respondent validity (Labin, 2011; Lawrenz, King, & Ooms, 2011) and cultural validity (Kirkhart, 2000).

The next section will describe the role of program evaluation and, specifically, the selection of collaborative evaluation for this national college access effort.

2.3. Program Evaluation

2.3.1 Competing Evaluation Approaches

There has been persistent tension among different evaluation approaches identified with evaluation practices (Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991), specifically among and between traditional and alternative evaluation approaches. Although traditional methodologists suggest that for an evaluation to be sound, it should maintain a degree of distance, evaluators using alternative approaches—utilization-focused, collaborative, participatory, and empowerment methods—have noted that engaging the stakeholders is better to maximize use and developmental impact (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005;
Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004; Patton, 2008; O’Sullivan, 2004). Although similar in their beliefs around increased stakeholder engagement, evaluation use, and capacity building, alternative evaluation approaches vary by types and intensity of stakeholder involvement and level of evaluator control and decision-making (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; O’Sullivan, 2012). These differences manifest in the execution of the evaluation life cycle. In this study a collaborative evaluation framework was studied.

Though many advances have been made in terms of interest, articles, and studies using these collaborative methods (Rodriguez-Campos, 2011), much more research is necessary, especially within college access, to capture the influence of evaluation findings and techniques, specifically those using these alternative methods (King, 2006; NCES, 2001). Table 1, comparing the collaborative approach with a traditional approach, highlights the stark difference in terms of methods and implementation.

Table 1.

Comparison of Traditional and Collaborative Evaluation Approaches

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Collaborative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholder Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Minimal participation; Maintain distance, engagement as needed</td>
<td>Collaboration throughout the entire evaluation process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Priority placed on rigorous design and use of preset metrics</td>
<td>As rigorous as possible; dependent upon client needs and use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation Design</strong></td>
<td>Always controlled by the evaluator; Adherence to funder bureaucracy and centralized structures</td>
<td>Negotiated; attempts to promote shared knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation Decision-Making</strong></td>
<td>Addresses the need for objective accountability and universal measures of effectiveness</td>
<td>Develop evaluation capacity through efforts to increase evaluation use, and improve data quality by reflecting program context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Claims</strong></td>
<td></td>
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Traditional or “distanced” evaluation approaches maintain distinct roles of control, authority, and distance as it relates to evaluator, stakeholders, and evaluand. Traditional evaluation has origins within an era of accountability. During this era, the role of evaluation in identifying merit and worth were limited to quantitative measures focused on standardized metrics without addressing issues of program context (Chouinard, 2013; Tyler, 1991). The consideration of context was limited to planning decisions and based on the needs of funders (Stufflebeam, 1971). In response to these shortcomings, responsive evaluation was initiated as a means to address program needs and contexts by carefully engaging stakeholders in a greater capacity (Stake, 1980). Collaborative evaluation is an offspring of responsive evaluation in that it uses ongoing communication and stakeholder engagement in the evaluation cycle including planning, data collection, instrument development, and reporting. It does not claim to sacrifice rigor or the use of Guiding Principles for Evaluators (AEA, 2011) to do this but instead centers its design around program stakeholders and local context.

Regarding evaluation decision-making, collaborative evaluation negotiates evaluation decisions with its stakeholders and attempts to promote an environment where authority and power are minimized. In a different manner, traditional approaches determine that technical expertise trumps participation and reinforce existing power structures (Chouinard, 2013). The focus of traditional approaches to promote validity through standardized metrics and preset indicators of success dictates why and how this approach is implemented. Alternatively, collaborative evaluation focuses on the dynamic versus static nature of evaluation by identifying program context and needs for evaluation in pre-activities, planning, and subsequent stages in an effort to reflect program context and promote cultural validity,
capacity building, and evaluation use over time (O’Sullivan, 2012; Rodriguez-Campos, 2012).

Evaluations recognized as reputable scientific research within the realm of educational programs are most often distanced evaluation approaches that focus on the use of experimental designs (Chatterji, 2004) to evaluate program outcomes. A well-publicized example of such a distanced evaluation study was carried out by Mathematica (2004) on the Upward Bound Program. Upward Bound (UB), the first of six TRIO programs, provides high school students from low-income, first-generation family backgrounds with college access services through an extensive summer experience on a college campus over four years. The results of this expensive, multiyear investigation of the effectiveness of the oldest federally funded TRIO Program led to national debate and subsequent federal mandates that required Upward Bound programs to change their targeted population to focus more on students with below average grade point averages. The 1992–2004 commissioned national evaluation report of UB programs contracted by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) came to a surprising and controversial conclusion that UB was ineffective. Understandably there was an outcry within the college access community about the findings and role of evaluation (Cahalan, 2009; Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, & Rak, 1997). The evaluation was criticized on numerous grounds including statistical measures, ethical procedures, and data collection practices (Meyers, Olsen, et al., 2004). One of the greatest concerns, relevant to contextualizing access services, was that it did not collect observational data to know whether program staff actually adhered to the guidelines of refusing services to half their eligible population or that students were not receiving services elsewhere.
In the traditional vein, Mathematica evaluators and the DOE relied on a distanced evaluation approach to minimize bias and maximize objectivity (Scriven, 1990) related to the evaluation when they should have incorporated some aspects of program context (Meyers, 2004). Third-party distanced evaluations are common practice within the policy discourse of grant-funded programs to ensure accountability of appropriated funds and advance political agendas (e.g., No Child Left Behind). For example, throughout the HEA grant proposal for Upward Bound accountability terms were used like “effectiveness,” “rigorous experimental evaluation,” and “scientific research,” (HEA, 2008) and these terms align specifically with those found in No Child Left Behind documents. However, the claims that evaluation is only useful or valuable when done from a distance rests on the questionable assumption that there is sufficient evaluation evidence available from a distance that ensures quality data and is helpful for stakeholders. This is not supported by the previously mentioned Mathematica study nor is it a proven tactic on school and community programs (Chatterji, 2004).

Moreover, fewer than half of non-profit program evaluations are conducted by third-party evaluators (Fine, Thayer, & Coghlan, 2000) and many of those published with a focus on college access services lack information on the use and involvement by clients in the evaluation process (Constantine et al., 2006; Hollenbeck & Kimmel, 1996; Holton et al., 2006; Solageui, 2009; The Colorado Trust, 2004; Watt, Huerta, & Lozano, 2007).

A review of evaluation reports from national college access Web sites and portals—JSTOR, ERIC, AERA, AEA, SIG, Program Planning and Evaluation and Education: Sage Full Text Collection educational research databases—along with membership-based portals and Web sites such as GEAR UP, Pathways to College Network, National College Access Network, and Pell Institute for Higher Learning Evaluation Toolkit showed limited results as
well (Kane, 2004). Although evaluation studies exist that discuss the impact of collaboration and cultural responsiveness in college access programs (Askew, Jay, & Greene, 2012; Zulli & Frierson, 2005), publications on its program impact are still limited. More studies exist that focus on the role of collaborative evaluation in program planning generally (Cousins, Donohue, & Bloom, 1996; Jay, O’Sullivan & Costello, 2006; O’Sullivan, Skaga, & Chernow, 2005). Hooker and Brand (2009) argued these limited results were justified because rigorous evaluations (with quantitative measures) are more expensive due to their greater quality and thus are not conducted often. Despite the controversial nature of such a claim that rigor is based on experimental design, Chatterji (2004) demonstrated that to capture the breadth and depth of information relevant to evaluation and program implementation, there needs to be a greater effort to work with programs conducting these evaluations.

Requirements by funders and policymakers on educational programs and organizations with limited resources to commission or adhere to a third-party evaluation service are taxing. First, evaluations are costly and programs (unconvinced of the benefit to them) would rather use that money on services (Carman, 2007). Second, traditional evaluation reports published seem punitive and less relevant to their program and are used to measure effectiveness and impact rather than process and improvement. Fowler (2000) discusses the need to use a mix of methods that encourage discussion and uncover unexpected findings. Last, the focus of funders to support distanced evaluation as the “gold standard” for good evaluation leaves program staff to believe this is their only option if they contract with an external evaluator where findings are sometimes controversial (Hooker & Brand, 2009; Thurston, 2009).
A review of evaluation results by the American Youth Policy Forum (Hooker & Brand, 2009) showed a strong level of program effectiveness measured as an increase in young people “who graduate from high school prepared to make informed decisions about education and training and who are ready to succeed in college and careers” (p. v).

Alternately Thurston (2009) cited evaluation studies that showed minimal levels of increase in participant outcomes compared to their control group counterparts. This discrepancy in evaluation findings may have something to do with poor data quality and/or data collection strategies as a result of minimal stakeholder involvement to validate contextual variables and program fidelity.

Due to insufficient and inconsistent evaluation findings using traditional distanced approaches, it is important to understand the factors that influence the likelihood of gathering and using good evaluation data so that project outcomes are measured, processes are improved on, and goals can be achieved. In the 1990s, program evaluators sought to determine appropriate responses to these changing demands of accountability and to assess program effectiveness with an increased need for quality data, flexibility, and usability (Brandon, 1998). Unfortunately, limited research (although it’s growing) has been reported on the topic of the best methods for college access evaluations to achieve this. Rather, funders must play more of a role in supporting the publication of evaluation efforts designed to minimize inequities and power systems (O’Connor, 2010).

To support efforts to reflect local program context and promote evaluation use, researchers found that evaluations must engage stakeholders even within multisite evaluations (Campbell & Mark, 2006). Specifically, evaluation studies of college access programs that focus on engaging stakeholders in the process report impacts of program
improvement and greater staff reflection (Kirk & Day, 2011; Zulli & Frierson, 2004). Multisite evaluations have a greater challenge to build evaluation engagement and capacity within organizations (Lawrenz & Huffman, 2003). However, studies show the strategic use of evaluation activities to create community and buy-in within the evaluation process—technical assistance, use of technology, involvement of peer groups—is useful (Goodyear, Lawrenz, King, & Ooms, 2011; Rogers, Ahmed, Hamdallah, & Little, 2010).

2.3.2 An Alternative Approach

Studies that reflect on and capture the development and actual experiences of college access programs are scant (King, 2006). Even if there were somewhat of a consensus, the variation in programs—community, capacity, funding, audience—would raise alarm for any one-size-fits-all approach to evaluation. Flexibility is important within college access programs because the types and implementation of college access services vary greatly. Therefore, YMCA programs, designed to address issues of access at various points in the early and secondary years of student life, are at a lack for best practices. As the research shows, the contention is not whether these services should exist but what variation lies in the implementation of these services by program staff and how to evaluate such an effort so it helps the program improve and holds them accountable to the necessary stakeholders.

Most not-for-profit organizations conduct program evaluation to measure the outcome and impact of their efforts (Fine, Thayer, & Coghlan, 2000), usually at the directive of their funding agencies. However, when given the choice, providing direct services takes priority over evaluating the efficacy of those services (Bennett, Riger, Schewe, Howard, & Wasco, 2004), especially when it is not directly related to the program goals. It has been only recently that efforts by program advocates, researchers, and evaluators have encouraged
funders to use evaluation to assist programs in assessing their outcomes for improvement in planning and implementation. This consideration on the role of evaluation in organizations doing college access allows programs to embrace aspects of evaluation that are necessary to identify what is working, what isn’t, and for whom. By highlighting only traditional distanced approaches to evaluation, stakeholders were doing a disservice to the possibility of learning from programs about what evaluation can do for them aside from assessing their program outcomes.

By further examining the limited use and types of evaluation present in programs doing college access work, it’s suggested that alternative evaluation approaches like collaborative evaluation offer programs an opportunity to exercise some program control by strategically engaging them in the evaluation process and building internal evaluation capacity (Baizerman, Compton, & Stockdill, 2002). This approach also boasts confidence in data quality and making the evaluation of greater use (O’Sullivan, 2004). Collaborative evaluation also lends itself to integrating contextually and culturally responsive practices (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Hopson, 2004). Despite critiques of uncertain objectivity and questionable advocacy agendas, if done correctly, its palatability and strengthening of programs is irrefutable (Shadish & Cleminsky, 1997). These types of claims coupled with the current political environment are the catalyst for increased use of alternative approaches in evaluation of social programs (Brandon, 1998).

2.3.3 Collaborative Evaluation

By understanding the phenomena each program seeks to address, evaluators can create better measures that are appropriate for the program, measure goal attainment, involve stakeholders in the process, and increase evaluation use (Fine, Thayer, & Coghlan, 2000;
The emergence of approaches dependent on the participation of stakeholders—like collaborative, participatory, and empowerment evaluation—was brought about by the largely unused nature of evaluations, those geared toward the research community as audience instead of program staff and other decision makers (Greene, 1986). Collaborative evaluation, as with other participant-oriented approaches, was seen as one way to increase the use of evaluation results by engaging stakeholders in the entire process (Patton, 1997). The evaluation literature has provided various explanations as to what collaborative evaluation is and how it functions to enhance evaluation usefulness and data quality (O’Sullivan, 2004; Patton, 1997; Rodriguez-Campos, 2005). Although the details of the definition of collaborative evaluation differ from evaluator to evaluator, there is a general consensus among them that collaborative evaluation represents an approach to the evaluation process by which stakeholders are actively engaged (O’Sullivan, 2004). In addition, developmental elements through collaborative evaluation are said to constitute a potentially viable means for building evaluation capacity and readiness (Henry & Mark, 2003; Hoole & Patterson, 2008). The basic premise is that collaborative evaluation is, in fact, developmental because it provides the necessary support and technical assistance for programs to have a shared experience in the evaluation process at their level of readiness (O’Sullivan, 2012). Based on these ideas, we elaborate in the remainder of this paper on the use of collaborative evaluation by outlining its roots and present uses.

Although having historically limited involvement in program activities, evaluation can be both empowering and affect an entire system by incorporating new cultural attitudes, organizational structures, decision-making models, and accountability methods (Fetterman, 1997; Greene, 1986; Hopson, 2004; Preskill, 1997). In fact, program evaluation has
expanded to include alternative evaluation approaches of participatory (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998), empowerment (Fetterman, 2001), collaborative (O’Sullivan, 2004; Rodriguez-Campos, 2005), and utilization-focused evaluation. These recent additions to the evaluation toolkit boast active participation by stakeholders, emancipating them by including their voices in the evaluation process rather than suppressing them. To be clear, traditional approaches may include participants at various points in the evaluation as well but these particular approaches are explicit and systematic about when and how this participation is taking place in an effort to increase use and usefulness to the program. Critics argue these approaches are biased due to their engagement of stakeholders. However, it is becoming widely accepted that although not always explicit, all evaluation is inherently political and biased (Chleminsky, 1987).

Collaborative evaluation falls roughly in the middle of a continuum of alternative evaluation approaches regarding evaluator control and flexibility in design in the evaluation process. Empowerment orientation is the most often referred to as furthest left on the continuum of evaluation participatory approaches, where full control of the evaluation is the extreme participatory marker. With empowerment evaluation, the evaluators want to make things better for vulnerable populations by “creat[ing] an environment conducive to the development of empowerment” (Fetterman, 2007, p. 182) by giving, if necessary, full control of the evaluation back to its stakeholders. Alternatively, utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 1997) is the most practical participatory approach. Instead of requiring the involvement of stakeholders to result in their gain in evaluation control, utilization-focused evaluation considers the program being evaluated and factors such as the evaluation interests, needs, and capacity of partners in design decisions to maximize the use for the intended
stakeholders. Participatory evaluation strategies, similar to collaborative evaluation, engage stakeholders but may or may not do so in a less formal way.

Collaborative evaluation has a strong level of flexibility and adaptability to address program variation. For example, similar to empowerment evaluation approaches, collaborative evaluation can have a transformative aspect as part of its intended goal where it aims to alter an injustice through its practice. Another option is for it to be primarily practical in intention as is the case with utilization-focused evaluation. A primary difference is the extent to which collaborative evaluation does not relinquish control of the evaluation but instead relies on the shared experiences and knowledge base of program stakeholders to help guide the methodology and intent.

Two unique conceptual models exist for evaluators seeking to understand and plan a collaborative evaluation (O’Sullivan, 2004; Rodriguez-Campos, 2005). Rodriguez-Campos (2005) created the Model for Collaborative Evaluation (MCE), which highlights the necessary steps and strategies for actively engaging stakeholders throughout the evaluation. Six elements comprise this comprehensive framework designed to give evaluators a guide for interactive decision-making to promote a collaborative evaluation. Those components are: (1) identify the situation, (2) clarify the expectations, (3) establish a shared commitment, (4) ensure open communication, (5) encourage best practices, and (6) follow specific guidelines. The next model, (shown in Figure 1), put forward by O’Sullivan (2004), described the collaborative evaluation in terms of a four-stage cycle, connected and enhanced by the communication back and forth with program stakeholders.

According to O’Sullivan (2004), the collaborative evaluation cycle is iterative and hinges on the use of communication throughout aspects of each stage. Based on extensive
evaluation experience (O’Sullivan & D’Agostino, 2002; O’Sullivan, Skaga, & Chernow, 2005) using this approach and a review of the evaluation literature O’Sullivan discovered that though collaborative evaluators should facilitate this cycle, programs will vary in their involvement at each stage based on their own organizational readiness and that evaluation of the program should not suffer because of it.

![Collaborative Evaluation Cycle](image-url)

*Figure 1*. Taken from O’Sullivan (2004) Collaborative Evaluation Cycle.

O’Sullivan (2004) and Rodriguez-Campos (2012) make the claims that by using a collaborative evaluation approach, meaning systematically engaging stakeholders at each step in the collaborative evaluation and adhering to basic evaluation principles, the evaluation can lead to positive outcomes for program work:

- Increased evaluation competence
- Increased use of evaluation in program work
- Increased program awareness
- Increased data quality
Collaborative evaluation is considered both an approach and a developmental process that can help programs respond to and assess internal and external changes in program environments (Henry & Mark, 2002). Moreover, regardless of the evaluation approach taken, excellence in evaluation should outline the extent to which outcomes are met, determine the quality of service, and identify areas for improvement. Thus, maintaining communication and transparency throughout the evaluation process for both evaluator and stakeholder, as prioritized in collaborative approaches, helps ensure shared understandings and meanings relevant to the program evaluation. For example, where traditional uses of evaluation in a formative process is to make judgments based on prescribed goals and objectives and to question how best to accomplish those goals, collaborative approaches allow the program to develop their own goals and objectives based on local social and cultural program contexts and focuses on formative information that will improve the program (Chouinard, 2013). In essence, the strategic interaction throughout implementation makes collaborative evaluation part of the program development process (Patton, 1997). As a result, the use and development of tools, identification of sampling procedures, and analysis of findings reflect the actual program practices and contexts, which increase data quality (O’Sullivan, 2004).

Cultural validity of data is also heightened by the engagement of stakeholders in the evaluation process (Kirkhart, 2005). A shortcoming of distanced approaches, Collaborative evaluation allows for the cultural responsiveness to manifest in the evaluation process (Askew, Jay, & Greene, 2012), a shortcoming of most distanced approaches. Without sacrificing evaluation data quality—technical and contextual—a good collaborative approach builds rapport and offers necessary support to programs as they interpret and make sense of relevant findings. Thus, instead of focusing solely on accountability to policy makers and
funders, college access programs can draw on their past prior to desegregation and exercise a level of self-accountability as well.

Where distanced evaluation approaches may seem useful for college access policymakers and funders due to its focus on program effectiveness and summative findings, empowerment evaluation is most useful to address the concerns of college access participants and staff regarding the historical and social situatedness of power dynamics and control for these the populations served. The program staff and other stakeholders become their own evaluators in an effort to develop self-reflection and program improvement (Fetterman, 1996). However, funders may believe the evaluative information received through program stakeholder control of the evaluation is less reliable or of poor quality. As a point of agreement, collaborative and empowerment approaches share similar processes of engaging stakeholders as data collectors, analyzers, interpreters, and reporters to build their evaluation capacity (O’Sullivan, 2012). In many ways a middle ground between distance and empowerment, collaborative evaluation works to equalize the power dynamics in evaluation and assist programs to gain awareness and understanding of their program, but it always prioritizes evaluation quality by never relinquishing total control.

Prior evaluation of college access programs may argue that evaluations do not need to be used to fulfill their purpose. Instead, they may be driven by other needs and desires of accountability or knowledge rather than focused on program improvement and development (Chelimsky & Shadish, 1997). It is true that collaborative evaluation solicits use where other traditional approaches do not. However, it is a mistake to assume that ideas of accountability and use are in any way mutually exclusive. It should be equally important to policy makers and program administrators whether programs are spending money effectively and whether
program strategies are continuously improving by use of evaluation data. The stakes are high in college access where thousands of programs vie for the same federal, state, and local funding streams, even more so for the half of the programs relying on federal appropriations (Thierney, 2002). Of major importance to all funders is the effectiveness of the programs where an indicator of program success lies in the ability to tell the story through empirical evidence. Thus, evaluation of college access programs as with all programs is never neutral and as an evaluator one must be transparent about the advocacy role tied to evaluation (Stufflebeam & Webster, 1983).

This review of collaborative evaluation and college access has begun to reframe our understanding of evaluation of programs doing college access work by suggesting evaluation must consider historical and cultural domains and political agendas that shape college access program environments and services. With collaborative evaluation, a participatory rationale is a promising way to engage and build capacity within college access programs and still maintain levels of expertise and accountability critical for policymakers and funders. However, there is no fool-proof solution for programs. Neither college access programs nor their services are homogenous so no single approach will fit them all. The sliding scale of collaborative evaluation does offer an entry point for programs to reflect on their program implementation efforts in a less threatening manner by identifying methods and designs that would be representative of the developmental and political nature of college access programs. The ideas mentioned here have implications for the role of collaborative evaluation in the sustainability and development of programs conducting college access services—including data quality, evaluation use, capacity, and cultural responsiveness, which should be examined.
Discussion

By studying the influence of collaborative evaluation on YMCA programs, this study hopes to explain the role of collaborative evaluation in developing college access programs by answering questions beyond what is happening in the program related to services to how events are happening within the programs to advance program goals and local ideals. Tierney (2002) suggested, “rather than pursuing the question ‘what works’? It might be more useful to ask, ‘What works where, with whom, under what conditions and why?’” (p. 198). To promote and identify effective college access programs, it is important for funders, organizational leadership, and program staff to shift their thinking and view evaluation as an integral part of program planning and implementation as well as a means for measuring outcomes. To do this, college access professionals must be clear on whether aspects of collaborative evaluation enhance program development competencies for staff and organizations overall.

This review has highlighted the importance of considering context in program evaluation, specifically for educational programming. In addition to context, stakeholders should revisit two key areas where collaborative evaluation purports to have an impact on organizations doing college access work. Through program evaluation activities, the collaborative evaluation framework seeks to emphasize program reflection/awareness and capacity building for staff. Further elaboration follows.

First, a recent statement published through the American Evaluation Association (2011) on cultural competence in evaluation advances the necessary elements of quality evaluation to include cultural competence and context. For programs doing college access work, collaborative evaluation acts as a lens for program reflection, including cultural values.
It should be noted that collaborative evaluators must work also to examine themselves in this process as instruments in the evaluation, which is not always explicit in the literature. Based on this public statement, diversity is identified as a vehicle to promote excellence in evaluation (Symmonette, 2004), because validity extends to culture throughout the evaluation process (Nelson-Barber, Lafrance, Trumbell, & Aburto, 2005). For some programs this cultural consideration is impetus for them to challenge the national landscape of deficit thinking on access program participants. For other programs it is not. By working in collaboration, evaluators are not necessarily serving college access programs by considering matters of race, equity, power, and culture (Hopson, 2004), but the approach makes cultural responsiveness more accessible (Nelson-Barber, Lafrance, Trumbell, & Aburto, 2005).

Evaluators should include the voices of diverse stakeholders at each phase in the collaborative evaluation cycle. This means them taking an active interest in cultural contexts and roles that may be hidden within a program framework. It requires the evaluator to recognize if and how the each program’s values, knowledge, and implementation strategies may differ based on the positionality of leaders, staff, and participants even though the content may not change. Programs must then reflect on how they are a powerful political and institutional tool for students and communities. This reflection is a result of the use of “evaluation to interrupt inaccuracies caused by systemic efforts to maintain privilege for some and marginalize others” (Symmonette, 2005, p. 4).

Second, Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) proponents have argued that for organizations to improve on their current program outcomes and reporting efforts, evaluation should be integrated into the overall organizational culture (Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Stockill et al., 2002). ECB is a way to promote organizational development using an evaluation
framework. The goal is to expand evaluation knowledge and promote the use of evaluation in decision-making processes. In addition, college access literature and community forums suggest that successful programs engage partners, create effective structures, and leverage the resources of institutions and sectors (Ward, 2006). Although collaborative evaluation efforts can foster innovative and dynamic environments with better use of program information (Tierney, 1999), it is up to programs to remain open to capacity-building strategies, technical assistance, and collaborative learning during the evaluation process. To some degree, for many college access professionals this is usually the only form of training they receive as program professionals (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). Thus a recommendation to programs doing college access to look at alternative approaches to evaluation that build internal capacity and contextualize findings is unsurprising (Cousins & Earl, 1995). For college access programs, a collaborative approach using ECB builds technical capacity for them to reflect on their decisions as it relates to institutional and societal policies in addition to program processes.

Last, recent studies on the relationship between the use of evaluation findings and relevance have implied that programs will make use of evaluation if it meets the specific needs of funders (Carmen, 2007), reflects their desires to improve their program (Lawrenz, King, & Ooms, 2011), and is accessible to all stakeholders (Hoole & Patterson, 2008). In particular, the role and purpose of college access programs to the communities they serve have crucial elements that should be addressed when collaborative evaluation is being used. Because the issue of program effectiveness is an integral part of the funding discourse, the effect of too few college access evaluation reports seems to be largely explainable by the dominance of traditional evaluation paradigms that only consider the needs of the funders.
Involving stakeholders through participative approaches reduces the power differential (Nelson-Barber et al., 2005) prevalent in research and evaluation situations that involve members of the non-dominant community, thus improving the likelihood of use and dissemination to the broader college access community. Collaborative evaluation approaches may have to convince funders and policy makers of their relevance and value to outcome evaluation due to their interactive nature with stakeholders; however, it certainly should increase the use and relevance to program staff and local stakeholders.

**Conclusion**

In choosing an evaluation approach, program stakeholders must consider the complicated historical and political climate shaping college access work. It is not clear that evaluators, funders, staff, and policymakers recognize the limitations to using distant, traditional evaluation designs. Specifically, evaluators using a collaborative approach are better situated within a conceptual framework to be responsive to the needs and challenges of local social organizations. This study contributes to the larger effort by evaluators to consider use, culture, and context in evaluation methods, approaches, and designs. It also parallels new existing efforts by stakeholders of college access programs to promote quality evaluations that are useful and informative. By studying the impact of an alternative evaluation on program implementation, specifically college access service–oriented programs, stakeholders will gain insight and make more informed decisions about how evaluation can impact their program, communities served, and organization. Moreover, there is not only space in the field but encouragement to gather empirical evidence on the use of collaborative evaluation.
Chapter 3: Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

This study offers researchers, funding agencies, and evaluation specialists a greater understanding of the impact on local organizations using a collaborative evaluation approach for the implementation of higher education service projects (HESP). The study significance and collaborative evaluation methodology were discussed earlier.

This chapter outlines a case study design with mixed-method data collection strategies used to answer three overarching research questions:

1. How have the components of collaborative evaluation influenced program reflection, planning, and implementation for:
   a. Program participants, activities, and outcomes,
   b. Evaluation capacity of individuals within the organization, and
   c. Organizational evaluation culture?

2. How are program stakeholders within the organization using evaluation?

3. What is the role of collaborative evaluation as implemented with YMCAs in planning and implementation of college access program services within their local organizations?

A description of the case and its context are presented in this chapter along with the data collection strategies used. By using a case study design, this research hopes to address the gap in the literature and to collect empirical data about how a collaborative program evaluation approach is used by different organizations within a single grant-funded initiative that supports students’ college preparation. As a case study, the research uses multiple data sources including documents from the actual two-year program evaluation, including all grant application and evaluation planning materials, interviews with national program
directors, and reports and reflections from evaluation interns. Additional data were collected in the form of surveys that were sent to program staff in the more than 60 local YMCAs participating in the project and follow-up interviews with 5 of the 61 YMCAs surveyed. The table below highlights the research questions and associated data sources, data collection activities, and analysis procedures.

Table 2.

*Research Questions, Data Sources, Data Collection Activities and Data Analysis Procedures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Collection Activity</th>
<th>Analysis Procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1. What is the role of collaborative evaluation currently being implemented with YMCAs in planning and implementation of college access program services within their local organizations?</td>
<td>Study Participants</td>
<td>Survey, Interviews</td>
<td>Statistical Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Directors</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Content Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluation Team</td>
<td>Documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relevant Literature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2. How have the components of collaborative evaluation influenced program reflection, planning and implementation: a. Program participants, activities and outcomes b. Evaluation capacity of individuals within the organization c. Organization culture</td>
<td>Study Participants</td>
<td>Survey, Interviews</td>
<td>Statistical analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program Documents</td>
<td>Program Documents</td>
<td>Content Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Literature Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thematic Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3. How are program stakeholders within the organization using evaluation?</td>
<td>Study Participants</td>
<td>Survey, Interviews</td>
<td>Statistical analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluation Documents</td>
<td>Evaluation Reports</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Directors</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Content Analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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3.2 Overall Research Design

A case-study research design was chosen for this study, because it is best suited for conducting explanatory research that seeks to preserve the holistic characteristics of contemporary real-life events (Yin, 2009). Maintaining these characteristics is especially important in an effort to capture the dynamic process of organizational change (Specter, 2005). Stake (1995) stressed that a bounded system such as programs or people are most suitable for case study, because it can shed light onto what is happening within a specific situation or system rather than addressing generalities. With collaborative evaluation, proponents have made claims about its use and impact but few studies have collected empirical evidence about these claims. Case study methods allows for an exploration of these claims in depth.

This study drew from information collected from over 60 local YMCA organizations, delving deeply into understanding what actually occurred during a two-year evaluation period. It used the program evaluation documents to build descriptions of the overall project but goes beyond that to have stakeholders experiencing the evaluation reflect on their participation in the process. By deliberately surveying stakeholders and select embedded individual cases from those original surveys, deeper probing occurred. By using archival interviews with the national program directors and local program staff, additional perspectives were also gained. Thus, the study considered multiple perspectives and select embedded cases to create a case study design. Understanding the variation within and among sites is instrumental to understanding the overall influence (Kirkhart, 2000) of this evaluation intervention. Another consideration in using this design is the focus on research questions that seek to answer how a phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2009), not just when or how many times
it occurs. Although case study research design underpins this study, multiple-source data collection and use of thematic analysis are the tools and procedures used for data collection and analysis.

3.3 Data Collection Plan

A sequential data collection process occurred in two phases. This is determined by one method of data collection being necessary before the other is begun versus them occurring simultaneously (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). Each phase had multiple steps occurring to promote verification strategies and improve data collection instruments used at each stage of the research process.

3.3.1 Participant Selection

Once methods were decided, the next step in the study was to define the population. Because the researcher has been a graduate research assistant with Evaluation, Assessment, and Policy Connections, a unit within the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill School of Education (see position statement), and in that capacity has worked as a mentor to the interns on the evaluation of the YMCA Higher Education Project for the two years of the evaluation, the information was obtainable, and the sponsor was supportive of the effort. YMCAs are committed to serving youth and teens in an effort to increase postsecondary enrollment of all student populations (National YMCA 2007-08 Grant Application to Lumina Foundation, 2007); YMCA USA is also very interested in promoting evaluation within their organization. All program staff members representing 61 YMCAs across the United States participating in the Higher Education Service Project were invited to participate in the study. Participants invited to complete the initial survey included one program staff liaison and CEO or equivalent within the organization. The program staff liaison was identified as
working directly with program development, implementation, and/or evaluation of the project. Fifty-eight program staff and/or executive directors representing 47 YMCAs completed a self-administered online survey consisting of Likert-scale, matrix, and open-ended questions. In certain cases, the initial program staff liaison was no longer available and another member of the program staff completed the survey. After analyzing survey data, four purposively selected YMCAs participated in an in-depth interview. In addition, interview transcripts of the national director and program coordinator and focus group summaries of the YMCA staff involved in YHESP, as well as reflection reports from each of the two evaluation interns working on the evaluation project, were reviewed. Following is a detailed description of each of these collection activities.

3.3.2 Survey Development

A survey adhering to basic questionnaire development guidelines (Dillman, 2000) was developed to collect data from YMCA professionals in each of the organizations funded by the National YHESP. Conducting a survey offers an opportunity to retrieve large amounts of data to have a better understanding of “the big picture,” meaning any variation and patterns that exist overall. The survey itself included measures of the evaluation behaviors they engage in, organizational characteristics, and their perceptions of collaborative evaluation activities.

The survey included approximately 30 to 40 items in four different categories: evaluation involvement (items 1–4), perceptions about influence (items 5–8), evaluation use (items 9–11), and organizational culture and demographic items (items 11–15). Demographic items provided contextual background information such as employment title, educational attainment, and previous evaluation experience along with race and gender. Questions were
both closed- and open-ended based on the collaborative evaluation literature, which indicates evaluation during the program planning phase assists in program implementation. Evaluation use and involvement items were based on a 5-point, Likert-type scale that assesses the frequency and degree to which respondents experience “collaboration” in their evaluation experiences because of the collaborative evaluation approach. Examples include being asked for feedback or assistance from staff about evaluation activities; being asked to present or collect data; and being asked to develop evaluation instruments. In this study, the frequency response options range from never (0) to almost all the time (4). Information gathered from these surveys guided probes that follow key interview questions as well as contribute to the selection of YMCAs in the follow up interviews.

Fortunately, the overwhelming support and commitment on the part of program directors ensured support and access to the entire population. Therefore, all YMCAs were surveyed and reminders were sent to ensure full cooperation from participants. In addition, all population members had the means to respond through the Internet because they had mandatory online trainings and communication during the project. Thus external validity was not a crucial issue. The validity and reliability of the survey was established with an expert panel (national director, coordinators, evaluators) and pilot testers from the same population to offer feedback on question wording and ambiguity of survey items. Feedback provided by the pilot group coupled with an extensive review of literature on how the key constructs of collaboration, use, and organizational culture are defined was captured in the survey. Foreseeable threats to quality information gathering included technological factors and multiple completions. To address technological factors, the researcher tested the survey link on multiple platforms prior to its dissemination; all YMCA staff members in the project
regularly use e-mail and the Web. To address multiple completions, the researcher directly sent the survey link to eligible parties with specific instructions not to forward along on their own.

3.2.3 Case Interviews

Interview participants were chosen through the use of purposeful sampling techniques (Patton, 1990). These techniques led to targeting 1) participants involved in both program and evaluation planning who 2) reported change in evaluation beliefs, 3) strong impact on capacity, and 4) use of the collaborative evaluation approach investigated. Basically, it was best to interview the individuals most familiar with the YHESP work and evaluation process for the grant. In addition, an initial evaluation knowledge rating was used to ensure participants represented each of the three levels of initial evaluation knowledge. Two cohorts in the project were generally distinguished by year of entry as indicated by program application materials. Although YMCAs from each cohort were invited there were fewer eligible participants from Cohort 2 and none responded to the interview request.

Of the 41 eligible YMCA respondents who completed the case study survey and granted permission for a follow-up interview, 7 met these criteria. Ultimately, four cases including five individuals were interviewed.

Table 3.

*Interview Cases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology Category</th>
<th>YMCA Case Name</th>
<th>Initial Evaluation Knowledge</th>
<th>YMCA Organizational Size</th>
<th>Evaluation Culture</th>
<th>Cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Mid-size</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamma</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Mid-size</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five open-ended telephone interviews with three executive directors and two program directors involved with the program and its evaluation following a semi-structured, interview guide format were conducted. Survey result variation was shared with the interviewees, who first engaged in discussion around current higher education program evaluation and organizational efforts. Next, interviewees spoke to any commonalities, variations, and expansion of these projects across the case study. The goal of this process was to make sense of their interpretation regarding the issue under investigation and identify their evaluation stories as an organization.

The interview protocol was developed by the researcher to examine longer-term impact of the evaluation and participant responses to the questions that would address the overarching three research questions. With regard to impact there were two components of the interview protocol, program development and evaluation process. In the case of recordings, four out of five of the interviews were recorded and transcribed and all were included in analysis. Interviews lasted between 52 and 75 minutes. Each set of questions asked about current initiatives, organizational culture, and capacity. Member-checking was done to ensure that the researcher’s interpretations of the findings reflected the voices of the participants. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the member-checking process, which entails reflecting back to stakeholders the data you have collected and analyzed for verification, is the most important technique done in research to establish credibility.

**Coding Process**

First, field notes and interview transcripts were reviewed separately, using open and axial coding processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding helped identify dominant themes; axial coding on subsequent review helped identify specific examples illustrating
each dominant theme. Interview transcripts were read and analyzed individually first, then as a group. The goal was to identify the narrative of each specific case before comparing narratives across all transcripts.

Finally, the emerging themes and narratives from the program notes and interview transcripts were cross-analyzed and compared as a collective whole. A thematic coding process was used to help identify the ways in which dominant themes relate, or do not relate to, the collaborative evaluation experience and YHESP program models proposed by O’Sullivan (2004) and Rodriguez-Campos (2002), respectively.

3.2.4 Archival Documents

Interview data, reflection narratives, program documents, and published reports were used to triangulate the data as necessary, original transcriptions were used when possible. Interview data were collected in three formats. First, the national program staff—director and coordinator—were interviewed by phone by the evaluation interns as part of their final reports, transcription data were used.

Next, a published report accounts the leadership meeting held for senior staff. The evaluation portion of the workshop introduced the logic model format used for the YHESP project and offered several open-ended discussions about evaluation within YMCAs for Higher Education Service projects. Lastly, another focus group report summarized thoughts representing 48 YMCAs with local Y staff members who work with educational programs. Twenty-five of the known 41 YHESP YMCAs were represented in a focus group report regarding resources and capacity of YMCAs focused on educational programming. Themes from the focus group included: Structure, Staffing, Training, Data and Evaluation, Partnerships, and Technology. After review of each section of the document, areas of
staffing, evaluation and partnerships had data overlapping with the YHESP project and related to collaborative evaluation and program planning.

Table 4.

*Data Collection Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Data Collection Phase One</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convene advisory panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule expert panel interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete expert panel interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Data Collection Phase Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop draft of survey protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit survey draft to advisory panel for piloting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview advisory panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revise survey to final version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminate survey to study participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze survey results</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Data Collection Phase One</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify 4-6 YMCAs to participate in interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite participation from the 4-6 YMCAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop initial Interview protocol based on selection of YMCAs and survey results</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Data Collection Phase Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submit interview protocol to advisory panel for feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule interviews with YMCA case study participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conduct interviews</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Over half of participating YMCA staff involved in the YHESP project plus several others participated in a one-day focus group around organizational culture and resources
including questions regarding evaluation within the YMCA. Review of interview reports was an approach to explore capacity and needs around educational programming.

Content analysis was used to produce themes and support primary data collection. The themes were deduced from the theoretical context. After the initial coding of evaluation reports and reflections, categories were refined and then applied to the remainder of the document. A visual representation of what occurred at each stage in data collection can be found in Table 4.

3.3 Background of the National YMCA of the USA Higher Education Service Project (HESP)

In this case study the National YMCA of the USA provides the context for program service delivery and shares a brief overview of their organizational characteristics and the program evaluation. This first section provides a review of current strategies and structures in place for the YMCA to implement their program plans. The second section gives details regarding the purpose of the evaluation and subsequent evaluation plan.

3.3.1 Organizational Structure

The National YMCA of the USA has access to hundreds of thousands of youth through their local YMCAs. Each local unit carries its own tax-exempt status as appropriate for fund raising as a not-for-profit entity. Rather than select a pre-existing organization, college, or institution known specifically for providing access services, the Lumina Foundation decided to partner with the National YMCA of the USA organization for its reach. The YMCA is most recently known for its workout facilities and after-school programs related to health and wellness, the most recent initiative being pioneers for a healthy community (YMCA Strategic Plan, 2009). The YMCA Higher Education Service Project (YHESP) Initiative is new on the scene. Although the YMCAs have a history of
education at the postsecondary and secondary level (see http://www.ymca.net for campus Y and school initiatives), those efforts have not been predominant for years.

Each local YMCA is a not-for-profit organization equipped with advisory boards, constitutions, and by-laws. Their funding is diverse but most often collected from membership and grants. The membership base and populations served at a YMCA varies greatly by geographic location, community, amenities, and programs offered. In short, the YMCAs are community-centered organizations, focused on the domain of well-being. The notion of a community-based organization rather than a postsecondary institution, corporation, school, or network implementing college access work suggests both challenges and opportunities when developing college access work.

Earlier, the researcher suggested that college access work benefits community participants when the program is accountable, whether implicitly or explicitly, to the community it serves. Having a community-based organization house a college access initiative may lead to more accurately identifying needs and concerns and responding to those needs and concerns in an authentic, contextually, and culturally responsive way. Because the audience, participants, staff, and volunteers come from within the community, there is a level of communication, context, and culture more easily accessed (Hopson, 2004). Allowing for variation in communities and improving how it is responded to by each YMCA was the primary reason by funders to use a collaborative evaluation approach that engages stakeholders. The consideration of context and stakeholders in the overall design and implementation of the evaluation plan was paramount.

Higher education scholars posited that college access practitioners should be experienced in higher education, college counseling, and/or education. College access
professionals, per se, did not exist within the YMCA community prior to this initiative, although some may have been recruited. Therefore, a challenge for many of the local YMCAs was to access the higher education expertise and see their role as community youth specialists who equally contribute to the development and implementation of college access programming. To build confidence and a stronger capacity for the integration of college access programs at the local YMCAs, the national program director and higher education specialist team chose to use evaluation as a vehicle to help YMCA programs reflect on both strengths and weaknesses in this process.

3.3.2 Purpose of the Evaluation

The evaluation of the YHESP effort in 61 YMCAs from across the country began at the request of the organization’s national director of the program during the initial pilot year. The following year, the national director hired a program coordinator to oversee the YHESP efforts and evaluation. Both stakeholders had noted that due to limited experience in the higher education field, the YMCA program staff was at a disadvantage in developing and implementing college access services. To guide and support YMCA staff evaluation efforts of program services in this arena, the director chose to contract with an evaluation center that specialized in the use of the collaborative approach to evaluation. The national organization’s primary focus for the program was on the successful preparation and enrollment of students from traditionally underserved communities and/or backgrounds into postsecondary institutions.

3.3.3 YMCA Evaluation Plan

By expanding or developing services that would address barriers related to the academic, social, and financial success of their target populations, 61 local YMCAs (30 from
Cohort 1 and 31 from Cohort 2) implemented varying degrees of college access programming. To assist in grant development, each year representatives from participating YMCAs attended workshops (provided by the national YMCA directors) to gain an understanding of expectations related to the grant and gather information about college access programming. Workshops included Developing Collaborations and Partnerships, Resources Available, Developing Task Forces, and Evaluation Planning. In the grant proposal YMCAs outlined the following: process and outcome objectives, parental involvement, task force members, inclusion of partners from higher education institutions, use of college access materials (KnowHow2Go, Mapping Your Future, etc.), and an evaluation plan (Newkrik, 2011).

Training related to the national evaluation used a collaborative evaluation approach that focused on local evaluation capacity building, individualized technical assistance, knowledge sharing, and context. Each year an in-person workshop with representatives from each of the YMCA HESP participants served to provide an introduction to logic model development and evaluation planning. The logic model was used as a primary tool to facilitate the interaction between local program staff representatives or liaisons and evaluation team members on the basis of program development and to establish an understanding of evaluation readiness related to logic model development of each local YMCA.

The national evaluation design was developed using a collaborative evaluation approach for multisite projects which translated to the development of individualized evaluation plans and logic models for each of the 61 YHESP with the program liaisons as the primary stakeholder and local contact with support from the national program staff as
secondary stakeholders. During initial planning, the national program staff and evaluation team met to determine who would be responsible and how evaluation activities would occur. Each of the 61 YMCAs that submitted YHESP grant applications and received funding were then responsible for assigning one program liaison to participate in ongoing collaborative evaluation activities. The initial meeting with the national program staff was followed by a working meeting to review each grant application. For the first year, 31 grant applications were reviewed. The national staff and evaluation team agreed to establish a needs-based tiered system to ensure those YMCAs requiring the most evaluation technical assistance had the support necessary. Thus, during the planning and design phases, the evaluation team and national staff established and scored each YMCA application using a rubric.

First, the team developed a logic model (see Appendix B) which was used as a template for each of the YMCAs as a way to align their original grant proposal indicators—goals and objectives, process objectives, outcome objectives, evidence of process objectives, and evidence of outcome objectives—developed by the national directors. Next, using their proposals as a starting point, the team rated each of the proposals using a three-point system, in terms of their ability to provide evaluative details by adhering to the proposal outline: 1-needs substantial improvement, 2-needs some improvement, and 3-satisfactory. When differences existed amongst the evaluation team member ratings and/or national staff rating, discussion was had and a consensus met. YMCAs from cohort 1 had a large number of evaluation knowledge ranking of 1-substantial improvement where as cohort 2 had 75% of 30 YHESP project with evaluation knowledge ranking 3-satisfactory compared to 18% of 31 YHESP projects in cohort 1. This difference was influenced by the change in application
process and decision by national staff to focus on those with more program experience and capacity.

Figure 2 refers to the collaborative planning and design process that occurred with each of the 61 YMCAs. From the beginning of the evaluation, the team used the logic model and worked directly with national staff and local program staff liaisons to develop a dynamic process for providing evaluation technical assistance for the planning and design purposes of their local YMCA program work. Rating categories allowed the evaluation team to determine preliminary evaluation readiness for each of the projects and provide targeted assistance throughout the process. Once logic models were developed for each of the participating YMCAs, the evaluation team began to contact staff liaisons to schedule one-on-one calls as a way to support initial logic model development and individualized evaluation plans.

Figure 2. YHESP collaborative evaluation cycle with activities.
The evaluation team then set up one-on-one calls directly with each local project staff to develop individual logic models for their programs based on the level of details provided in the grant proposal. Although each logic model review session focused on understanding the use, components, and processes of a logic model (e.g., evidence), the facilitation of this information varied based on the program content, target audience, and readiness to apply the information (Newkrik, 2010). YHESP project sites were located in 60 US cities across the country and each organization varied in staff capacity and experience level. For many YMCAs from Cohort 2 initial project liaisons were grant developers/writers where in Cohort 1 they were program managers. Variation in program services, context, and target audience was also vast. However, to facilitate relevant trainings and promote knowledge sharing opportunities, the evaluation team organized the projects by areas of intended outcomes. Five themes were developed that organized the projects by outcome objectives and, in most cases, projects fell into more than one theme. Themes and corresponding frequencies of the cases are in Table 5.

Table 5.

*Number of YMCAs Indicating Outcomes in Five Areas of Higher Education Services*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COHORT 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010, YR1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011, YR2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COHORT 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011, YR1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ongoing one-on-one technical assistance through conference calls and e-mails was provided to each of the YMCAs for the development and understanding of use of their logic
models and subsequent evaluation activities. The evaluation team worked with each project to identify and share instruments for data collection online through Google Groups. The evaluation team conducted a widespread review of instruments within college access relevant to the work YMCAs were doing. Next, the team gathered existing tools used by the YMCAs to assess their program efforts. In collaboration with national staff and local YHESP program liaisons, the team facilitated a sharing of revised instruments to be used by each of the YMCAs based on the outcome objectives identified in the logic models.

Training opportunities occurred in the form of webinars, where experienced YHESP program staff were encouraged to share their evaluation knowledge with project staff from other YMCAs. The first year, evaluation-sharing webinar sessions were organized by the five themes in Table 5 and focused on data collection tools, challenges to evaluation planning, and networking. Representatives from at least one YMCA program representing the content theme area presented their findings and relevant evaluation work. The second year, the webinar sharing sessions focused on evaluation themes around reporting and future program planning using the logic model framework. Once again, YMCA project staff presented their data and discussed the use of logic models in their projects.

Integrated throughout this collaborative approach was a focus on working directly with program staff liaisons and national directors to conduct evaluations that are relevant to their program and represent their community organizations both in capacity and context. Evaluation interns from the American Evaluation Association were the primary evaluation contacts for the program liaisons. This allowed the evaluation to be conducted in a thorough manner despite minimal resources because the amount of time working directly with the projects was extensive.
Chapter 4: Results

Although YMCAs have used evaluation processes in varying degrees over the course of their history, evaluation of the Higher Education Service Projects was the first time many of them had conducted evaluation using a collaborative model. The national director, program coordinator, and evaluation team wanted an evaluation approach that would be responsive to the needs of diverse organizations, communities, local program participants, and the national organization itself. The collaborative evaluation model was used on multiple levels within the YMCAs’ highly contextualized program framework. Each YHESP participant adopted and adapted programmatic features and services to their community and/or organization (e.g., ages, language, urban/rural, race, ethnicity, family background). Results and analysis of the data mirror this complexity.

This chapter considers multiple factors through which to see the impact of a collaborative evaluation. Results address the research questions and highlight how, if at all and to what extent, the collaborative evaluation approach met its intended goals for multiple stakeholders in this college access effort. The chapter begins with a general introduction of the data collection sources and overview of resulting data used in the analysis. Results are divided into two key sections with archival data information woven throughout. The first part of each response to the research questions explores important potential contextual effects. These are elaborated on for consideration in subsequent survey analysis. Additionally, embedded case study interviews were analyzed and framed as an illustrative example of YMCA embedded cases in a single-case design (Yin, 2009).
Survey, archival data, and interview results are organized by research question and corresponding themes listed in the table that follows. These themes emerged in the course of data analysis and provide a heuristic method by which to gain insight into the findings.

Table 6.

Table of Contents for Organization of Survey Results by Research Question and Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Theme (s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How have the components of collaborative evaluation influenced program reflection, planning, and implementation for:</td>
<td>• Usefulness of Evaluation to Program Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Program participants, activities, and outcomes?</td>
<td>• Change in Beliefs about Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Evaluation capacity of individuals within the organization?</td>
<td>• Capacity Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Organization culture (around evaluation)?</td>
<td>- Program Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Evaluation Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Data Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Stakeholder Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How are program stakeholders within the organization using evaluation?</td>
<td>• Evaluation Use Across Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Logic Model Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Stakeholder Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Evaluator Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Purpose of Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What was the role of collaborative evaluation as implemented with 60 YMCAs</td>
<td>• Project Staff Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in planning and implementation of college access program services within their local organizations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1 Introduction

This study was conducted using an embedded single-case study design. An embedded case study allows for the researcher to explore specific phenomena happening at the level of subunits such as individuals, groups, or organizations (Yin, 2009). The case study approach seemed appropriate because it allowed the researcher to respond to the research questions descriptively. The ‘case’ consisted of the collaborative evaluation of 61 YMCAs involved in a pilot Higher Education Service Project where the subunits included individual YMCA projects. Data results were first collected via an online survey coupled with a review of
archival data from the evaluation process, with follow-up interviews being conducted with five YHESP staff.

4.1.1 Online Survey

As presented in detail in the previous chapter, the survey created was based on review of research literature focusing on evaluation use, evaluation capacity, and collaborative evaluation models. Additionally, input was solicited from a small advisory team of YHESP staff and volunteers. The advisory team of five individuals plus the two directors were given an initial draft of the survey and asked to review the survey for relevance and content. This effort resulted in a modified version of the initial survey with specific changes to language and the addition of open-ended questions. Two members of the advisory team (not part of the initial project) were asked to complete the survey for usability, and a phone interview was done with one of those members to follow-up on any suggested changes.

The survey consisted of four major topics: stakeholder engagement, evaluation use, evaluation capacity, and data quality, which aligned directly with the claims of the collaborative evaluation. Descriptions of these topics explored through the survey questions are summarized in the findings. Next, data from survey respondents, archival data including interviews with national program directors, and self-reflection documents from the two evaluation interns were then analyzed using a thematic analysis process. The guiding research questions provided the schema for organizing and interpreting the data.

4.1.2 Survey Data Analysis

After receiving Internal Review Board approval and consent from YMCA participants and relevant national YMCA program staff, the survey was administered to the YHESP participants online. The initial invitation was sent over e-mail to a distribution list
available through the evaluation artifacts and then verified with the national director. The list consisted of approximately 20 names and e-mail addresses of executive directors and 61 staff liaisons. After accounting for turnover, e-mail address errors, and YMCA closings, a total of 73 e-mails were correctly sent in September 2012; the survey was taken offline in mid-November 2012 with 58 respondents. Of the 73 potential respondents, 11 did not complete the survey, 4 e-mail errors occurred, and 11 partially responded for a response rate of 76% (58/73). Due to online and contact errors, 8 respondents (out of 58) were unidentifiable individually for follow-up purposes but still were able to be counted in overall cohort and ranking tables. Respondents represented 52 of the 61 YMCAs that participated.

Twenty-three of 58 respondents were program managers or program coordinators responsible for teen and youth programs. The next most common respondent was the executive director or senior management responsible for operations. Grant managers and/or writers were the third most common respondent to the survey and responsible for writing and securing the grant. Table 7 shows the frequency breakdown of respondent overall and by cohort.

Table 7.

Total Respondent Titles by Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants Manager</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Manager</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Embedded Interview Cases:

The interview cases analyzed used data gathered through five semi-structured interviews to further address two research questions: *How have the components of collaborative evaluation influenced program reflection, planning, and implementation?* and *What was the role of collaborative evaluation as implemented with 61 YMCAs in planning and implementation of college access program services within their local organizations?* A group of five executive directors and program coordinators at four YMCAs were interviewed about their program and evaluation practices in the context of YHESP and the role of collaborative evaluation. The selection of topics covered was determined by the thematic aspects emerging from the survey data and reported program and evaluation discourse. Interview protocol questions included “please describe current project evaluation activities” and “how, if at all, was evaluation used in YHESP program planning.” These open-ended questions addressed organizational dynamics, staff roles, and beliefs about program strategies, which served as prompts for interviewees (see Appendix C for complete protocol). The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each and were recorded and transcribed. Transcription was done from digital recordings to better appreciate and understand the unique voices of the respondents.

4.1.3 Interview Data Analysis

Findings were analyzed through open-coding methodology developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), commonly accepted as a way to identify meaning in qualitative research. The content analysis methodology involved open and axial coding of field notes and interview content and text. Open coding helped identify dominant themes; axial coding on subsequent review helped identify specific examples representative of each major theme.
This section provides an overview of the four YMCAs as well as the individual staff working within the YMCA who consented to involvement in the interviews.

4.1.4 Embedded Cases General Description

From the overall data analysis, the CEOs and executive directors played critical roles in the support, evaluation planning, and implementation of the project. Each of the YMCAs was purposively selected for their reported impact according to the survey data. When reflecting on the first and last research questions that asked how the components of collaborative evaluation influenced program reflection, planning, and implementation, and the role of collaborative evaluation on each of the four YMCA cases selected for interviews with staff liaisons were able to capture and articulate how this evaluation approach built their own capacity to manage programs and allowed them to make better programmatic decisions.

Case Alpha

Alpha is located in the eastern region of the United States; it is a stand-alone association, one of the smallest YMCAs. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was extremely involved and acted in both a supportive staff and leadership role. With the initial grant money their YMCA convened a task force for the purpose of connecting foster youth with postsecondary education.

The follow-up interview with Alpha confirmed that the majority of YHESP project activities were not sustained because of competing priorities and reduced funding. Many of the task force members, including state foster youth representative, state department of education, and two other college access program representatives, had moved on to continue other higher education projects. Alpha was chosen for this analysis because this YMCA displays the hallmark characteristics of a small, rural YMCA: a budget of less than $10
million, employed fewer than 10 full-time staff, executive and program staff are promoted from within the YMCA. The key liaison for the Alpha YMCA was the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Although support staff was invited to participate in the interview, several follow-up attempts found no interest. The CEO of Alpha was raised in the same small city where the YMCA is located and has been with the YMCA for over 15 years in many capacities. Alpha was part of Cohort I and maintained high CEO involvement throughout the grant, had low initial evaluation knowledge, and reported strong impact by the process.

**Case Beta**

Beta University YMCA branch is part of a larger association with several other branches. University YMCAs have a history rooted in serving university students through opportunities for service, support, and volunteerism. At the time of the project, Beta University YMCA was part of one of the two major YMCA metropolitan associations. Since then, those two associations—including Beta University YMCA branch—combined with 21 other branches in the area to form one of the largest YMCA associations in the country. With regards to programming, Beta YMCA used their grant to expand on their existing Black and Latino Achievers Program. Black and Latino Achievers is a national effort founded in 1967 held in over 350 YMCAs across the country. The intent of the program is to motivate minority teens to develop self-esteem and to set high expectations for academic and career goals. The key liaison for Beta YMCA was the executive director, Beta #1. Since project completion, Beta #1 has been promoted to a senior-level position responsible for a major initiative leading social responsibility and urban initiatives for the new combined association. Prior to joining the YMCA four years ago, Beta #1 earned a doctorate degree in educational service and has served the local school district in many capacities for the past twenty years.
Beta #1 was part of Cohort I and served as CEO of the University YMCA, had medium initial evaluation knowledge, and reported strong impact by the process.

At the time of the grant, Beta #1 hired Beta #2, program director, as a coordinator for Beta University YMCA initiatives. Beta #2 never completed the initial survey because she perceived herself having little involvement in the project. Beta #1 also noted Beta #2’s involvement as that of “support staff;” however, upon invitation she agreed to a follow-up interview regarding her experience.

**Case Delta**

YMCA Delta is 1 of 14 branches of a mid-size association located in the mid-west region of the country. The association sponsors the YMCA Black and Latino Achiever’s Program across all 14 branches. The executive director of the program was interviewed as part of the YHESP project. Since YHESP completion, the interviewee has taken a position as executive director of 1 of the 14 YMCA branches in the association. The executive director interviewed has been with the YMCA since graduating with a Bachelor’s of Science degree five years ago. Delta’s ED was part of Cohort I and maintained strong CEO involvement, had medium initial evaluation knowledge, and reported strong impact by the process.

For YMCA Delta, YHESP was an opportunity to expand their existing offerings of the Achiever’s program to include local and national tours for young people and develop a community initiative board. The efforts were designed around a tour of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Select students have since participated in the YMCA Europe festival in Prague as well. As a result of the YHSEP grant, efforts of the community initiative board have continued and now include a college coalition board. Delta ED now oversees the work of the new Black and Latino Achiever’s director.
Case Gamma

YMCA Gamma is one of several centers of a mid-size YMCA. Gamma has three branches (Full Family Centers as referred to by staff), several offsite camp properties, and three outreach centers. The association has a long-standing focus of providing afterschool educational support to youth. Within the Youth Development division alone there is a total of 20 staff, including 6 full-time. For YMCA Gamma, the interview was conducted with the group executive director of youth development, responsible for all teen programs. The ED of youth development is responsible for all teen programs throughout the association.

Gamma YMCA facilitates an afterschool support program known nationally as YES. The focus of this effort is to support students’ matriculation into the next grade level with a focus on seniors in high school.

Last year, Gamma noted a matriculation rate of 87% for their students compared to the school district average of 55%. Even more, in the past few years it has broadened its outreach services from one alternative high school to include two charter schools and a traditional school. In addition, ED Gamma says although the youth development division has always focused on teens staying in school and going to college, “the Y has since taken on that thought process, not just one YMCA branch but the entire Y was focusing on that program aspect.” Gamma ED described a positive impact of the YHESP project as broadening their focus and affirming their use of evaluation. Gamma ED was part of Cohort I and maintained strong CEO involvement, had medium initial evaluation knowledge, and reported strong impact by the process.

Interview Case Summary
The interviews present a narrative around the reinvention of YMCAs as vehicles for college access services and the role of the evaluation in this process: how, if at all, it promotes or hinders this reinvention is also highlighted. The interviews represent variation held by the 60 YHESP YMCAs by cohort group, initial evaluation knowledge, and organizational culture. Through use of language, decision making, staff restructuring, and relationship building, collaborative evaluation in local YMCA program practice was used to frame traditional YMCA practices as inadequate for higher education program planning. In many ways collaborative evaluation became a vehicle for leadership at the local level to challenge the fit of YMCAs to act as agents of college access, which is unconventional.

4.2 Potential Contextual Effects

In addition to information about the three research questions, data were gathered to assist in identification of any contextual factors that may have contributed to the individual or organizational change reported in the planning of college access services by YMCA organizations. Understanding context is a key element to effective evaluation and one of the areas on which stakeholder-based approaches thrive. Rog (2012) pointed out that involving stakeholders in the evaluation reveals potential flaws, fosters transparency, and heightens the evaluator’s sensitivity to contextual influences.

The first wave of analysis conducted showed differences in results by four potential contextual factors: cohort/year of entry into the program, changes in national program coordination, YMCA application initial evaluation knowledge ranking, and the organizational culture of each of the 61 YMCAs. In addition, the educational attainment and job title of the respondents were examined and, finally, the YMCAs were compared in terms of how these factors may have impacted collaborative evaluation use.
4.2.1 Cohort/Year of Entry into the Program

The program unfolded in two waves across two years. In 2010, 31 member YMCAs were selected through an application process into Cohort I as the initial pilot group of YMCAs. This selection was based on their reported interest in developing and/or expanding higher education services at their local YMCAs. In the following year, Cohort I received renewed funding and another 30 YMCAs were selected through an application process to be included as Cohort II of this pilot project. Both first-year (Cohort I) and second-year (Cohort II) grant recipients responded to the survey. Accounting for the total responders, there was similar representation from both Cohort I (n=28) and Cohort II (n=30). These 58 respondents represent 52 YMCAs; where 6 YMCAs had more than one respondent to the survey, scores were averaged. An assumption for this study was that Cohort I would report an increased impact of the evaluation on their evaluation capacity because they had more time with the evaluation.

Table 8.

Descriptive Breakdown of Survey Respondents by Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>Partially Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Email errors</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Non responses</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total distributed</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.2 Changes in National Program Coordination

Two staffing differences existed based on year of entry into the program: 1) changes in national coordination and 2) turnover of evaluation interns. After the first year of programming, the national program director hired on a new staff member to oversee the YHESP project, including communication with evaluation staff interns and coordination with YMCA program staff. During the initial pilot year (2010), the coordination was conducted exclusively by the national program director. The national program director had over 20 years of college access programming experience and wrote the initial grant for the YHESP project, including edits made to the section on evaluation. In contrast to year one, the new hire in year two had less than 7 years of college access program experience with no experience working with evaluation. Both years 1 and 2 were pilot project years, but in addition to typical issues and changes with program planning, the second year resulted in program coordination that was less fluid. In part this could be attributed to doubling the number of programs as well as the addition of new national program personnel.

Additionally, program differences between year 1 and year 2 could have contributed to cohort differences. During each evaluation phase throughout year 1, the evaluation team met with program staff to review process findings. The evaluation team supported the work of program staff by disseminating feedback and fostering a more standardized system based on formative findings. For example, based on application review, document analysis, and participant feedback, the application form changed from year 1 to year 2. Other changes happened to the program process as well. Rubrics and standard forms for interim and annual
reporting were developed and revised. National orientation and training sessions were modified to include more evaluation-embedded activities and capacity building.

Finally, after the first year of implementation, the evaluation team also went through staff changes. Both years relied on the expertise of the same evaluation team leader and evaluation specialist to oversee evaluation activities. However, much of the workload for the technical assistance and evaluation activities was conducted by evaluation interns through a year-long fellowship model. The role of evaluator competence is considered important to evaluation quality and use (Johnson et al., 2009). Beyond factors of educational background and technical training, characteristics like cultural and program competence and leadership style have shown to be impactful as well (Callahan, Tomlinson, Hunsaker, Bland, & Moon, 1995; Cousins, 1996). Differences in evaluation fellows as team members also may have contributed to cohort effects.

The evaluation fellowship trained graduate students from a variety of disciplines in evaluation with an emphasis on culturally responsive evaluation. To align with the fellowship model schedule and adhere to the fellowship program guidelines, two new evaluation interns were hired each of the two years beginning in the fall semester. In this case study, the YHESP project was the hands-on experience for two sets of evaluation interns, evaluation activities were overseen by the director of the evaluation office, and hiring decisions were decided by the national YMCA team with assistance by the UNC evaluation office. Differences between year 1 and year 2 evaluation interns included their breadth of knowledge about higher education and evaluation as well as their years of experience with each. For example, one of the interns from year 1 subsequently conducted her dissertation on one of the YMCA programs. The other intern from year 1 was considered for an evaluation
job with the national YMCA office. Year 2 interns were an average of 5 years younger with less work and evaluation experience. However, both evaluation intern groups conducted their work satisfactorily in the office and maintained positive relationships with participants and the funder. Additionally, the same oversight of the evaluation project was given to both sets of interns.

4.2.3 Initial Evaluation Knowledge of Programs and Staff

In addition to cohort differences, another contextual factor was the entry-level evaluation capacity of the individual YMCAs and their program staff. Organizational evaluation capacity is expected to influence an organization’s ability to use collaborative evaluation (O’Sullivan, 2004). As a result of program and training changes, Cohort II YMCAs demonstrated greater evaluation knowledge. Moreover, the second year national staff made modifications to the grant application to encourage a greater pool of YMCAs with more evaluation knowledge and greater program capacity. For this reason, applications from Cohort II showed greater evaluation capacity than in the previous year. Moreover, more evaluation information was available as the evaluation team rated all YMCA applications for evaluation content such as activities, indicators, and outcomes and then converted those applications to logic models. This process was done to identify those organizations most in need of technical assistance. The evaluation team used a 3-point rating scale to assess how attainable, measureable, and relevant to higher education the evaluation logic model contents were within the application. A rating of 1 indicated a substantial need for technical assistance needed to improve the logic model, a 2 indicated some additional assistance was needed, and a 3 indicated the logic model was thorough and clear enough to carry out an evaluation plan. One aspect of context importance could be that those with lower initial ratings had greater
opportunity for improvement than those with higher ratings. As a result, part of the analysis included reviewing the initial rankings given to each YMCA by the evaluation team to verify the respondents’ description of their growth and impact in evaluation as a result of this project.

Given the differences in entry evaluation level, it was hoped that survey respondents would represent these three rankings. A descriptive table shows there were no major differences among logic model ratings by survey respondents and completion compared to that of the overall YHESP projects. Table 9 shows frequencies of respondents by initial evaluation knowledge rankings and survey completion status for all 61 YHESP YMCAs. Table 9.

**Descriptive Breakdown of Survey Respondents by YMCA Ranking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>Partially Completed</th>
<th>All YHESP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest Level -1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Level -2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Level -3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>47</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>61</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the results of the survey questions could be analyzed by ranking and cohort group. Of those 50 respondents who were matched by YMCA (8 were unmatched due to technical errors), by cohort, and by ranking, 46 were unique YMCAs. Approximately half (n=22) of the distinct YMCAs were from Cohort I and half were from Cohort II (n=24). A chi-square test of expected frequencies revealed there was a significant difference in initial evaluation knowledge ranking by cohort for both survey respondents and overall YHESP YMCAs. For example, 18 of the 24 YMCAs in Cohort II compared to only 4 of 22 YMCAs in Cohort I were ranked at the highest level of initial evaluation capacity. Table 10 shows
representation for survey participants by cohort group and initial ranking as well as for YHESP projects overall.

Table 10.

*Evaluation Team Initial Ranking of YMCA by Cohort*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rankings by YMCA</th>
<th>Cohort I</th>
<th>Cohort II</th>
<th>Cohort I</th>
<th>Cohort II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*χ²=18.337 p=.000 **χ²=18.551 p=.000*

The survey results identified variation in respondents by cohort in terms of their initial rankings. Thus, these data show YMCAs in Cohort II compared to YMCAs in Cohort I were more likely to exhibit evaluation knowledge during initial phases of application and logic model development. It’s possible that reported impact by evaluation activity on YMCA program planning and evaluation beliefs differed because of this difference of initial knowledge by cohort. YMCA participants’ differences between cohorts and among rankings encourage consideration of what, if any, pre-existing contextual organizational differences existed.

4.2.4 Organizational Culture

The influence of organizational culture to the implementation of evaluation has implications on claims of evaluation use, data quality, and capacity for the collaborative evaluation approach. Rather than assume all YMCAs in this process were equivalent, the survey included items to identify beliefs about specific processes and cultural characteristics that may influence an evaluation plan and its subsequent implementation. Because the
previous section revealed variation by cohort and initial knowledge rankings, analysis results for these contextual factors were compared. Table 11 shows results of the question asking members to reflect on statements about the organizational culture of their YMCA prior to YHESP participation using a Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Survey items were analyzed overall, by knowledge ranking, and by cohort resulting in four tiers of commitment regarding organizational culture: Values, Use, Structure and Competence. Values pertained to top tier survey items 1, 2, and 3 which inquired about whether the organization “values” or “cares about” the success of program planning and evaluation process. The second tier related to a culture of evaluation use indicated by items 4 and 5. The third tier was referred to as structure. Structure of the organization was indicated by items 6, 7, 8, and 9 which inquired about organizational supports, systems and cultural attributes in place to successfully engage in evaluation activities. The last tier indicated how YMCA respondents were likely to believe in the competence of their YMCA. Specifically, item 10 referred to respondents’ agreement about whether their YMCA was competent to implement evaluation processes.

Table 11 below displays the range of percent agreement and frequency breakdown overall for each organizational culture feature as highlighted through the survey. The first tier showed that 97% of 42 YMCAs agreed with each of the items related to whether their organizational culture values the program evaluation process and its subsequent outcomes. Overall, each of the three statements about “values” or “cares about” were rated the highest by each of the YMCA respondents. Next, YMCAs mostly agreed (90% of 42) about whether their organization supported evaluation use. The item regarding supports evaluation use
received nearly 95% of 41 respondents’ agreement compared to 85% of 42 respondents who agreed whether the organization actually uses evaluation as a means of program improvement. Beliefs about strong structural systems were also likely to be agreed on by each of the respondents about their unique YMCA culture. However, there was overall less (80% vs. 97% of 42) agreement by YMCA respondents in this third tier than the first tier. Last, fewer than half of YMCA respondents (39% of 41) agreed that their YMCA would like to implement evaluation processes but does not know how. Thus, most respondents believed their YMCA knows how to implement evaluation processes.

A chi-square analysis found no significant differences by cohort at a probability level less than .001. Chi-square analyses by initial knowledge ranking group were also done for each organizational culture characteristic. Respondents from the lower-ranked initial knowledge group indicated more agreement about the statement that YMCAs had the necessary systems in place for engaging in evaluation practices at probability level of p=.002. Specifically, 17 of 18 YMCAs from the highest initial knowledge ranking compared to 1 of 8 YMCAs with the lowest initial knowledge indicated agreement about whether their organization had the necessary systems in place to implement evaluation practices. Overall, these findings indicated that participants believed their organizations valued evaluation and its uses but programs and staff with more evaluation knowledge were more likely to represent organizational cultures with greater capacity to implement evaluation activities.
Table 11.

**YMCA Members’ Agreement with Statements Regarding Their Organization’s Culture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier (% Agree)</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values (95% +)</td>
<td>1. Values learning</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Cares about this project succeeding</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eval Use (85% - 95%)</td>
<td>3. Values evaluation</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Supports evaluation use</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Uses evaluation results to improve programming</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Creates a culture of inquiry in programming</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Provides communication opportunities to access evaluation outcomes</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Provides communication opportunities to disseminate evaluation information</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Has the necessary systems in place for engaging in evaluation practice*</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence (&lt;50%)</td>
<td>10. Would like to implement evaluation processes but does not know how</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates significant difference found by initial evaluation knowledge for $\chi^2=20.935$ at $p=0.002$
Contextual factors included cohort/year of entry, national program coordination, initial evaluation knowledge, and organizational culture. Further analysis found differences by cohort were influenced by initial evaluation knowledge ranking, beliefs about organizational evaluation culture, and amount of time within the pilot project. In terms of organization culture, four tiers emerged: values, evaluation use, organizational structure, and competence. In the first tier, nearly all YMCA respondents agreed that their YMCA values evaluation and its process. The second most commonly held belief by YMCA respondents was that their YMCA supports evaluation use. In the third tier, less commonly agreed on by YMCA respondents but still agreed on by the majority, was the belief that structural systems were in place within their YMCA to conduct an evaluation process. Last, in the fourth tier, YMCAs were less likely to indicate confidence in their evaluation competence as an organization. Results from this analysis showed YMCA respondents with higher initial evaluation knowledge indicated greater confidence in their organizational structure but all YMCAs fell into the tiered themes of organizational culture. The next section offers further insight into how and to what extent these contextual influences, specifically knowledge ranking and cohort, may have mediated the overall impact of this particular collaborative evaluation approach on the YMCAs program planning even further.

4.3 Q1: Influence of Evaluation

The objective of collaborative evaluation for the YHESP initiative was to promote collection and use of evaluation data while building capacity and best practices around evaluation use in program planning. This section determines how the collaborative evaluation approach influenced YMCA evaluation and program planning practices. The original research question asked: How have the components of collaborative evaluation influenced program reflection, planning, and implementation for: a) Program participants, activities, and outcomes;
b) Evaluation capacity of individuals within the organization; and c) Organization’s evaluation culture?

Kirkhart (2000) used the term “influence” to incorporate both the traditional and non-traditional layered ways of using evaluation that in some cases may be unintended. According to Mark and Henry (2004) influence is dependent on the various contextual factors present in the evaluation. Additionally, research has developed conceptual models that capture the role of context in evaluation influence for both health and education fields (Clinton, Appleton-Dyer, Cairns & Broadbent, 2009; Cousins, 2003; Kirkhart, 2000; Mark & Henry, 2004). Moreover, understanding the influence of evaluation on programs supports the need to include potential contextual factors in the analysis. In this study, cohort, evaluation knowledge, change in national coordination, and organizational culture have in some ways been mediators in the collaborative evaluation approach in both intended and unintended ways. Analyses of survey responses to identify influences of the collaborative evaluation reflect survey sections represented by three subgroups: 1) Usefulness of Evaluation to Program Planning; 2) Change in Beliefs about Evaluation; and 3) Capacity Building Including Program Knowledge, Evaluation Skills, Data Quality, and Stakeholder Involvement.

4.3.1 Usefulness of Evaluation to Program Planning

Each evaluation activity implemented was considered as part of the collaborative evaluation approach and, thus, should result in some influence over the program planning process. However, a key component to this evaluation process was the development of a site-specific logic model. All subsequent evaluation activities—Initial Ranking, Evaluation Training/Webinar Participation, Evaluation Planning and Reporting, Technical Assistance, Peer Support, and Others—revolved around the use of the logic model. Moreover, in this case study
the logic model organized the program planning and evaluation for individual YMCAs. YHESP staff was responsible for ensuring the successful completion of a logic model and subsequent revisions for use in program and evaluation implementation. Now, to better understand its and other activities’ usefulness to the program planning process, the next section outlines results from survey questions that address the usefulness of the collaborative evaluation approach and activities to YMCA program planning and results from case interviews that discuss its utility in actual programming.

Descriptive analyses of participants’ responses by YMCA to the survey section, asking how instrumental five activities were in program planning (using a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 is not at all instrumental and 6 is highly instrumental). Overall means of the five activities from highest to lowest: 1) logic model development, 2) participation in webinars, 3) evaluation fair/reporting, 4) receiving technical assistance, and 5) peer assistance. Regardless of cohort, individual YMCA respondents reported the logic model development activity as the most instrumental element in program planning and reported peer assistance as the least. Moreover, all five evaluation activities were rated descriptively higher by Cohort I than Cohort II respondents.

The Tables 12 and 13 that follow show the mean response ratings for each activity in the survey question that asks about the instrumental value of specific evaluation activities in program planning. The first table looks at individual respondents and cohort, the second shows unique YMCAs and cohort, and the third table shows unique YMCAs by evaluation knowledge.

Table 12 shows results from participants’ responses by YMCA to the survey section, asking how instrumental were the five activities in program planning (using a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 is not at all instrumental and 6 is highly instrumental)? The table shows ranking of item, mean ratings by all respondents, and then ratings by cohort.
Table 12.

*Individual Mean Rating by Cohort*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Activity</th>
<th>All Respondents (n=39-45)+</th>
<th>Cohort I (n=15-16)</th>
<th>Cohort II (n= 17-21)</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rank Mean SD</td>
<td>Rank Mean SD</td>
<td>Rank Mean SD</td>
<td>t df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic Model Development</td>
<td>1 4.76 1.25</td>
<td>1 5.44 0.73</td>
<td>1 4.29 1.38</td>
<td>3.02 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in Webinars*</td>
<td>2 4.23 1.43</td>
<td>4 4.5 1.21</td>
<td>2 3.95 1.6</td>
<td>3.58 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Fair/Reporting Out</td>
<td>3 4.05 1.64</td>
<td>3 4.53 1.3</td>
<td>3 3.41 1.87</td>
<td>1.94 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving Technical Assistance</td>
<td>4 3.96 1.36</td>
<td>2 4.69 0.87</td>
<td>4 3.38 1.24</td>
<td>1.13 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Assistance</td>
<td>5 3.70 1.67</td>
<td>5 4.13 1.2</td>
<td>5 3.11 1.85</td>
<td>1.89 33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes significant difference at p < .001

+There was variation in respondents completion by survey item. In some cases, respondents were not comfortable answering each question or item. Thus, response ratings for survey questions varied by item and are noted as ranges.

Table 13.

*YMCA Mean Rating by Cohort*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Activity</th>
<th>All Respondents (n=33-42)+</th>
<th>Cohort I (n=13-14)</th>
<th>Cohort II (n= 16-20)</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rank Mean SD</td>
<td>Rank Mean SD</td>
<td>Rank Mean SD</td>
<td>t df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving Technical Assistance</td>
<td>1 4.71 1.235</td>
<td>1 5.42 .646</td>
<td>1 4.25 1.371</td>
<td>2.982 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic Model Development</td>
<td>2 4.17 1.434</td>
<td>4 4.46 1.216</td>
<td>2 3.86 1.597</td>
<td>1.167 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Fair/Reporting Out</td>
<td>3 4.00 1.553</td>
<td>3 4.61 .893</td>
<td>4 3.25 1.807</td>
<td>2.483 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in Webinars*</td>
<td>4 3.89 1.377</td>
<td>2 4.71 .913</td>
<td>3 3.27 1.163</td>
<td>3.862 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Assistance</td>
<td>5 3.63 1.618</td>
<td>5 4.17 .992</td>
<td>5 2.94 1.764</td>
<td>2.339 30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes significant difference at p < .001
Ratings for evaluation activities were descriptively higher for Cohort I compared to Cohort II and in one case significantly higher. An independent t-test between Cohorts I and II showed significant difference in the ratings of participation in webinar sessions \((t=3.578, \ p=.001)\). To make sure that these results were consistent across YMCAs and not individuals, descriptive statistics and a second t-test were run using calculated averages for those six respondents from the same three YMCAs. Table 13 shows similar patterns of cohort differences as Table 12.

Analyzed by YMCA team means rather than individual respondent, technical assistance was the most highly rated as instrumental to program planning compared to the means of individual respondents, who rated logic model development as most instrumental. However, logic model development was still reported as highly instrumental to program planning for all YMCAs. Consistent with individual respondents’ means, an independent t-test found participation in webinars was more instrumental to Cohort I than Cohort II \((t=3.862, \ p=.001)\). Specifically, Cohort I YMCA mean rating was 4.71/6.00 where Cohort II mean rating was 3.27/6.00. Moreover, Cohort I ratings exceeded at least a four for all evaluation activities received. One possible explanation is that Cohort I had more time to participate in the evaluation for the project and, therefore, more opportunities to participate in webinar sessions, work on logic model development, and receive technical assistance.

In addition to the cohort group as a contextual factor, initial evaluation knowledge also was considered. Table 14 presents these mean ratings for evaluation activity by initial evaluation knowledge ranking.
Table 14.

Usefulness of Evaluation Activities to Program Planning by Initial Evaluation Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Activity</th>
<th>Low Initial Capacity, High Need (n=9)</th>
<th>Mid Initial Capacity, Medium Need (n=10)</th>
<th>High Initial Capacity, Low Need (n=15–18)+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>StdDev</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic Model Development</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.118</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving Technical Assistance</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.167</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in Webinar Sessions</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.453</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Fair/Reporting Out</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.537</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Assistance</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.130</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+Variation in response completion by item

These data show some consistencies across capacity levels. For example, all three groups rated Logic Model Development as the most instrumental evaluation activity and Peer Assistance as the least useful to their program planning. Respondents from YMCAs with mid-level evaluation knowledge reported the most instrumental influence of evaluation activities. Overall, there was little variation between knowledge levels regarding the usefulness of each activity to the program planning.

Next, respondents were asked to rate the collaborative evaluation process used for the YHESP project for its ability to address specific program evaluation needs. Table 15 shows responses to the question that asks them to please rate the collaborative evaluation process using a scale of excellent, good, fair and poor.
Table 15.

*Respondents’ Reported Impact of Collaborative Evaluation (CE) on Program Elements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Evaluation Need</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Usefulness to program management</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Add clarity to program dynamics</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Ability to inform future program planning</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Ability to improve quality of data collected</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Identify purpose of evaluation for the YHESP project</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Provide quality evaluation assistance</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Provide opportunities to share strategies with stakeholders</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Determine evaluation resources available</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Ability to engage stakeholders throughout the process</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Reflect organizational system characteristics</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Ability to adapt to cultural context of the program</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, 90% of 39 respondents expressed a good or excellent rating when asked about the usefulness of collaborative evaluation to program management. Also ranked highest among items reported were the ability to add clarity to program dynamics, inform future program planning, and improve quality of data collected. Alternatively, items rated the least impactful to program planning by this collaborative evaluation approach were the ability to engage stakeholders throughout the process, reflect organizational system characteristics, and adapt to
the cultural context of the program. Additionally, a chi-squared analysis found no differences at a level of $p < .001$ by evaluation knowledge level or cohort.

Another set of survey questions addressed the influence of the evaluation on individuals. These items asked respondents to rate their opinions on a scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. One of the items asked respondents how much they agree with the statement “evaluation findings were useful.” Results from this question item show 96.6% of 38 survey respondents indicated strongly agreed or agreed that evaluation findings were useful.

Last, respondents were asked whether they would recommend the collaborative evaluation process to a colleague and why. Seventeen of the 21 YMCA survey respondents (81%) said that they would recommend this evaluation approach to a colleague. Of those 19 respondents who elaborated, 10 of them shared that the collaborative evaluation process was useful to program planning. Of the 4 respondents who reported not recommending it to a colleague, 2 members said that it was a helpful process and the other 2 did not explain their response.

4.3.2 Change in Beliefs about Evaluation

The most basic guideline of collaborative evaluation is engaging stakeholders at multiple stages of the evaluation so that they strengthen their view of evaluation as a useful program tool. In addition to the influence of specific evaluation activities on program planning, survey respondents were asked if they thought differently about evaluation in general. Then, they were asked to elaborate on their response in a narrative format. Table 16, which follows, shows that overall 21 members indicated “change” and 21 indicated “no change.” Of those 21 members who reported “no change,” 11 elaborated on their already strong organizational evaluation culture due to their previous experiences. For example, one “no change” respondent wrote:
My YMCA works closely with our local United Way to develop appropriate outcomes for projects and programs seeking philanthropic support and to improve services. The methods used during the YHESP were reinforcement of previous activities and thus did not impact my opinion on evaluation.

As a result, these 11 in Table 16 are listed as “neutral.” The 21 respondents indicating a change in their thinking shared appreciation for the evaluation as a way to “keep them on track.” Some experienced greater change while others identified their experience as validation for existing efforts. For example, one member said, “It just affirmed for us that all programs need to be evaluated, and asking the ‘right’ questions is most important.”

The following open-ended question on the survey sought the participant’s views on why they indicated no or yes for a change in evaluation perspective. From the comments listed in this section, three broad categories emerged for Yes—Logic Model Development, Evaluation Understanding, and New Ways of Building Community. Another category emerged as Neutral—Already Strong, and two categories emerged for No—Removed from the Process and No Response. From the 42 survey respondents, there were a total of 36 who chose to elaborate. Of the 6 who chose not to elaborate, all indicated “no change.”

Table 16.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (n=21)</td>
<td>Evaluation Understanding</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logic Model Development</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Ways of Building Community</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral (n=10)</td>
<td>Already Strong</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (n=9)</td>
<td>Removed from the process</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No comment</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Respondents by Category and Theme
Categories were analyzed for cohort and initial evaluation knowledge effects. Table 17 presents the breakdown of number of respondents by categories and cohort group. A chi-square analysis for differences found that beliefs about evaluation changed did not significantly change by cohort or initial evaluation knowledge at a rate of $p < .001$.

**Yes: Evaluation Understanding**

As shown in Table 18, 15 respondents’ evaluation understanding changed in response to participation in this collaborative evaluation process. In their comments participants identified a greater understanding of items related to evaluation such as data collection, overall process, terminology, and tools needed to assess impact. As these participants explain:

> *I believe that in order to be successful we have to make sure that we as YMCAs are collecting and measuring data appropriately. We have moved from outputs to the outcomes and the work with the researchers have (sic) helped our organization immensely.*

> *I have a much deeper understanding of what evaluation is, how to start the process, and what meaningful data should be collected. I did not realize how much I did not know in regards to process and outcomes. I also have a better understanding of what data can be used for and how to collect specific data based on measurable outcomes.*

> *The care and support to which the evaluation of this project took on has allowed us to see great impact. We are now using many of the tools in other areas of our programs outside the specific YHSEP project.*

> *I was very uneducated on how to evaluate effectively and accurately before participating in the YHESP. Through a lot of education and mentorship, I believe my knowledge has increased.*

For two YMCA participants who indicated a shift in evaluation beliefs, evaluation was already a staple in program planning but the YHESP efforts were reinforcement in the value of evaluation.

> *It just affirmed for us that all programs need to be evaluated, and asking the “right” questions is most important.*

> *Having evaluation a focus in this grant aligned with the existing focus.*
I understand the value of multiple forms of evaluating more intensely now.

Three participants found this evaluation process to be more accessible and “positive” than either they expected or had previously experienced in other evaluations. These respondents commented:

The way the evaluation was done it made it very simple to gather all of the information need to accurately report our findings.

I feel more knowledgeable about how to set up measureable objectives, goals, etc. It doesn't need to be painful either.

Because it is explained so well and everyone is accommodating it is less stressful.

According to these YMCA participants, such evaluation activities and the process overall increased their understanding of evaluation. Furthermore, the assistance from the evaluation team seemed impactful to a few YMCAs who may have already had a strong evaluation culture.

Yes: Logic Model Development

Six respondents specifically mentioned the use and skill building associated with logic model development as integral to their evaluation experience. One of those 6 participants expressed a more seasoned evaluation background but still shared ways this experience promoted an expanded view of how to use evaluation tools like the logic model for program planning.

According to these 6 YMCA participants, getting assistance about how to use a logic model and the benefits to program development helped raise their confidence in becoming better program planners:

I definitely found the logic model helpful when developing the YHESP program. From the very beginning, I knew exactly what the goals were for the program thanks to the logic model. As a result, I built the lessons and the activities around those goals to ensure that the program was successful.

To be honest I didn't really understand the logic model at first. Once I began to use it I found it to be extremely helpful, especially with regard to making improvements to the program and reporting success to community partners.
The development of the Logic Model was very impactful for me and instilled the necessity as well as a structured process for evaluation. I truly had constructive and formulated expectations.

I have a much better idea of what to evaluate, what is important, and how to measure data. The logic model assistance was key to that.

Well, I still dislike the paper portion of the evaluation process. But I recognize that evaluation and reporting the results is necessary if an organization wants to qualify for grant funds. Therefore, I have improved my evaluation skills and willingness to develop logic models and report writing efforts.

I will say that the help this year with the logic model and the presentation at the September 2011 training on logic models was invaluable! I definitely like logic models better than in the old days of developing them with United Way!!

**Yes: New Ways of Building Community**

A few YMCA participants did not perceive any changes because they were already building community, effectively evaluating programs, or the evaluation did not meet their expectations. However, a few other YMCA members elaborated on how this process changed the way they used evaluation to reflect on their program effectiveness or community. Once again, although some members did not see the experience as shifting their evaluation beliefs, others did. The following statements reflect this:

_I work in a community schools initiative that is researching success factors for students, so evaluation is very important to our work!_

_I see the importance of evaluation in making programs better for the community._

_As a community based organization, it is critical that partnerships be utilized and we (the YMCA) must engage the education system in the evaluative process in order to learn the things that are important to them and ultimately to the community._

**Neutral: Already Strong**

In 10 cases, YMCA participants reported “no change” and commented on their previous evaluation work. Two members mentioned specific work with United Way, others explained how previous experiences were similar to that of the YHESP evaluation project. As a result,
these YMCA participants observed no shift in their evaluation thinking, that prior experiences were just too similar to report any difference. Representative comments were:

*My YMCA works closely with our local United Way to develop appropriate outcomes for projects and programs seeking philanthropic support and to improve services. The methods used during the YHESP were reinforcement of previous activities and thus did not impact my opinion on evaluation.*

*We have a lot of experience evaluating programs, so I felt strongly about evaluation before and after YHESP.*

*Have had to do evaluations for many of the other grants that I oversee (sic).*

*Program evaluation has always played a significant role in our program design and implementation measures.*

*We've been providing similar evaluations for a number of years.*

YMCA members who indicated change in their evaluation beliefs (and some who did not) elaborated on how the evaluation was a learning process. For this reason, the 10 who reported “no change” and explained it as “already had a strong culture” or indicated there was no room for growth, were included in this neutral category.

**No: Removed from Process**

The remaining 3 survey respondents who indicated “no” in this category and elaborated reported they had “not enough experience with the evaluation,” “did not give it much thought,” or “was not the implementer.”

The remaining 6 respondents who indicated “no change” chose not to elaborate, whereas of those 21 who responded with “yes,” all of them explained.

Overall, half of the YMCA participants felt more positively about evaluation after experiencing the collaborative evaluation process. One-fourth of the respondents had already believed in its value prior to the evaluation, so no change was reported. The remaining respondents had indicated no reflection of the process. Differences between the yes, neutral, and
no groups—shown primarily as a result of their previous experiences—reflect the variation of cohort groups. These responses follow similar patterns to those reported for the usefulness of evaluation activities. This information also supports earlier beliefs about the role of organizational culture in evaluation experiences and evaluation knowledge.

**4.3.3 Capacity Building**

Evaluation capacity building consists of evaluator roles and behaviors that create a supportive and enriching environment for stakeholders to gain increased understanding of evaluation processes, activities, skills, and inquiry (Stockdill, Baizerman, & Compton, 2002). According to proponents, a collaborative evaluation should provide the appropriate level of technical assistance and training while creating an atmosphere of open communication and “evaluation voices” (O’Sullivan, 2002; Rodriguez-Campos, 2004) which leads to enhanced programs. In response to survey questions asking about enhanced capacity 96% (n=27–31) of respondents agreed that their involvement in the collaborative evaluation process helped:

- A. Increase program knowledge.
- B. Build evaluation skills.
- C. Increase organizational capacity.

For the next sections of the survey some respondents selected “not applicable” on a given survey item and there also were members who just felt uncomfortable responding on behalf of their YMCA for the YHESP experience and opted to skip this section. This information was discovered through follow-up e-mails and correspondence with partial completion surveys. Tables 17A, B, and C show descriptive information regarding how often respondents indicated agreement with a specific statement. These percentages incorporate all respondents, although screening was done by cohort and initial evaluation knowledge to identify where, if any, differences occurred by group.

**Increase Program Knowledge**
The most challenging aspect many of the YMCAs faced was developing a higher education effort within their existing “swim and gym” culture. Although several YMCAs expanded existing efforts with youth, others ventured into new territory and, based on the findings, used the evaluation as a means to identify what were the best programmatic decisions for their local community. For example, Table 17A shows over 90% of the 27–31 respondents believed they learned more about higher education programming and were more comfortable answering questions about their program. In addition, 86% of respondents reported they are now “more aware of elements related to their program.” As a result of the evaluation process respondents believed they were more reflective and knowledgeable about their program overall.

Table 17A.

*Percentage Frequency of Agreement Responses to the Survey Question Asking about the Influence of the Evaluation on Program Knowledge*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Total % Agreement</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have learned more about Higher Education programming through this evaluation process.</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more comfortable answering questions about my program.</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more aware of elements related to my program (e.g., participant reactions).</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked the separate question regarding whether they would recommend the collaborative evaluation approach to a colleague and why, 3 of 19 respondents who elaborated discussed its usefulness in relation to program reflection and improvement. Two respondents elaborated on the increased program knowledge precipitated by the collaborative approach. Specifically, these members shared how it has increased their program reflection necessary to connect program planning, overall goals, and evaluation strategies. These two respondents explained:
It gives you greater insight into the program itself. Maintains the focus of the program and directs the data collection in alignment with the overall goals and strategies.

If you don't understand it, get help. It is a very useful tool for strengthening your program, reporting to stakeholders, and improving program effectiveness.

In addition to reflection strategies, 12 respondents reported gaining program content knowledge to plan and/or execute program activities. When asked to describe this process to a coworker, two respondents explained:

The support and tools are extremely useful in measuring and guiding your program. It will help you take it to its most effective level, and reach whatever potential there is.

It gives you greater insight into the program itself. Maintains the focus of the program and directs the data collection in alignment with the overall goals and strategies.

When YMCA respondents were asked to rate overall impact on a scale of excellent, good, fair, and poor, the majority of YMCA respondents agreed that it has had an impact on increased program reflection and knowledge with ratings of good and excellent. Specifically, when sharing the overall impact of the collaborative evaluation process on program planning, 33 of 39 respondents reported a good or excellent rating on items related to its ability to 1) add clarity to program dynamics and 2) inform future program planning. Five of the respondents rated these 2 items as having a “fair” impact, and the same respondent rated both items as “poor.” Last, 72% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “my organization increased program staff’s understanding of their program.”

**Building Evaluation Skills**

YMCA members described experiencing anxieties about understanding evaluation, which is a fairly common evaluation phenomenon (Orr, 2010). Survey responses, however, show the collaborative evaluation process helped them cope with confusion and learn how to focus on the evaluation process step-by-step. As shown in Table 17B, 87–94% of respondents agreed that
they had gained one or more new skills, strengthened understanding of evaluation, and increased ability to conduct evaluation.
Table 17B.

Percentage Frequency of Agreement Responses to the Survey Question Asking about the Influence of the Evaluation on Evaluation Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Total % Agreement</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have gained one or more new skills (e.g., survey design, ability to work collaboratively, etc.)</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My understanding of evaluation has been strengthened</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My ability to conduct evaluation has increased</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those YHESP participants who indicated recommending this approach to a colleague, 3 of 19 respondents described the collaborative approach as providing a better understanding of evaluation process. Those respondents said:

I will talk about the benefits to include high quality of experts that work with you to develop high quality assessment tools; developing a logic model that is directly related to the content of the project; clarity in developing outcomes and the right tools for measuring them, and acquiring a deeper understanding of evaluation and the impact it has on your programs.

The evaluation process truly allows you to state your outcomes at the beginning of the program planning process. Using the evaluation tools you know exactly what it is that you want your lessons and activities to accomplish and it can help you plan which lessons and activities to use. Often times, I think we plan a program and then determine the outcomes at the end of the program and they may or may not be what we had initially set out to accomplish. The evaluation process gives you confidence that you know what the program's outcomes will be.

It [logic model] is an excellent tool that enables you to identify what you want to measure and focus your attention on specific goals you would like to achieve. By breaking your objectives into process/outcomes and identifying the evidence to support each, you have a clearer understanding of your effectiveness, why it was/wasn’t effective and what changes you can make to obtain the desired results.

Additionally, case study interviews also discussed the need for increased evaluation skills and capacity as a result of the process. With limited resources at YMCAs, it became important for them to understand how and when evaluation needs to occur. The use of language about
existing evaluation knowledge and capacity supported positions of limited or strong evaluation experience. Their YHESP evaluation experience and skills were described as a vehicle for measurement and program improvement.

*We don’t have grant writers we are the grant writers...I am not in a major Y. It’s us learning how to fill out the form and getting better at understanding measurements.* (Alpha #1)

*When I got there I inherited an operation that was not data driven. Now, everything is based upon data. Not only have we adopted the principles, we were able to recruit onto the University Y Board a well-known research and evaluation specialist and so everything he does is based on a logic model. He worked with us all this year and has been working with us on creating a logic model for each program. It has been phenomenal.* (Beta #1)

*At the time we didn’t have a grant-writer for the organization. It has always been part of our strategy with that. Now we have an evaluator too that has done a lot of work, I believe she had done her doctorate in North Carolina. As is our grants director. We’ve been able to take a deep dive at looking at our program, we have been able to expand and start some pilot programs. Where does it fit along with our continuum and how is that we know what it is we want to accomplish, how are we evaluating it.* (Delta #1)

Beyond their learning new skills in evaluation, in two of the cases, the importance of an internal evaluator presence either on payroll or on-site voluntarily was highlighted as necessary and negotiated as a piece of the puzzle in program expansion, change, and increased organizational capacity.

**Increase Organizational Capacity**

In a separate question asking about its influence on the organization, 73% of survey respondents indicated that their organization’s personnel had a better understanding of evaluation and 80% indicated their knowledge about evaluation has increased (see Table 17C). Additionally, 71% of YMCA survey respondents reported their organization was better able to meet its evaluation responsibilities. Responses to these items were reviewed for differences by cohort group or initial knowledge capacity, and none were found.
Table 17C.

Percentage Frequency of Agreement Responses to the Survey Question Asking about the Influence of the Evaluation on the Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Total % Agreement</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My organization’s ability to conduct evaluations has increased.</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization’s knowledge about evaluation has increased.</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization improved its data collection strategies.</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization’s personnel have a better understanding of evaluation.</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization’s quality of data collected has increased.</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization’s better able to meet its evaluation responsibilities.</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization’s utilizing evaluation more than before.</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reliance on quality data is extremely important to good evaluation and reflects an organization’s capacity to conduct evaluations. In fact, it is an essential element. Collaborative evaluation claims to promote more reliable data (O’Sullivan, 2004) and a majority of respondents agreed. In fact, 72% of 29 respondents indicated, “my organization’s quality of data collected has increased.” Over half (76% of 29) of respondents believed their data collection strategies had improved.

When considering what quality data are, YMCA members discussed understanding what is happening with the program and what decisions need to be made:

*That it is laid out so well with the logic model format that it keeps you on task and helps you focus on the end results to have the best data to see if you are making a difference and if not where you will put your efforts to make positive changes moving forward*

*I will talk about the benefits to include high quality of experts that work with you to develop high quality assessment tools; developing a logic model that is directly related to the content of the project; clarity in developing outcomes and the right tools for measuring them, and acquiring a deeper understanding of evaluation and the impact it has on your programs.*
The responses above highlight the definition of “quality” data from the YMCA perspective. One member stated the “best data” were those “to see if you are making a difference.” The last quote discussed how experts make “high quality tools” and the logic model connects the pieces of the process.

In all evaluation approaches, collecting quality data that represent local context and reflect cultural competence is needed (Frierson, Hood, & Hughes, 2002; Greene, 2006; Kirkhart, 2011). Although some were more diverse than others, each of these YMCAs conducted programs within a context of cultural diversity and with a specific focus on underrepresented student groups. Of 33 respondents, 97% (n=32) agreed that the evaluation plan developed reflected their local context. Additionally, 70% of respondents (n=26/37) affirmed its ability to adapt to the cultural context of the program and reflect organizational system characteristics (n=28/40).

Local case narratives reflect a complex and multilayered notion of program development, change, and evaluation. This is manifest in a fusion of organizational change discourse and an evaluation discourse informed by reference to values such as data collection, instrumentation, improvement, and evidence. Although critical skepticism and the need to resist becoming evaluators themselves was negotiated, this combined with the recognition of the importance of evaluation to the organizational vision were seen as nonnegotiable demands to maintain funding and support quality program development.

*We are doing more pre- post- satisfaction surveys. It’s making a difference in the community and people’s lives . . . people here [YMCA staff] don’t like change they like status quo. ‘We’ve always done that’ doesn’t work with me.* (Alpha, #1)

*I am mobilizing a mission impact council . . . developing a process that engages this group but engaged around data. We are making data based decisions. Conducting a needs assessment and these clusters will work collaboratively to develop opportunities for change and my role is to find funding. Competition increased and resources dried up so to compete we had to have some compelling data.* (Beta #1)
National YMCA Leaders were talking about what they were looking for in terms of grantees . . . be willing to build a network and team, set the stage for building relationships and leverage more dollars to continue our efforts. The way to connect with our community, we can’t do it alone. We have been allowed to build more partnerships—we have made that 25K stretch into partnerships, leverage funding and stretch that, we were awarded a collaboration with the Urban League for 100K. (Delta, #1)

I have been on the FAFSA Day (College Goal Sunday) committee since 2 years ago and my colleague was co site coordinator and now I am a site coordinator. (Gamma, #1)

Interview data affirmed the expanded evaluation knowledge as useful to organizational capacity overall. Specifically, the ability of program staff to connect with program partners around data-driven decisions had also increased.

4.3.4 Conclusion

Survey responses consistently showed positive feedback on both individual and organizational evaluation and program capacity. The majority of respondents regardless of initial capacity and cohort group agreed that the collaborative evaluation approach increased their program understanding and ability to conduct evaluations. One member summarized it saying, “It is effective, thorough, and beneficial.” When citing the top reasons they would recommend collaborative evaluation to a colleague, respondents believed it helped understand the Higher Education Service Program better, built their evaluation skills, and increased organizational capacity to conduct and integrate evaluations. Even the least cited influence of collaborative evaluation, to improve data collection strategies, was noted positively by the majority of respondents.

4.4 Q2: Evaluation Use

Evaluation question 2 asks: How are program stakeholders within the organization using evaluation? As a branch of the utilization-focused strand of the evaluation roots tree described by Alkin (2004), collaborative evaluation, similar to other responsive stakeholder approaches, seeks
to employ strategies that make it more likely to be used and relevant throughout the project. Specifically, researchers have found that the interaction and involvement by stakeholders and evaluators maximizes the use of evaluation long term (Johnson et al., 2009). Moreover, one of its purposes or roles, per se, is to be used by the program and its staff for program improvement (Chelminsky & Shadish, 1997; Fetterman, 2001; O’Sullivan, 2004). In general, evaluation use refers to the level of traction gained by the evaluation to shape the program. For example, was the evaluation used to make programmatic, organizational, and/or staffing decisions? This section primarily shows results of two survey questions asked YMCA survey respondents directly about the use of evaluation across 13 program activities. However, within the survey, one question series item asked specifically about the influence of collaborative evaluation on the organization’s use of evaluation, and 71% of respondents said they “are utilizing evaluation more than before.” Additionally, 83% of 40 respondents reported their organization was more likely to integrate evaluation activities into their existing programs.

Table 18 shows respondents’ reported rates of evaluation use by item and cohort. Survey participants were asked to indicate how often, if at all, they use evaluation for the following activities listed a through m. The top reason respondents reported used evaluation was to better understand the extent to which their program had been successful. In contrast, the least reported reason to use evaluation was to make a program staffing decision. Of the 13, 10 items averaged a majority agreement response of over 90 percent for both cohorts. Four items on the survey had the most variation of YMCA members by cohort group: j. Analyze my students’ performance compared to their peers, k. Make a funding decision, l. Change one of my program’s priorities, and m. Make a program staffing decision.
### Table 18.

**Number of Respondents in Agreement about Frequency of Evaluation Use by Item and Cohort**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Cohort I</th>
<th>Cohort II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a. Better understand the extent to which my program has been successful</td>
<td>36/36</td>
<td>15/15</td>
<td>16/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b. Make decisions about program activities</td>
<td>35/36</td>
<td>15/16</td>
<td>15/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3c. Reflect on the weaknesses of my program</td>
<td>35/36</td>
<td>15/16</td>
<td>15/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4d. Reflect on the strengths of my program</td>
<td>35/36</td>
<td>15/16</td>
<td>15/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5e. Make decisions about program content</td>
<td>34/35</td>
<td>14/15</td>
<td>15/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6f. Communicate with program stakeholders</td>
<td>34/35</td>
<td>14/15</td>
<td>15/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7g. Monitor program services</td>
<td>35/37</td>
<td>14/15</td>
<td>17/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8h. Better understand the student perceptions of the program</td>
<td>33/35</td>
<td>14/15</td>
<td>14/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9i. Adhere to funding guidelines</td>
<td>31/34</td>
<td>13/15</td>
<td>13/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10j. Analyze my students' performance compared to their peers</td>
<td>29/32</td>
<td>14/14</td>
<td>11/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11k. Make a funding decision</td>
<td>29/35</td>
<td>13/15</td>
<td>11/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12l. Change one of my program's priorities</td>
<td>28/34</td>
<td>10/14</td>
<td>13/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13m. Make a program staffing decision</td>
<td>25/31</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>11/12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The use of evaluation to make staffing and funding decisions received the highest level of variation by cohort and lowest frequency overall. However, a chi-square analysis showed no significant differences by cohort group or initial evaluation knowledge.

Table 19 shows results from another series of survey questions asking respondents to determine how they used the logic model in program development. These findings are similar to the previous ones but with an even stronger endorsement for the use of logic models in program elements. In fact the majority of respondents indicated a frequent to almost always use of the logic model for assisting with program planning, understanding data collection, communicating results, and making program decisions.
Table 19.

**Frequency of Respondents Indicating Logic Model Use for Program Elements by Cohort**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Cohort I</th>
<th>Cohort II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. Understand what data needs to be collected related to program outcomes</td>
<td>34/36</td>
<td>15/15</td>
<td>14/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Communicate to stakeholders about program content</td>
<td>34/36</td>
<td>15/15</td>
<td>12/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Support a decision made prior to the evaluation</td>
<td>32/34</td>
<td>15/15</td>
<td>13/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Communicate program results</td>
<td>33/35</td>
<td>15/15</td>
<td>13/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Make program decisions</td>
<td>32/34</td>
<td>15/15</td>
<td>12/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Assist in designing my program curricula</td>
<td>32/34</td>
<td>14/14</td>
<td>13/14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data indicate programs are using the evaluation logic model to make programmatic decisions. In fact, one of those respondents said, “I looked forward to the evaluation after each event to gauge the effectiveness of our programs and identify the areas/resources that need strengthening.” Moreover, the frequency of logic model use present by key element shows a level of confidence in its use as a programmatic feature.

Much of the interview case study discourse around evaluation also included recognition by leadership to use the logic model as a map or plan to guide the organization through reinvention, relationships, and restructuring for efficiency with funds based on community needs and program goals. Use of logic models beyond higher education service projects to include other YMCA program areas speak to the value and importance of evaluation use in program planning.

*And we were using that logic model to develop what a quality program would look like. It was more aligned with not only the pre collegiate opportunities and services but also the work we were doing with the college students themselves. The whole infrastructure — looking at it from the ground up, systemically - is what this whole opportunity gave us. What is the process, the entire logic model process, how will we do the work, what are we going to do, and the assessment. (Beta #1)*
Here is what our test grant’s about. Help foster youth make connections and then we develop activities and even smaller activities. I was able to use that same map in our strategic plan about safety. (Alpha #1)

We are doing autistic buddy system swim program teaching kids to have fun and support one another. Again, we are trying to reach out and get something different and with that program, we are using the road map to measure outcomes that the autistic society agrees and what we feel we should be getting out of that. I am putting it in the heart of my swim lesson time. (Alpha #1)

Just understanding how to walk with the logic model, has helped me as we build our case to show that we are really meeting our outcomes and that it is not just about outputs and working backwards how do we implement activities, different way to work through and your work as well as team members has been really crucial. (Delta, #1)

Even in the two years they were not doing as much with local colleges, it [logic model] helped guide us to that and now it is more of an expectation now. These doors are now open and it is helping our students see, guided us towards improving our programs. (Gamma, #1)

Logic model as a framework seemed to support a new program-planning model. When asked about how they were evaluating programs prior to the YHESP grant, all but one interviewee described limited knowledge coupled with unrealistic demands. In many ways, the culture prior to YHESP described how programmatic decisions themselves were based on funding. Interestingly when discussing the current state, the interviewees still tied funding streams to program decisions through reliance on evaluation data but for both evidence of outcomes and information to improve program quality.

4.4.1 Conclusion

Results from this section point to YMCA respondents’ increased use of evaluations and, more specifically, logic models in program planning. Even more, when comparing it to their use of evaluation prior to this effort, the majority of respondents found they were using evaluation more. In most cases, use was for program planning decisions with no notable variation among cohort or initial knowledge capacity. These data support the claim that this collaborative evaluation approach encouraged or at least supported evaluation use among these organizations.
4.5 Q3: The Role of Collaborative Evaluation

Evaluation question 3 asks: What was the role of collaborative evaluation as implemented with 61 YMCAs in planning and implementation of college access program services within their local organizations? According to its proponents, the role of collaborative evaluation is “to engage stakeholders to the extent possible” in an effort to improve data quality, increase evaluation use, and build capacity among the team (O’Sullivan, 2004; Rodriguez-Campos, 2005) as a result of the evaluation. In fact, other stakeholder-based approaches would also contend that by involving stakeholders in the evaluation process, program staff are more equipped to conduct evaluation activities and find the results more relevant and useful (Cousins, 2003; Fetterman, 2001; Patton, 1997) for program planning.

Differences in stakeholder-based approaches are not always clear. As a result, researchers have created typologies for the most common approaches to better delineate these differences (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; O’Sullivan, 2012). For this reason, some evaluators and researchers have focused on working within a predetermined framework specific to that model to measure the extent of stakeholder involvement and any subsequent impact for that approach. For example, Daigneault and Jacob (2009) expanded a framework of stakeholder involvement for measurement of involvement in a participatory evaluation model. Rodriguez-Campos (2005) described the collaborative evaluation model as one that includes a significant degree of collaboration where all parties should benefit from the relationship. In the collaborative evaluation model collaboration should occur where possible at every step in the evaluation cycle (O’Sullivan, 2004). Specifically, parties should have a shared commitment, open communication, clear expectations, and encourage best practices (Rodriguez-Campos, 2005). For this study, a collaborative evaluation model lens was used to determine to what extent and how
facilitation of stakeholder roles and involvement occurred in the YMCA HESP activities: logic model planning, instrument development, webinar participation, and evaluation fair reporting. Findings for this question are presented according to the following sections: stakeholder involvement, evaluator roles, and responsibilities.

4.5.1 Stakeholder Involvement

Stakeholder involvement is a staple in collaborative evaluation approach models as well as participatory and empowerment approaches (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; O’Sullivan, 2004; Rodriguez-Campos, 2005). Specifically, this means the explicit involvement of people with a vested interest in the program (Green, 2005) like program staff and participants. Researchers cited the direct relationship between stakeholder involvement and evaluation use (Johnson et al., 2009; Cousins, 2003) and increased understanding and credibility of the evaluation findings (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). In addition, Greene (2005) shared how stakeholder involvement improved the relevance of the evaluation to organizational needs and concerns.

Level of Stakeholder Involvement

To understand the extent to which involvement in these collaborative evaluation activities took place, two survey questions asked about stakeholders’ involvement in predetermined evaluation activities. The first question asked specifically about the involvement of the survey respondents in evaluation activities, and the second question asked about the role of an expanded list of project stakeholders in evaluation activities.

Forty-four responses were collected for the first question about involvement and those numbers are reflected in Table 20. Data in the table below show the breakdown of reported respondent involvement by evaluation activity. YMCA respondents reported being most involved in logic model development, webinars, and one-on-one technical assistance. Not
surprisingly, the least reported activity involvement across groups was site visits. YMCAs were not required nor were specific actions taken to visit each site.

Table 20.

*Involvement in Evaluation Activity by Cohort*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Activity</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Cohort I</th>
<th>Cohort II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logic model</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webinar</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Assistance: One-on-one calls</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Assistance: E-mail</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Fair</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Visit</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cohort I had more respondents report involvement in the category “other” for evaluation activities. When asked to elaborate on “other,” comments included participation or presenting at other YMCA conferences and trainings on behalf of YHESP. As a result of their additional year of experience, Cohort I was given the opportunity to share best practices with other YMCAs. One member noted involvement in another effort related to the Higher Education Services Program called KnowHow2Go. Additionally, a chi-square analysis found no difference by cohort on 1 of 7 evaluation activities presented.

Information from other survey items reported that respondents viewed their participation in the evaluation favorably. Thus, there is support to say that most respondents were engaged and were collaborators in the evaluation activities. To explore this area of actual involvement by extended stakeholders further a second question asked respondents to indicate who else was involved in a predetermined list of evaluation activities. The results of this question are shown in Table 21 by stakeholder involvement and cohort.
Level of involvement was reported by indicating whether a stakeholder participated in a specific activity. When combining the frequency of reported involvement, it holds that students/participants had the most involvement as stakeholders when they were providing information about their program experience. Other contributors about their program experience included volunteers and parents. On the other end of the spectrum, stakeholders had the least involvement in creating the evaluation report. Overall, respondents reported volunteers and community members were the most involved in evaluation activities, followed by the UNC evaluation team.
Table 21.

Stakeholder Involvement by Cohort and Category (n=58)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Involvement</th>
<th>Volunteers/Community Members</th>
<th>UNC Evaluation Team</th>
<th>Students/Participant</th>
<th>School Staff</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Stakeholders</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided evaluative feedback</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided information about their program experience</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped with logic model development</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collected data from others</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped with development of data collection instruments</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided expertise in evaluation implementation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented information to constituents</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped present evaluation findings</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped to make the evaluation culturally responsive</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped create evaluation report</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cohort I reported more involvement by the UNC evaluation team on the following items: provided expertise in evaluation implementation, helped present evaluation findings, helped create evaluation report, and helped make the evaluation culturally responsive. In some cases, Cohort I reported twice as much involvement by the UNC evaluation team. The first cohort indicated involvement of the UNC evaluation team in all except one area of evaluation activity (providing information about their program experience). Seven participants across this cohort indicated that the UNC evaluation team helped make their evaluation culturally relevant, when only one participant from Cohort II reported the same. Cohort II was also less likely to report the UNC evaluation team as being involved in data collection and reporting. For example, nine participants from Cohort I reported UNC evaluation team’s involvement in helping create the evaluation report where none of Cohort II indicated so. Although both cohorts indicated so, Cohort I was more likely to report that evaluation expertise was provided by the UNC evaluation (n=14 Cohort I compared to n= 7 Cohort II). Moreover, because Cohort II had a greater knowledge of evaluation on entering the project they required less support. In addition to Cohort I having a greater need for technical assistance as predetermined by evaluation knowledge ranking they had longer project cycle compared to Cohort II, resulting in more evaluation team involvement.

Referring to their initial evaluation knowledge, groups with a higher need for technical assistance reported greater involvement in evaluation activities by volunteers and community members. Table 22 shows some noticeable variation by low-, medium-, and high-level initial evaluation knowledge and their reported involvement with specific evaluation activities.
Table 22 highlights the variation in level of volunteer/community member involvement by initial evaluation knowledge on five evaluation items. Differences in type of stakeholder involvement may reflect organizational culture, capacity, and/or relationship with volunteers/community members. For example, groups with less staff may depend more on their volunteer and/or community members to supplement evaluation and program work or those with less capacity may prioritize relationships with volunteers and community members in evaluation and program planning.

In one of the case study interviews, the executive director described the need to expand the engagement of stakeholders to board members and other alliance members to support buy-in.

### Table 22

**Involvement of Volunteers and Community Members by Initial Evaluation Knowledge**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Activity</th>
<th>Initial Evaluation Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low (N=11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium (N=15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High (N=24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Collected data from others</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Helped with logic model development</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Helped create evaluation report</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Helped with development of data collection instruments</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Provided expertise in evaluation implementation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I was learning more about the logic model and really being able to do it but through the transition realized . . . we need to bring a road show or have it [training] regionally because we lost the board our second year and people took on other jobs and other responsibilities and if those board members are included, we could have met and that Y could have seen what we are doing just working on that buy-in. On an alliance model, saying here is the higher education. They all wanted to help out it would be better to say, here’s the grant. (Alpha, #1)

Leaders within the YMCA organization were important stakeholders of the YHESP project as well. In fact, while program staff participated in program and evaluation meetings, CEOs were invited to participate in training regarding higher education programs, logic models, and program development as part of a parallel LLEAP (Leveraging Leadership in Educational Advancement Project). In some cases, CEO involvement was critical to the application and execution of the project. One respondent stated:

The YHESP opportunity was presented to me by our CEO. He and I discussed the possibilities of this grant and the potential impact this grant opportunity could have on our Y and surrounding community. We sat in on a few conference calls to further our understanding of the project. He and I went to the cohort and when we returned I completed the grant application and wrote the narrative. From the onset and award of the grant I have been responsible for its functions and operations.

Documents tracked involvement of CEO attendance by LEAPP, webinars, and offsite meeting participation. YMCAs with CEO participation in one of these three activities were documented in analysis as having CEO involvement. Table 23 shows the involvement of YMCA CEOs overall and by initial evaluation knowledge.

Table 23.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Evaluation Knowledge</th>
<th>CEO Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although descriptively higher, a chi-square analysis found no difference at a level of p < .001 in CEO involvement varied by initial evaluation knowledge or cohort group. As noted in Table 23 the most reported CEO involvement was from those with a medium-level evaluation knowledge, next from the lowest initial evaluation knowledge, and the least reported CEO involvement came from the highest initial evaluation knowledge, or those needing the least amount of technical assistance.

Overall, respondents had similar level of involvement from parents, school staff, and students, although some variation existed in the types of activities reported. Three key differences existed on the group level. First, the level of involvement from the UNC evaluation team in evaluation activities varied by cohort. Cohort I reported a much larger integration of support for multiple activities by the UNC evaluation team, including helping make the evaluation more culturally responsive. Second, respondents from the lowest evaluation capacity group show greater involvement by volunteers and community members.

**Ability to Engage Stakeholders**

Essential in understanding levels and types of stakeholder involvement is identifying how, if at all, collaborative evaluation was able to engage these stakeholders. According to the majority of respondents, engaging stakeholders is exactly what they would tell colleagues happened during the collaborative evaluation process. In response to the question about the collaborative evaluation’s *ability to engage stakeholders in the evaluation process*, respondents were asked to rate their perception on a scale of 1 to 4 where 1 was the highest rating of excellent, 2 was good, 3 was fair, and 4 was a rating of poor. Twenty-seven out of 38 respondents agreed or strongly agreed about the ability of collaborative evaluation to
engage stakeholders throughout the process. Additionally, 30 out 39 respondents believed in its ability to provide opportunities to share strategies with stakeholders.

When responding to the question asking what they would tell colleagues about this approach, 4 YMCA respondents reported they were more connected with program participants and other stakeholders involved. These respondents stated:

*It’s a great tool to use to know your participants and program better.*

*I would say that getting input from a wide range of participants helps make for the most comprehensive evaluation and use of the data to improve programs.*

*Involving multiple stakeholders in the evaluation process can have many benefits. It is a way to rely on the "experts" and get a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and the impact of the work that you do. In the process, expectations are clarified and measured. For us, it was also a way to maximize time and financial resources by sharing tools and having the added support.*

*Visiting with colleagues helps expand the vision of the possibilities of the programs effects.*

Survey comments describe how most respondents felt connected to other stakeholders as a result of this process. Survey data also show that the evaluation approach engaged the project staff in the evaluation planning cycle. However, variation existed in the intensity and involvement of local site stakeholders, including volunteers/community members and national involvement from the UNC evaluation team. For example, Cohort I indicated the UNC evaluation team provided more technical expertise and support during their evaluation involvement compared to Cohort II. One possible explanation is that Cohort I had one more year to interact with the UNC evaluation team. Further because Cohort I was less skilled in evaluation overall, their need for contact with the UNC was greater.

In certain instances, there were reported limitations of the collaborative evaluation process to engage local program stakeholders other than project staff liaisons: higher education officials, board members, other YMCA program staff, and program participants.
However, in the case of Beta #1, the staff liaison decided the new staff hired, Beta #2 was already overburdened thus she chose not to completely include them in the YHESP evaluation process. However, the drawback to Beta #2’s limited involvement led to less opportunity for collaborative evaluation to be used as a tool to engage those outside stakeholders and reduce work in silos. This was similar in another case where Delta #1 also did not include outside stakeholders to the degree possible but progress was made through programmatic solutions. Alternatively, Alpha #1 appreciated the use of collaborative evaluation as a way to gain other perspectives.

*I have thought a lot about how do I get university friends to understand what I am doing here. I have done a lot of collaborating to try and get the university people to see the value in what I have done . . . its this kind have different kind of charges and trying to get that language and understanding where they overlap. I need to get those areas outside the shaded areas to see the value and recognize who we are. (Beta #2)*

*It is an ongoing conversation in getting people to really understand that we are a part of youth development. Our achievers program meets at the college campus and partnering with middle and high schools, when they see us outside of these four walls. Under the previous leadership we weren’t as involved in community. Now we are being invited to more tables and I think that has been some of the more positive things that I have seen and the Y is about development of people in general. Where the people are, the Y is where you are not just in the building we have been able to expand that type of thinking here locally. (Delta #1)*

*I think it’s getting the other views. We often sit in our jobs that this is the Y and this is how it is. You get the other perspective. Just people thinking that the YMCA can do other things. It opened up my eyes to say that we need to be better and get involved in the process. We had those other views, this is some programming that Y’s can help out with. It’s that other thing that can separate us out and help out in the community. Just separates us and makes us important. Hearing the other views, I think we can have a foster care day at the Y. Almost like our healthy kids day but for foster kids. Families can come into the Y and allow them time to themselves. (Alpha, #1)*

There is a clear need for YMCA HESP projects to have tools in place to engage stakeholders as partners in the program planning process. In some ways, there were missed opportunities for the collaborative evaluation approach to be used as such a vehicle. In other cases, it was a chosen impetus for conversations and multiple perspectives to be heard.
4.5.2 Evaluator Roles

Role sharing is a common characteristic of stakeholder-based approaches. Within the collaborative evaluation framework, the involvement in evaluation activities—planning, instrument development, data collection, and reporting—is encouraged of key stakeholders by an evaluation expert or team of experts. The evaluator role is to facilitate the reflection of the evaluation cycle to maximize program improvement and use. Specifically, the evaluation team in this evaluation had 61 pilot YMCAs to evaluate with specific needs and contexts, because each was tailored to its audience and/or community. The ability to facilitate role sharing without sacrificing technical expertise was challenging but necessary to meet national program goals and stay within the one year grant timeframe and budget.

The concept of evaluator roles and responsibilities has been examined in many ways. Recent literature provided evidence that evaluator roles shift based on the relationship with stakeholders (Mark, 2002; Patton, 2007), evaluation methods (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005), orientation (Cartland, Ruch-Ross, Mason, & Donohue, 2008), and evaluation activity (Skolits, Morrow, & Burr, 2009). Although roles may shift throughout the evaluation cycle, within collaborative evaluation models evaluators maintain their professional evaluator role (O’Sullivan, 2004). Specifically, where participatory and empowerment evaluation approaches may relinquish their role as expert in terms of power and authority, claims of collaborative evaluation are that the evaluator is always the technical expert (O’Sullivan, 2012). Either way, ever-changing roles of the evaluator within an evaluation means that evaluators must not only possess technical expertise but facilitation skills as well.

This section explores how, if at all, for the YHESP projects the many ways evaluator roles and responsibilities conveyed a much more expanded role than technical expert
consistent with collaborative evaluation tenants. The following section presents data found in YHESP evaluation reports and reflection narratives from four interns who worked with the project and the national staff as they expressed their understanding of evaluator and evaluation roles throughout this collaborative approach. After each academic year, the two sets of interns were asked to individually report out on their projects including a reflection piece. Content analyses were done on these reflection narratives and reports to determine how, if at all, they described their roles in the collaborative evaluation process. Role shifting was manifested in both years of the project. Data are organized into four evaluator roles: a) Evaluator as Coach, b) Evaluator as Manager, c) Evaluator as Change Agent, and d) Evaluator as Learner.

The data from the four interns working on this project are critical to the understanding of this collaborative evaluation model and subsequent evaluator roles. The national YMCA program staff manager initiated the evaluation contract with the director of the evaluation unit where the interns were mentored directly by a senior staff member. Thus, both the senior staff member and the director of the evaluation unit had oversight of the evaluation activities and planning cycle. The student interns were participants in a national training fellowship program that included nine months working in organizations to gain direct knowledge and application of evaluation work. In this instance, two interns were chosen annually and supplied a stipend in exchange for two days of work per week on the YHESP project.

During the YHESP grant cycle, both sets of interns were selected based on their geographic location, interest, and research skills. Interns were guided through the collaborative evaluation approach through fellowship seminars and conversations with the evaluation team leadership—the senior staff member and director. Additionally, interns
worked closely with the national program staff to ensure the relevancy of evaluation activities and program context. In fact, weekly calls were scheduled with the interns by the program staff and e-mail communication happened daily. In-person meetings also were held once during each academic semester, first to meet the interns and again to follow up on progress. Although the reality for student interns is that this was a learning experience within a collaborative evaluation, multisite platform, intern self-reflections about the experience are a rich source of information by which to understand the actual framework for how the collaborative evaluation model functions in this context. Specifically, interns were evaluation actors with no direct ties or specific training in this approach beyond what they were given by the evaluation leadership. For this reason, their opinions about evaluation roles provide almost a participant-observer prospective in understanding the collaborative evaluation model.

**Evaluator as Mentor or Coach**

Evaluation interns did not directly speak of themselves as coaches but shared how their role was to guide YMCA staff through a series of probes to assist them in program evaluation planning and decision making. In certain cases, much more direct means were needed and in other cases, it appeared to be rather subtle in terms of tone and frequency. This aligns with Patton’s (2007) work on how the role of evaluator would look different based on the primary stakeholder type. All four interns expressed the point of view that their position as evaluators was to provide guidance through input and inquiry. This perspective has been labeled as one of mentoring or coaching. Points of emphasis are underlined.

One of the four interns described,

*When sites had to plan an evaluation and think about how the activities fit with the outcomes and goals they wanted to achieve, I felt they were pushed to think about*
their programming more intentionally. Questions of reflection, or thinking about the outcomes as a result and their connection to the activities, had the ability to eliminate any programming or activity that did not align strongly with achieving their outcomes. I think in being able to guide them in thinking through our probes to understand their program, sites were able to determine what activities to implement that really lead to achieving project goals and outcomes. (Intern C, Cohort 2)

Another intern shared her reflection below:

Through the process it was a small struggle, it is a trade-off so that sites could build capacity within. While they gain experience, they are learning to complete evaluation with the input of the evaluators, but without the evaluators taking over. The evaluation becomes their own in that they have the stronger say, as they knew the evaluators would not be around the whole project duration to guide them once the internship was completed. (Intern D, Cohort 2)

In the above excerpt the intern talks about evaluators not “taking over” and the evaluation “becomes their own [project staff],” which implies that it was a supportive framework where the evaluator encouraged the program staff but never controlled the evaluation. These comments point to a process of mentorship, where the evaluator adopts roles to assist project staff in building capacity and confidence (Preskill & Boyle, 2008).

**Evaluator as Manager**

Similarities across cohort and knowledge groups were the use of evaluation to determine the project’s success and its ability to either reinforce or build evaluation capacity. However, one major difference found by cohort groups was the intensity of relationship by the UNC evaluation team. Although groups agreed about the involvement of the evaluation team in terms of logic model development, program staff differed by cohort in their indication of involvement by the evaluation team in terms of providing technical expertise, making the evaluation culturally responsive, and presenting findings. It is possible that Cohort II had less need for the same level of assistance offered than Cohort I, as supported by survey data. Despite these differences, both sets of interns described moving through the evaluation planning and data collection phases of the collaborative approach, the evaluation
interns described an alternative role to mentor/coach; they began describing management and administrative roles.

One intern expressed her reflection below:

_Evaluation can be more administrative in nature depending on the model being used. In working with sites to plan their evaluations or give feedback on logic models and evidence tools, at times felt more administrative than completing an actual evaluation as thought or expected in the beginning._ (Intern C, Cohort II)

In this instance the evaluation intern compared traditional evaluation to that of the collaborative approach, and shared how the collaborative approach seemed to require greater managerial oversight. Skolits et al. (2009) argued the role of manager is incorporated in all evaluation approaches and remains as either a primary or secondary role throughout the evaluation phases. In another instance, one of the evaluation interns shared the managerial challenges working with so many organizations:

_During the project, Ys were contacted on numerous occasions to review logic models and determine where they were in the evaluation process. There were various challenges within the Ys that interfered with the evaluation project, to include: staff health issues, lack of internet accessibility, time constraints, capacity, filtering information from the Chicago session to other Y staff, staff turnover, etc._ (Intern A, Cohort I)

Mentioned by the intern above are confounding contextual issues which could contribute to this managerial role and its subsequent challenges. In fact, there were four major challenges confronting these interns. First, year 1 interns had 30 sites for whom they facilitated and provided evaluation services. Even more, the second year cohort had double that number; 61 YMCAs to manage. Next, with a meager budget for both the local YMCA projects and the evaluation overall, YMCA staff were stretched thin and often had competing priorities. Last, the evaluation interns were students with little experience in project management or administration so tasks that required experience in these areas were both new and challenging, as designed for such a learning fellowship.
Evaluator as Learner

In collaborative evaluation, the evaluator must act not only as knower but also as learner. The role of learner is crucial to the ability to respond accurately and contextually to evaluation needs. Baizerman (2009) argued the evaluator acts as a “knowledge worker” and learner in an effort to minimize power relations and bureaucracy present in the typical roles. Evaluation interns also pointed to their experience as one of learning about cultural and program contexts and differences. For them, it appeared to be a beginning step of shifting roles within the evaluation, where they were in a learner role in addition to that of an evaluation specialist. One of the evaluation interns described this role below:

*Through the YHESP use of collaborative evaluation, I was able to learn evaluation from the beginning of a program. I went through as I would describe a parallel learning process, learning with the site staff who worked with us, going through the collaborative evaluation steps allowed me to think about what is it the sites intended to do, what they were going to do to achieve those outcomes, and for them to be able to speak about what they did, how well they did it, and how to think about their evaluation to feed into next year’s program.* (Intern D, Reflection)

This comment provides feedback about how the evaluator saw herself in the position of learning about evaluation and from the evaluation while she simultaneously conveyed this to the program staff. Following is another comment from the same intern that elaborated on this statement:

*The capacity building, also allowed for us as evaluators to gain experience in translating evaluation practice to those with little experience or for those who had engaged in other evaluations a new type of evaluation in the collaborative evaluation framework.* (Intern D, Reflection)

The cultural contexts of each YMCA were complex. This diversity challenged evaluation staff to pursue as much understanding as possible despite limitations from their own programmatic background, academic fields, and previous evaluation experiences.

One evaluation intern said,
I realized that I was learning how to provide assistance to very different types of people who had different educational backgrounds, experiences, organizational cultures, and were working with different groups. The evaluation team was able to help us to navigate the different cultures that we were working with. We had tools and resources to help us stay abreast of our relationships with them. In addition, our biweekly conference calls with their supervisors at the YMCA headquarter helped us to understand the YMCA culture better, while they helped facilitate our relationships with some clients. (Intern B, Reflection)

This intern spoke about her guidance as an evaluation intern but also her reliance on a strong cultural network to continue supporting her in reflection activities and inquiry. Specifically this gave her a way to manage the multisite project and its complex needs.

**Evaluator as Change Agent**

In terms of advocacy, transformation, and social justice, collaborative evaluation makes claims of empowerment of participants as a result of this approach but it is not central to the approach. However, culturally responsive evaluators who use the collaborative evaluation approach have begun to acknowledge its overlapping role in facilitating an evaluation that addresses the needs of diverse community groups in terms of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and power (Askew, Greene, & Jay, 2012). In many ways, it is the responsibility of collaborative evaluation and participatory approaches to incorporate the level of engagement necessary to act as change agents and reformists by uncovering relationships of power and equity present in program practices (Greene, 2006; Hendricks & Bamberger, 2010). The ideal of stakeholder-based approaches in supporting program and organizational changes happens only to the extent time, resources, and expertise allow (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; O’Sullivan, 2012). The most common evaluation approach in this area is that of empowerment evaluation, where the evaluator explicitly becomes social reformist or change agent (Fetterman, 2001).
As a result of this collaborative approach and highlighted in the previous sections, most YMCA respondents reported increased capacity and skills in the areas of program planning and evaluation. Additionally, many respondents indicated their YMCAs have now integrated evaluation in daily program activities. One respondent commented that, “we are now using many of the tools in other areas of our programs outside the specific YHSEP project.” Moreover, the national director of the YHESP shared, “there are increased efforts underway to evaluate programs.”

Other researchers have also found this role of change agent extremely important to evaluation and identify it as a client-oriented approach (Cartland et al., 2008). In this role, the evaluator acts as a member of the community and often has project coordination roles. Either way, they are not exclusively evaluators but partners in the activities of the project. In many cases, the UNC evaluation team was an important partner in the YMCA program evaluation and subsequent planning cycles. Thus in the case of evaluator as change agent, the YMCA national program staff had a rich perspective on the collaborative evaluation process. According to the funding agent/national program staff interview transcripts, the expectation of the collaborative approach was that aspects of the organizational culture and collaborative should have been more present in the evaluation on a broader scale. In one instance, the national program director stated:

*I think we could have done more on understanding culture. Understanding what collaborative evaluation means, and how it fits into the program as a whole and instead of looking just merely at their tasks, should have done more in terms of why they’re doing what they’re doing. I’m trying to go outside of a program focus and more into a cultural focus.* (Director, Interview 1)

After further inquiry into what was meant by cultural focus, the national program director explained to the interviewer:
I don’t think there was an understanding on the side of the evaluators as to the big picture of the program and why they’re doing it and understanding of the program itself. And I don’t think there was an understanding of the program coordinators on how collaborative evaluation should work within their day to day work. (Director, Interview 1)

According to this description, the evaluators were focused on individual YMCAs when the national program director expected the evaluators to also be versed in the Higher Education Service Project on a national level, its purpose and vision within the national office. Also evident in this statement is the expectation that program coordinators were to change behaviors and daily operations based on this collaborative evaluation approach. Alternatively, the national staff coordinator working alongside the national director believed the process did assist in the transition to working with higher education projects because the collaborative evaluation approach was structured similar to that of YMCA culture.

She described this effort below:

They seem to feel it has been more of a team effort as opposed to an effort to judge or critique their work. They feel it is a team effort where everyone is working toward the same goal, which really fits well with the way most of the staff within the Ys work. They like teamwork and team building this really made the transition into higher education work for a lot of them, and much more pleasant because it is a way of working which they are much more accustomed. (National Program Coordinator, Interview 1)

Both national staff addressed the need to connect and understand YMCA culture on national and local levels. Although notable change takes time to mature and recognize, which is a shortcoming of a two-year grant cycle, the approach of partnership and team building in collaborative evaluation was able to reinforce and initiate in some cases evaluation changes within and across YMCA organizations.
4.5.3 Purpose of Evaluation

Program evaluations differ in terms of purpose. Most common purposes included: 1) to identify areas of improvement, 2) to determine effectiveness, 3) to assess outcomes, 4) to identify long term impact, and/or 5) to provide accountability. For this evaluation, each YMCA had to participate in the evaluation process as a means of securing funding—meaning it was a requirement. However, the role evaluation played in their program planning and implementation was determined largely by the collaborative evaluation approach used and individual interests and needs of each YHESP program. Collaborative evaluation models have been used for both formative and summative evaluation purposes. In this instance, the national director and evaluation director determined the purpose of evaluation for the YMCAs was to develop capacity for them to implement and assess the effectiveness of their programs. However, for many YMCAs the purpose of evaluation was to secure and sustain funding for future programming.

*It [evaluation] is extremely important to funding, it is really scarce. The Y used to be the recipient of several funding streams and now the Y will have to show proof about the impact of the services but it is everyone because it is a long term affect throughout. The whole thinking around the work that we are doing says that you bring in the evaluator up front.* (Beta, #1)

*Every grant that we have helps us to make sure that we are focusing on the right things, tracking the right things so that we are making a difference. We know that we are hoping, you know when you see a teen that says “I was about to go drop out and being in this program made a difference’ that’s great but funders don’t want to hear a testimonial from someone about what the program meant. They love to see something that is a little bit more statistical. We are evolving in our evaluation. We continue to evolve. We are still trying to find some different tools.* (Gamma, #1)

Focus group reports indicated that many of the YMCAs, similar to other community-based organizations (CBOs), rely on the United Way for funding (Carmen, 2007). As a result, many YMCAs are familiar with the logic model necessary for their granting system.
However, many YMCAs indicated the United Way process was both cumbersome and unclear. Additionally, they were challenged by their own lack of capacity to measure educational outcomes as required by funders.

Focus group participants described challenges in collecting evaluation data, including difficulties developing data collection instruments such as surveys and problems getting sufficient numbers of responses. Several mentioned the difficulty in tracking youth once they leave a program, which can make it nearly impossible to measure long-term outcomes such as high school. (College Readiness Focus Group, 2012). The collaborative evaluation approach used the logic model, but not the identical framework as the United Way model—one developed specifically for use with the YHESP project.

The previous data on uses, usage, and engagement through the survey, interviews with national staff, and reflection pieces highlight these perspectives. Here the national director tells how previous evaluation experiences for YMCAs were overwhelming and inaccessible for many organizations involved in educational programming. According to her, evaluators need to make evaluation accessible and they need to be approachable. In this statement she uses the example of a seven-column logic model used previously as a means of evaluation planning.

So it’s (this evaluation process) made a tremendous impact on Y-USA. Some local Ys that are United Way, get United Way money, in which the United Way demands an evaluation, but their logic models have 7 and 8 columns to it, so it’s no way that that’s understandable. I recommend we have 2 columns, what you do and what happened with it. It’s because they’re not at that professional level where they do understand all the pieces of it. To go back to your original question, it has had a tremendous impact on Y-USA. And there will be no programs coming out that do not have an evaluation component. (Director, Interview 1)
The national director alluded to major concerns regarding the role of evaluation. To start, she discussed the ability for evaluation to be basic and at a level of comprehension. The next concern raised from the national director in the earlier quote was about the professional level of the YMCAs and having an evaluation that meets them at their level. In fact, the evaluation interns from both years pointed to the limited evaluation knowledge and skills that both cohorts possessed to implement their programs. When referring to the work the previous cohort had done, one intern said, “although all had developed logic models and some had created tools, few had results and fewer still used the results to improve or expand their programs.”

It became a role of evaluation to not only build capacity but help them make better use of their evaluation results to integrate into future planning. When reflecting on the outcomes that had taken place in terms of the evaluation, the same intern reflected on positive outcomes.

After an iterative process of reviewing and revising the logic models with each site, most YMCA sites resulted with improved logic models that included measureable, relevant, and attainable objectives and evidence. For those who submitted their evaluation tools from last year or this year, the interns provided constructive feedback to ensure that their tools matched the objectives they were measuring and improve their data collection process. (Intern C, Reflection)

Not only did they have stronger understandings about how to improve their logic models, they also understood the collaborative evaluation process better. (Intern C, Reflection)

Evaluation interns all reported the primary role of the collaborative approach as one of building capacity within programs. However, rather than highlighting the differences in evaluation knowledge among programs, one intern shared how “evaluation fairs/webinars” allowed for projects to learn from one another.

The great thing about having our office work with all these different sites is that we can work with different programs and share resources between these programs. This
helps to promote networking around best practices and enhance their evaluation capacity that is transferrable, as well as enhance their results. (Intern B, Reflection)

For this study, the evaluation itself served the purpose of connecting learners with one another to share knowledge around program and evaluation in an effort to build stronger programs and evaluation strategies. In the case of Delta YMCA, Delta #1 described:

*Looking at our programs and how we can make them better and also having an opportunity to bring more people to the table that is committed to the same. Also, an internal network within the YMCA movement, now I have a network of individuals that I can call on these individuals about our student challenges and what are their strategies to combat those problems. So I think it has allowed me to expand my resources and networks so we can...focus in on what is really important to our organization, now we have a strategic plan whether its new programming or existing programming does it align with our strategic plan. So that allows us an opportunity if it doesn’t meet these requirements, why are we doing it, to look at ourselves and not miss use resources with helping us achieve our goals.* (Delta, #1)

The YMCAs selected share a perspective that contrasts with the views of YMCAs as strictly a “swim and gym” facility and the way they saw the YMCA role in the community. As they make sense of their organizational mission and work therein, they produce their own discourse of college access, which fuses and blends perspectives on higher education, evaluation, and vulnerable populations resulting in a social responsibility discourse that speaks of the role of collaborative evaluation efforts to support YMCA change efforts to serve as college access providers.

*We are more than just the gym and swim. It shows that we had another level to us with our social responsibility to help create a more educated, stronger community. Out of healthy living it is the youth development and social responsibility and getting the word out about foster youth and how we can go to the next level.* (Alpha #1)

*We used the Achiever’s Program because we thought it was easier to use the grant process through an existing program. Not only did we increase the opportunities for participants in the program we combined it with the collegiate program. We have our college students now working in achievers and we have an intern now... We have taken that program to another level.* (Beta #1)
In all cases of YMCAs interviewed, after YHESP grant funds ended leaders still sought to identify ways to assist students in their quest for postsecondary education as a way to promote a social responsibility agenda. In many cases, beliefs about social responsibility were shaped by earlier experiences as a learner, teacher, or researcher in education. For example, Beta #1 considers her views as broader and different than the current traditional YMCA discourse on social responsibility and volunteerism.

4.5.4 Project Staff Roles

Interaction among stakeholder involvement, evaluator roles, purpose, and the project staff roles played by project staff are dynamic. However, if the literature holds true, each is dependent on the other. For example, the evaluator roles and the evaluation purpose may change, depending on the relationship and project staff involvement; a volunteer may receive technical assistance differently than a CEO. In addition, they may see the role of evaluation differently, which mediates what resonates.

Earlier the variation in YMCA survey respondents was mentioned. In some cases, grant developers responded (13), in other cases it was project managers (23), and in several cases the executive directors (17) responded to the survey. When asked to describe their role in the project, many respondents shared common attributes. However, there were activities more commonly associated with specific project titles.

For example, most leaders described their role as that of visionary. In all but four cases, executive directors reported being the one responsible for oversight of the project. Three said they implemented the project or expanded on a new one. Two CEOs said they were responsible for hiring decisions. One executive director respondent states: *I attended*
the initial workshops and work at a high, advisory and visionary level in relation to this initiative.

The YMCA executive directors interviewed for the embedded cases shared perspectives that challenged the presence of the mainstream discourse about YMCAs as gym facilities in public and internal forums. YMCAs in each case constructed dominant YMCA thought processes as “old” and presented existing YMCA staff as being change reluctant, unwilling to think “outside the box,” and tied by adherence to traditional YMCA programs and practices. New staff was displayed as “good staff,” people who understand “higher education” and “communicate new ideas.” “Old” program staff was constructed as suspicious of new program ideas and evaluation initiatives because these seemed to collide with YMCA norms.

At the time of the project, it was just me. Within the first year, I had gotten rid of all the staff. There was no staff left. When we started down this road, we started new and we recruited Beta #2 from the University so she is just what we needed and the other program coordinator was recruited from another university. (Beta #1)

We have had a huge staff turnover and they were just on the wrong bus. Pretty much there are now more forward thinking board and staff. I want to know if they have done surveys, do they collect data can they digest the data, have they volunteered in the past. If they have not volunteered they don’t understand the YMCA, they don’t know how to give and work with people. They don’t understand the mindset that you are here for someone else’s not your own purpose. A lot of the old staff was that they are owed something and the YMCA doesn’t owe you anything. (Alpha, #1)

As is common in organizational literature, leadership and decision makers were defined as a critical piece to the organizational advancement of YMCAs’ program and evaluation work. Specifically, CEOs and Executive Directors carried out the function of staff decisions and marketing of the YMCA to promote an image of the YMCA as leaders in educational support of communities and data-driven decision makers. That said, evaluation had to enable CEOs to use the most appropriate findings to strategize about those decisions.
Beta, Gamma, and Delta illustrate the use of CEOs to exercise decision-making power in staffing decisions.

The CEO at the time was looking for a position that a University campus and the YMCA can understand because they speak very different languages higher education and the YMCA. To create a clear understanding of those cultures and how they work together, I had a focused college student development career prior so my perspective in the YMCA is small compared to those having grown up in the YMCA. (Beta #2)

With our new Chief Executive Officer, I can say that, the YMCA has never been as up front and center as it is now. They don’t connect that we are the biggest provider of education outside of public schools. He is intentional and he has a huge soft spot for teen programs so he wants people to know that we are not just a gym and swim there is more to us and because he has such a soft spot for teens and programs... We have been linked with them much more than we have in the past. (Gamma, #1)

Our new CEO he was really supportive. We really worked hard at getting rid of some of the silos we had with people not wanting to be collaborative that I think that has really helped and allowed us... We did experience some restructuring and realignment, everybody was given the opportunity to come on board with the vision and the mission and really be a part of that and so we were given the opportunity to apply and we were individuals that reapplied for positions... It really allowed our organization to change. Having other thought leaders, fresh set of eyes, and helped us to change. It was time for a change. (Delta, #1)

New staff and interviewees had simply relied on changes of both leadership and staff and adopted a new perspective of program planning as a collaborative, data-driven process.

The evaluation work described by interviews was used as a vehicle to support these staffing and program decisions.

In the case of project coordinators and managers, they mostly described their role as that of implementation. However, in several cases, they were responsible for all aspects of the project including designing the curriculum, securing funds, and writing reports. Over half of program managers (9/15) reported being responsible for implementation and design of the project. Six program managers indicated they wrote the proposal and/or subsequent program
reports. Another two program managers said they hired staff. One program manager described:

As director of the program receiving YHESP funding, I was involved in writing the grants and reports, as well as participating in trainings held at YUSA. I also assisted in presenting two of the webinars, one each year. I was also responsible for program development, implementation and ongoing internal reviews of the project.

Another respondent describes:

My role was project coordinator. I oversaw the entire process and program of our YHESP Program. It evolved from being based at an elementary school focusing on high school age students, to being based at a middle school and focused on 6th to 8th graders. I was responsible for data collection, tools, program implementation, relationship with the school, and the relationship with YUSA.

According to grant developer/writer respondents, their role involved writing the initial grant proposal, writing reports, and adhering to funding guidelines. In most cases (11/13) grant developer respondents indicated their duty was to report activities back to the funder. In the other two cases, respondents reported they had inherited the project from someone else. In a few instances they were responsible for designing the project. One respondent says:

Our Y received funding for the second round of implementation. My role was to help design the projects and determine how funds could best be utilized, as well as developing the project evaluation and completing reports.

Specifically, executive directors and grant developers reported carrying the burden of accountability, decision making, and oversight. One respondent said, “I designed the project with my team and made sure we were accountable for doing what we said we would do. I also chose the staff who would work on the project.”

4.5.5 Conclusion

When reviewing the data about roles of evaluators, national staff, project staff, and the project itself, it is likely that collaborative evaluation, similar to other forms of
evaluation, required stakeholders to wear many hats. Evaluation interns attested to a high degree of administrative and mentorship tasks in addition to providing technical assistance and learning about the programs. YHESP respondents also confirmed the likely involvement of the UNC evaluation team in varying roles of evaluation activities both as technical experts and partners. Specifically, those YMCAs with low- and medium-level initial evaluation knowledge reported more support from evaluation team members and data showed increased involvement by CEOs in this same group. All YMCAs expressed similar involvement in the evaluation by students as participants but varied by cohort on volunteer/community involvement.

In many cases, survey respondents found the evaluation was culturally responsive to their YMCA stakeholder and project needs. Even more, the national coordinator reported the style of collaborative evaluation supported positive team dynamics and reflected how YMCAs operate in daily life. However, the national director felt the evaluation team did not meet expectations of understanding the national YMCA cultural and programmatic needs in terms of the role of collaborative evaluation in influencing YMCA culture.

For the most part, YMCA cases seem to have entered the landscape of college access efforts or vice versa. In the case of the University YMCA with greater budget and connections, it was more graceful and sustainable than the smaller YMCA disconnected from existing educational outreach efforts. However, here where the YMCAs chosen reported the greatest impact by the collaborative evaluation processes, collaborative evaluation activities were likely to be used as a means to develop new or existing program capacity for a long-term agenda of social responsibility. The reputation of the YMCA as a “swim and gym” facility was a dominant discourse throughout the interviews. College access programming for
children, youth, and adults is primarily untraditional for YMCAs to conduct, and it is for this reason that needs-assessment and partnerships were strongly suggested in the application process.

Overall, national staff and evaluation team members agreed that the purpose of a collaborative evaluation approach includes building capacity and influencing program planning. Local YMCA grant developer respondents reported adhering to grant requirements and writing reports as their role in the process. CEOs and executive directors indicated an expansion of program and capacity as their primary responsibility. Last, program managers reported managing the project implementation process successfully, including evaluation responsibilities, as their purpose. This variation in respondents’ roles presents evidence that evaluators were responsible for connecting with stakeholders as it relates to the evaluation process.
Chapter 5. Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

This case study was approached to identify lessons of evaluation practice and program planning. As this is being written, evaluators eagerly find creative ways to connect with clients and organizations as a way to better meet their program needs. The ways of both stakeholder engagement and capacity building in evaluation continue to expand as popular arenas to increase use, increase quality, and in many ways promote an evaluative culture. Collaborative evaluation is but one approach to make these claims and show results of success in that arena.

The study’s findings suggest the collaborative evaluation approach used had the strongest influence on the program planning and implementation process of YMCAs. Of the survey respondents, 96% of 38 participants found the evaluation findings useful and 85% of 39 respondents reported its ability to influence future programming. Considering YMCAs from the first grant cycle, known as Cohort I, had an additional year to receive evaluation team involvement and build on the practices they had developed the prior year, it is unsurprising they reported a greater overall impact of the collaborative evaluation. Through its execution of the tiered collaborative model, YMCAs with the highest need for evaluation assistance as determined by an initial evaluation knowledge assessment received the greatest amount of evaluation assistance and also reported the most involvement from stakeholders in the process. Even so YMCAs from both cohorts and low, medium, and high initial evaluation knowledge groups reported increased confidence in evaluation knowledge and practices. The
influence of national coordination changes may have influenced the relationship between program participants, evaluation and evaluation staff as well as subsequent stakeholders, but nothing in this study explored this further as a factor. However, this study does affirm the necessary involvement of local senior leadership to support organizational evaluation capacity building.

This case study explored the extent to which YMCAs engage in a collaborative evaluation approach that results in positive impact for higher education program planning and implementing organizations. The findings suggest there were definite strengths to this approach for all YMCAs conducting higher education service projects but especially for those willing and able to leverage the collaborative evaluation process as an extension of their own resources. Specifically, collaborative evaluation allowed for organizations to partner in the evaluation process and use it as a bridge to program planning. What are the aspects of readiness to consider in the collaboration evaluation approach to support the strongest impact in college access programs and why?

A look at collaborative evaluation as a way to facilitate engagement of YMCA stakeholders into college access work emerged through four important readiness points: capacity, culture, networks, and competence. First, capacity refers to the ability of funders, evaluators, and program staff to recognize the value of collaborative evaluation as a way to build evaluation and program capacity levels including program knowledge and decision-making skills to promote use of evaluation in program planning. Second, in the collaborative evaluation case study studied, culture referred to organizational and program contexts, which are represented through the program staff. In most cases, this approach led to more contextually relevant data. However, still missing from this approach is the lens from which
evaluators may consider the context of college access programs and services as seen in a social, historical, and political context and the implications of representing the “organizational contexts as-is” in their evaluation processes (Askew, Jay, & Greene, 2012). Third, networks refer to the extent to which program and evaluation staff identified and engaged local network partners in the collaborative evaluation process to ensure that evaluation was accessible beyond key program staff and directors and resulted in increased organizational capacity, cultural validity, and data use for program improvement and future funding opportunities. Finally, the notion of competence relates to the necessity highlighted in the findings for evaluators and program staff to exhibit both technical and facilitation skills that stimulated thinking around program and evaluation practices, as well as the overall quality of data collected.

Despite limitations in initial evaluation capacity and cultural practices, programs offering college access services that encourage and support the postsecondary aspirations of kids, youth, and adults still have a chance to use and understand evaluation as a way to identify and sustain good programming. The four aspects discussed earlier act as a lens through which to see how collaborative evaluation may be better operationalized within a college access context. After analyzing both survey and interview data, the researcher developed Figure 3 to depict the collaborative evaluation at play with YMCAs as they became college access providers. The figure shows how each phase in the evaluation cycle observed varying to no degree of engagement by local stakeholders depending on the local program staff. The arrows denote the potential expansion or retraction for greater involvement throughout the process as a result of the collaborative evaluation process. It highlights the ability of collaborative evaluation processes to consider multiple stakeholders.
strategically in the evaluation and in a college access context. It will be further referred to throughout the descriptions of each of the readiness points.

Figure 3. Collaborative evaluation of YMCAs in college access context.

5.1.1 Capacity

As is the case with most educational service programs, many YMCA organizations are low-resourced, dependent on volunteers, and in dire need of evaluators with adequate skill who understand how and why evaluations occur (American Youth Policy Forum, 2006). Beyond the assumption of grant funding, these organizations must identify programs and services that work well with their populations and understand why to sustain funding. For this to occur, capacity building must be integrated into all aspects of program planning and implementation. Integrating capacity-building strategies for programs must occur for higher education program practices as well as for evaluation processes.
In many ways this model of collaborative evaluation incorporates Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) to help organizations meet their program needs and funder requirements. In these strategies, evaluators guide staff and organizations through evaluation processes and practices to make them an ongoing part and partner of organizational program planning and implementation (Preskill & Torres, 1998; Stockdill et al., 2002). In this case the collaborative evaluation facilitated each YMCA local staff through designing, implementing, monitoring program services, and tracking outcomes using an individualized logic model. Logic model use as a developmental learning tool to build staff capacity is common and useful (Iriate, Suarez-Balcazar, Taylor-Ritzler, & Luna, 2011). Use of logic models supported evaluation use in program planning across all YMCAs, report findings, and then were used to redesign programs for improvement the following year. YMCAs with lower initial evaluation knowledge showed greater need to leverage capacity building efforts with partners including the evaluation team. For this to occur, stakeholder involvement needs to occur consistently and be prioritized by both evaluation team and stakeholders, because collaboration is a key concept in evaluation capacity building (Labin, Duffey, Myers et al., 2012).

Over 90% of YMCAs surveyed used the logic model to determine data collection strategies, communicate findings, and develop program curricula. More so, the vast majority used it to make program decisions and communicate with stakeholders. Logic model use proved a direct reflection of increased ability to conduct evaluations and increase understanding, where all but one YMCA respondent believed their evaluation capacity has been strengthened. As Taut (2007) purports, cognitive outcomes are associated with evaluation capacity building strategies. With such a strong influence on the collaborative
evaluation approach to build program and evaluation capacity it is not surprising that nearly 80% of 30 respondents believed their organization’s knowledge about and ability to conduct evaluation had increased. Moreover, interviews with leadership proved a sustained effect on individual competence and organizational evaluation capacity to integrate into program activities nearly two years after the completion of the project.

The role of funders, national staff, and evaluators should be to assist local leadership and program staff in YMCA organizations to better operate and become effective in educational program delivery. For this to occur, there needs to be ongoing training and services that provide support in program strategies, content, and evaluation processes. There also needs to be a commitment of involvement from the organization for this to occur. Collaborative evaluation makes use of its model and can be an effective training tool for program staff and funders to build program capacity. In this case, the extent of capacity building for stakeholders not identified as key liaisons, however, is largely dependent on the engagement and commitment of key program staff and leadership to integrate partners into their local efforts.

5.1.2 Culture

A second key finding refers to the adaptability and responsiveness of the evaluation to the organizational and program culture. Some YMCAs, regardless of initial capacity, had clear shifts in beliefs around the ability of evaluation to effect organizational and program cultural practices. The collaborative evaluation used anticipates modifications to the program and purports that adaptability of the evaluation to fit the cultural context is critical to its adoption as a process and use. Interestingly, in this study collaborative evaluation
responsiveness to local leaders’ needs proved greater success than its ability to respond to national program needs.

Considering the strength of impacts in program use and capacity building, YMCA respondents believed the approach was less likely to deliver on its ability to reflect local program context and organizational system characteristics. More so for Cohort I than Cohort II, the approach adapted to their local program needs. Additionally, the national program director reported that it did not adequately reflect national needs to generate cultural change. These shortcomings may reflect the multi-site approach targeting local project activities without national evaluative efforts to link back to the national organizational context.

Organizational cultural change in evaluation is often indicated by evaluation use. YMCA local leaders recognize the potential use of evaluation to promote or hinder cultural change by helping YMCAs to create a culture of accountability—maximizing financial resources, establishing performance baselines, and measuring progress toward achieving goals were highlighted (Workshop Summary Report, 2012). In this study YMCAs maintained that the collaborative evaluation approach increased their evaluation use and acted as an impetus to the integration of evaluation into existing programs. All programs agreed in the use of the logic model to communicate program content and support and make program decisions to improve local programming.

According to both the national director and YMCA leader reports, even before collaborative evaluation takes place, there needs to be adequate consideration given to the expectations of cultural change on national and local levels. Many cases seemed to have expressed a personal or organizational shift in evaluation beliefs and culture, but for the organizational shift to be maintained other practices and ongoing support should be
considered. There was evidence that the approach used fostered an environment to meet most leadership needs in terms of a culture of accountability and program improvement. Although most responses suggest collaborative evaluation does well to fit the cultural context of local programs and organizations, others challenged that perspective.

For programs with a strong cultural focus, designed to promote access to postsecondary opportunities for marginalized populations, responsiveness to both program and participant culture is extremely important (Zulli & Frierson, 2004). Evaluation approaches for these programs must attempt to understand cultures relevant to national and local program managers and participant stakeholders to maximize program success. Moreover, collaborative evaluation must focus on integrating initiatives that pay more attention to cultural responsiveness beyond the key staff liaison (Askew, Jay, & Greene, 2011). As shown earlier in Figure 3, beyond the lens of the program manager rests a national and local social and political culture of college access. The national culture suggests a need for evaluation approaches with critical reflection of program practices that address issues of social injustice rather than perpetuate bureaucracies of power (Baizerman, 2009). As, evaluators recognize their role in social agendas and systems it is important to adopt practices that minimize power differentials rather than support them. Despite limited resources, collaborative evaluation approaches must adhere to this responsibility when working with multiple cultural contexts within community organizations.

Although limited by resources, multisite evaluations have the capacity to promote awareness of stakeholder involvement in evaluation and facilitate that understanding. In this evaluation, program staff assumed much of the responsibility to identify and make use of the voices of program partners, participants, and community members, where in a single-site
collaborative evaluation that may not be the case. However, when collaborative evaluators approach these program staff, they must be intentional during planning and facilitation of the collaborative evaluation cycle to add a lens for equity. Earlier, Figure 3 showed the necessity of program staff to obtain the resources and skill set to act as culturally responsible gatekeepers in the integration of voices within the collaborative evaluation process.

5.1.3 Networks

Much of college access service work relies on partnerships with higher education institutions, other service providers, and school districts. Thinking through the role of collaborative evaluation on organizations like the YMCA of the USA has led to exploring the role of networks in program development models. Specifically, networks in this case study were the connectedness to multiple resources, perspectives, and partnerships for use in a collective effort toward a common goal. Even more, the program materials of this national project highlighted the use of networks through community members/volunteers and higher education partners as key features to the execution of the program services.

As part of the grant criteria, your YMCA will be required to recruit convene, and lead the key community stakeholders in a Higher Education Service project Community Task Force. (YHESP Application Part 7, 2011)

Please identify community higher education organizations that your YMCA will invite to collaborate in and enhance this program? What support will your YMCA request from each collaborator? (YHESP Application Part 8, 2011)

With such a priority on building networks, programs should consider their own practices and values along with those of the evaluation and whether those align.

Collaborative evaluation of YMCAs resulted in engagement of stakeholders through providing feedback, data collection, and reporting. In some cases, respondents reported an increased ability to engage stakeholders in program development through the collaborative
evaluation framework. However, since there were limited resources and no specific aims to move beyond the engagement of key staff liaison, this was another shortcoming of the approach. Multiple methods of stakeholder-based evaluation exist, with the focus of relationship between evaluator and client yielding potentially different results.

The role of evaluators in this collaborative approach was that of both structured facilitator as well as coach for program staff to understand and use evaluation to improve their own program services. Shifting of evaluator roles is not a new phenomenon (Patton, 2004). Within this case study it stands that one advantage of this approach is that evaluator roles of administrator, technical advisor, facilitator, and coach appear as an extension of program staff resources. A strategy based on stakeholder engagement is critical to promoting evaluation access for low-resourced staff and guidance to those with more resources. In fact, program staff appreciated the ability to refer to a “technical evaluation” expert as a team member throughout the process. This is one area of alignment to be considered in future research.

A central axiom of collaborative evaluation is to engage stakeholders to the extent possible. This is much easier in practice with single-site evaluations. Other participatory and empowerment approaches recognize the challenge of engaging stakeholders when conducting multisite projects with minimal resources as well (Lawrenz & Huffman, 2003). For this national project with 61 YMCA sites, it had been structured in a way that would maximize collaboration with national staff and local program managers but depended on each YMCA to engage their own local participants and other key stakeholders throughout the process. An expectation of staff to facilitate the engagement of local stakeholders throughout the evaluation process at their sites is critical to ensure multiple voices are heard and
community needs met (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Rodriguez-Campos, 2012). When expectations are unclear or not shared it limits the collaborative evaluation impact and use throughout the organization. Another barrier noted for capacity-building strategies is attitude (Owen, 2003). Specifically important here is the perceived attitude of program staff toward evaluation (Posavac, & Carey, 2007). This lingering fear in the misuse or limited use of evaluation for program development stands to be a reason program managers take a minimal approach of involvement, resulting in less impact.

The recognition of a network between partners, evaluation team, participants, and community volunteers to program and evaluation planning resulted in a stronger impact in the ability for the collaborative evaluation to act a vehicle to facilitate these networks. In other cases, the expectations of collaborative evaluation to facilitate engagement of stakeholders may have been unclear or seemed unnecessary.

The role of networks in the collaborative evaluation approach is crucial to organizations gleaning the greatest impact. If a program is not willing or ready to engage network partners in the collaborative evaluation approach, or the evaluators do not promote such a stance, YMCA as college access providers are more likely not going to find such an approach helpful and thus not embrace other perspectives or voices in the process. Any stakeholder engagement is particularly challenging to implement in multisite evaluations (Goodyear, 2011; Lawrenz & Huffman, 2004). Gaining buy-in to do this from local as well as national YMCA staff increases its impact (Rogers et al., 2010). Rather than having imposed measures of success, it may be helpful to have funders require grantees to participate in a collaborative evaluation process on both local and national levels. This would allow that all stakeholders were considered and provided resources to do so. Without proper
buy-in, however, local YMCA staff may feel overworked and resentful toward the external evaluation staff.

Beyond typical evaluation readiness assessments, a collaborative evaluation readiness must include opportunities for leadership, staff, and evaluators to determine their ability to function in the collaborative evaluation, including perspectives that consider the college access landscape. In this case study, less involvement in the collaborative evaluation approach varied by 1) leadership agenda, 2) rooted evaluation experience (history), 3) perceived necessity of collaborative evaluation (value), 4) perceived advantage of evaluation (worth), and 5) initial capacity. YMCA leaders confirmed readiness challenges when referring to limited staff member involvement because of limited skills and perceived value.

5.1.4 Competence/Quality

Facilitating both a strong evaluation plan, engaging multiple stakeholders, and staying culturally responsive is challenging. In fact, difficulties to address both are reflected in this study. Findings about the quality of evaluation assistance have not resulted in as much consensus as the other factors by the impact of this collaborative evaluation approach. But the study still reflects the advantage a majority of YMCAs had working with a collaborative evaluation team on program evaluation. For most of the YMCAs, data collection strategies and data quality increased. In a collaborative evaluation, quality does not just refer to data and design, rather this study suggests it is crucial for the evaluation team to have competencies in facilitation as well.

Facilitation is concerned with the evaluator’s role in stimulating critique of evaluation and program practice. Ability to connect with stakeholders, engage them in the evaluation process, and provide administrative and technical assistance is needed. The role of evaluators
moves beyond that of technical expert, although that is paramount to evaluation. The use of interns to act as the direct line of evaluation services in this study speaks directly to the strength of the collaborative evaluation approach rather than the experience of the evaluator to promote use through quality evaluation. In fact, this study had two separate sets of interns that followed the same collaborative evaluation approach under the same leadership. However, shortcomings in the facilitation skills may or may not be attributed to the individual evaluator competence compared to the collaborative evaluation approach.

Even more, as collaborative evaluation makes claims of difference from other participatory empowerment approaches in the degree of evaluation control throughout the evaluation, facilitation is that much more important. Evaluators in this study promoted ownership but retained their role as technical experts throughout the process. YMCAs valued this differentiation between their role as program staff/director and that of evaluator as responsive to their local needs and context.

It is important to note the views on evaluation quality perceived by stakeholders versus that of preset standards in meta-evaluation studies (Thomas, 2010). However, a recent study shows how good quality as rated by decision makers is far more important to evaluation use and subsequent changes than that by preset standards (Lederman, 2012). In this study, agreement about data quality increased as the initial evaluation knowledge was limited. That said, expectations of quality evaluation assistance, data collection instruments, and data quality are directly associated with the perception of program staff and their prior experiences with evaluation. This makes clarity of expectations around evaluation and a readiness tool even more in need.
Another area that deserves discussion is the influence of evaluation on program content and vice versa. The objective in evaluation is to support programs in the use of evaluation for effective program decision making. When looking at this approach, YMCAs have an increased ability to better understand higher education through the reflective nature of this evaluation as well as the self-confidence to engage in evaluation discourse around college access services. This also has implications on future program funding. In addition to building evaluation capacity within their organizations leadership engaged built competencies with the evaluation as a means to secure funds for future program efforts as well.

Making sure quality is sound also means finding a way to connect evaluation measures to program content. In many ways, this refers to the ability of evaluation to promote (multi)cultural validity by having relevance to actual program practices and content (Kirkhart, 2005; Symmonette, 2004). This also means asking the right questions to the right people throughout the evaluation process (Askew, Jay, & Greene, 2012). Where collaborative evaluation may have fallen short was where the national YMCA staff felt the interns had limited familiarity with YMCAs and higher education work. Given the eight-month timeframe of each intern’s involvement, scheduling conflicts arose with interns participating in trainings on specific program content. However, the local YMCA staff exhibited no concern in the limited program knowledge of the evaluation team. In fact, once hired evaluation interns reviewed documents and consulted with national staff weekly.

What this should alert evaluators to is the need to understand how and when having background in the program content is advantageous and when it is irrelevant. This study makes no claims to support it either way. But the study does seem to highlight the
dependency of YMCA staff on the evaluation team to ask the right questions regarding program content in an effort to promote data quality. In many cases, YMCAs had a lack of program background relying on both community needs and partners to identify relevant content. Given that not all partners were involved, there were limitations to the adherence to program content. In such a developmental process, which requires YMCAs to learn through inquiry, it may be beneficial for evaluators to facilitate that inquiry through relevant questions.

Higher education service projects differed in target audience, staff, and specificity but all implemented or expanded on social, academic, and/or financial services to increase students’ likelihood to apply or attend college. Those with existing services such as Black and Latino Achiever’s Programs used this grant opportunity to recruit more students or address gaps in services. YMCAs with little educational program experience were starting pilot efforts. YMCAs showed evidence of growth in evaluating these projects despite prior experience in the higher education arena.

Whether programmatic, technical, or contextual knowledge, stakeholders had the opportunity to work together to identify and use their varying skill sets in the collaborative evaluation process. Earlier Figure 3 showed the manifestation of YHESP YMCA stakeholder roles and shaded areas highlight the collaboration that occurred to varying degrees based on skills, resources, and readiness. To the degree stakeholders were integrated in the evaluation process, evaluation becomes more reflective of their needs and context. Thus, the part of evaluators or funders to become program experts is not necessary. Rather, it is through the process of facilitation of the evaluation that stakeholder expertise should be highlighted and integrated.
5.1.5 Conclusion

This study and previous discussion support expanding collaborative evaluation readiness to assist college access programs and organizations like the YMCA and their staff in identifying the best strategies to use in their program evaluation and development efforts. Although funders and organizations tend to focus on programs with existing evaluation resources and program experience, this study shows the collaborative evaluation approach used in a multisite effort may be best suited for those educational efforts of YMCA sites seeking to expand resources and capacity, build rapport among stakeholders, and make better program decisions.

The ability for evaluation to facilitate increased evaluation use, improve data quality, and engage stakeholders rests largely on program staff and their willingness to commit to a collaborative evaluation approach. YMCA YHESP program staff members were central to the collaborative evaluation process where national funders and local staff were engaged throughout the process. In such a large multisite evaluation, it was also dependent on evaluators to encourage program staff to incorporate culturally responsive strategies into the approach even with such limited resources. Ultimately, the more consideration occurring of local stakeholders, the more responsive to the both college access and YMCA contexts evaluation can become.

The intentional strategies by funders, evaluators, and staff to engage stakeholders in the process of both program and evaluation planning enable college access programs and organizations at all levels to maximize benefit from collaborative evaluation approaches. As highlighted in Table 24, in planning and implementing collaborative program evaluation of
multisite projects, it is important to ensure programs have opportunities to assess their level of collaborative evaluation readiness—culture, networks, capacity and competence.

Table 24.

**Collaborative Evaluation Readiness Lens**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readiness Area</th>
<th>Collaborative Evaluation Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Strives to create increased evaluation skills, knowledge and practices through facilitation of collaborative evaluation planning and execution. Acts as expanded program resource to staff offering them technical expertise as needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Readiness Check:** How will the evaluation plan identify organizational needs relative to evaluation capacity, establish shared value in leveraging collaborative evaluation in existing program development? How will the program provide leadership support and resources for aligning and/or restructuring existing practices to maximize resources available through partners in an effort to promote data quality and use?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Seeks to integrate cultural attributes into evaluation process and for evaluation to reflect context to maximize evaluation use.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Readiness Check:** How do the evaluation team, funder and program staff plan to promote an evaluation sharing environment that encourages ongoing evaluation use and dissemination amongst stakeholders? In what ways does the evaluation approach and plan consider social, political and historical contexts of the program locally, nationally or internationally?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Networks</th>
<th>Strategic development of evaluation learning communities and structures that facilitate sharing of evaluation and program knowledge and experience that allow staff to establish meaningful relationships.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Readiness Check:** How does the evaluation team plan to engage diverse perspectives ensuring voices are heard? In what ways and who will be responsible for engagement of network partners in the evaluation process? In what ways will stakeholders be involved and what are their expectations as network partners in the evaluation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence/Quality</th>
<th>Focus on quality data that is used by the stakeholders to make improvements and decisions around program planning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Readiness Check:** What is level of program and evaluation staff ability to carry out facilitation of inquiry throughout stakeholder engagement in the evaluation cycle? What is considered quality?
The main areas where collaborative evaluation has likelihood of establishing impact for YMCAs is in its potential for responding to capacity, culture, networks, and competence. Capacity building in collaborative evaluation promotes understanding and skill building while being an added resource to the organization. Although all evaluation should consider cultural context (see American Evaluation Association principles) collaborative evaluation offers multiple opportunities throughout the evaluation cycle to adapt or promote cultural practices. Networking occurs throughout the evaluation planning and implementation and allows for co-construction of evaluation with multiple stakeholders. Last, competence refers to the services of quality where collaborative evaluators need skills as facilitators and technical experts to support the practice of stakeholder engagement in identification of data sources, data collection, instrument development, and reporting processes.

Accountability and preset standards plague YMCA HESP efforts and similar college access programs as recognized dependency of funding on their status relative to other efforts. That said increased understanding of evaluation terminology, processes, and skill building can increase capacity and promote sustainability. In theory, what differentiates collaborative and other alternative approaches from traditional approaches is the intentionality to make evaluation relevant and promote use to stakeholders. Eager to sustain funding, programs want to adopt evaluation methods and strategies that can highlight or prove their worth rather than adopt evaluation strategies that may lead to sustainable program planning skills that can be used over time across the organization.

5.2 Limitations

Limitations for this research study were identified pertaining to the depth of data available for the case study. The case study used survey data to hear mass perspectives from
the YMCAs involved in the project. The survey was piloted and developed using an advisory group of similar program staff. However, with self-reported survey data there are always possibilities of inaccuracy. Respondents may be influenced by desirability and human memory during self-report, which can consequently influence data accurateness (Polit & Beck, 2004; Trochim, 2001). Lastly, with the focus of the approach on the project staff liaisons, few respondents were included outside of these stakeholders.

Reporting was performed by those responsible for communicating the grant but a few of them professed limited knowledge of the actual program and evaluation planning. Other interview, focus group, and program documents were used to supplement any inaccuracies in survey data. However, secondary qualitative data are also subject to the inaccuracies of reporting and analysis by the researcher.

Finally, this study also intended to examine the role of collaborative evaluation in any differentials of power, status, and education addressed as factors associated with stakeholder participation and engagement. With the collaborative evaluation strategies focused on national and local program managers and, in some cases, executive directors there were inadequate data to explore the positioning of insider and outsider stakeholder involvement within a task force that may limit cultural and economic diversity.

5.3 Final Thoughts

Funders must consider their power in perpetuating an evaluation discourse that may not serve advantageous to programs working to support marginalized populations (O’Conner, 2010). The collaborative evaluation approach is in part a response to these failings. This study asserts the collaborative evaluation and methods used complement YMCAs and similar organizations carrying out college access work but could do more. Additionally, the work of
collaborative evaluation is resource intensive for evaluators and program staff alike. With such overlapping strategies and skill sets with participatory, developmental, and empowerment approaches to maximize work with social programs, collaborative evaluation could be more deliberate, specifically when it comes to social justice, empowerment, and examining the role of criteria for program success on students and program staff. Glimpses of empowerment were extremely evident in this study. It should be stressed that focusing on social justice in a collaborative evaluation approach may be necessary and does not compete with an empowerment approach.

When division of such approaches stifles the use of a hybrid approach or further consideration of a particular lens, it should be more about strategies used than a pre-determined approach (O’Sullivan, 2012). Program staff took ownership of their evaluation through the collaborative evaluation by receiving structured guidance to be confident but also felt control over the evaluation. The potential to encourage reflective practice on actual program services and subsequent criteria is available but without its integration in the framework, evaluators may assume it not necessary.

In such a collaborative dynamic process where programs are still formulating their own understanding and needs around the program services and successes, the cycle of expectation should be visited more than once on a national scale with stakeholders and again by individual sites. This is because expectation may shift as their needs and capacity grow with evaluation. Another concern in this case study was that it was unclear whether a national evaluation with analysis across common measures was needed. Although it created common terminology, as is the case with many Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) strategies (Labin et al., 2012), this collaborative evaluation lacked the development of common indicators and
a national analysis. Some might also criticize the fact that it also lacked the use of comparison or control groups in the evaluation design for use in longitudinal studies over time, but given the lack of uniform programs (i.e., treatments) across sites that would not have been appropriate. For some YMCA leaders in particular, the possible use of common indicators already tied to their work (e.g., developmental assets) as a guiding framework might have better responded to their local and subsequent national needs.

Further, the findings suggest the use of a specific collaborative evaluation readiness tool to determine a program’s readiness and expectations to fully engage in such a process, thereby extending research in this area. Although research on the effects of ECB and other participatory approaches is steadily growing, stakeholder-based approaches are weakened without intentional thought to how they integrate crucial elements of empowerment, ECB, and participation to fit an organizational need. Although the framework of this collaborative evaluation approach is promising, its potential is dependent on its ability to intentionally expand.
Appendix A: Consent Page with Survey

My name is Johnavae Campbell and I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am sending you this email to ask for your participation in a survey that I am conducting as part of a dissertation study at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. We are asking YMCA staff who had participated in the YMCA Higher Education Service Project (YHESP), like you, to reflect on their experiences in the evaluation conducted by the Evaluation, Assessment, and Policy Connections Unit at the University of North Carolina.

Your participation in the survey is entirely voluntary and all your responses will be kept confidential. No personally identifiable information will be associated with your responses in any reports of these data. You may stop taking the survey at any time, and you may skip any question for any reason. You will not receive any direct benefit from being in this research study. The only possible risk to you of participating in this research study might be embarrassment if your answers became public, but that is very unlikely. All possible measures have been taken to protect the confidentiality of your answers. Note: The survey should take you no longer than one hour to complete.

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the University of North Carolina’s Institutional Review Board at (919) 966-3113 or via email at IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Background: The national evaluation for the YHESP, led by the EvAP team at the University of North Carolina used a collaborative evaluation approach, which focused on working with the YHESP staff to evaluate the effects of their program efforts through evaluation capacity building, technical assistance, and knowledge sharing activities. The logic model was used as the primary tool to facilitate the interaction between local YMCA program staff and the evaluation team on the basis of program development. The second year the evaluation team held an in-person workshop to provide an introduction to logic model development and evaluation planning. The team followed-up with one-on-one email correspondence and phone calls to assist in the development of a logic model and evaluation plan for each individual YMCA. The evaluation team also hosted webinar sessions annually to share best practices among the YHESP project on evaluation related topics: instrument development, data collection, and reporting. Finally, the team supported an evaluation sharing experience held at the national location in Chicago where each YMCA presented their program outcomes and lessons learned.

Purpose: This survey is part of a larger study to assess the extent to which the collaborative evaluation approach used with the YHESP project influenced your local YMCA program planning efforts. Part of this larger study will involve an analysis of the evaluation data provided by all the YMCAs which participated in this effort. The national director of the YHESP project has given permission for me access that data for this purposes. But what is critically important are the responses and reactions of the individuals who participated in the YHESP project. Your responses to the survey are very important in understanding how, if at all, this evaluation has impacted you and your organization. In addition, the researcher may select a few of the survey respondents to interview in-depth about their experiences. In the beginning of the survey, there will be a question about whether you might be interested in participating in follow-up interviews. If so, we ask that you indicate that by clicking yes when prompted in the survey.

Should you have further questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at Johnavae@email.unc.edu or 919-843-7878.

We appreciate your time and consideration in completing the survey. Thank you for participating in this study! It is only through the help of individuals like you that we can provide information to students about higher education opportunities.

Many thanks,
Johnavae Campbell, Doctoral Candidate
1) Please indicate yes or no whether you are willing to be invited to participate in follow-up interviews to provide further details regarding your experiences.

Yes  No  
O  O

2) Your feedback is crucial to understanding how this form of evaluation fits within YMCA HESP program, please indicate yes or no whether you will complete the following survey.

Yes  No  
O  O

3) We have read the project descriptions and are very interested in learning more about your specific involvement in the project. Please tell us about your role in the YHESP project during the first two years (2010 - 2012) of its implementation.

4) What aspect(s) of evaluation planning, if any, have you been involved in during the evaluation activities for the YHESP project? Select all that apply.

| Technical Assistance: One on one conference calls | O |
| Technical Assistance: Email correspondence | O |
| Logic Model Development | O |
| Webinar Session(s) | O |
| Site Visit(s) | O |
| Evaluation Fair/Reporting Out Results | O |
| Other (Please Specify): | O |

5) Using a scale of 1-6, (1=not at all instrumental and 6=highly instrumental) please indicate how the following aspects, if at all, have been instrumental in the development of your higher education service project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all instrumental</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Highly instrumental</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receiving Technical Assistance</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic Model Development</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in Webinar Sessions</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Fair/Reporting Out</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Assistance</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: please specify_______</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6) Based on your experience with the YHSEP evaluation, do you feel differently about evaluation?
7) We’d like to know about the involvement of other YHESP stakeholders besides your staff in the evaluation activities. Please identify which of the following evaluation activities your other stakeholders participated in. Note: if the person listed at the top of the column is not a stakeholder at your facility indicate that by checking the first row. Otherwise, SELECT ALL THAT APPLY:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOT STAKEHOLDERS</th>
<th>STUDENT/PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>VOLUNTEERS/COMMUNITY</th>
<th>PARENTS</th>
<th>SCHOOL STAFF</th>
<th>UNC EVALUATION TEAM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped with logic model development</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided evaluative feedback</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented information to constituents</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collected data from others</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided information about their program experience</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped with development of data collection instruments</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped present evaluation findings</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped to summarize data</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided expertise in evaluation implementation</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped to make the evaluation culturally responsive</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped create evaluation report</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify) ________________________________

The next section asks specifically about your opinion of the collaborative evaluation process used during the YHESP project.

8) Please rate the collaborative evaluation process used for the YHESP project for the following (select one response for each):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Ability to engage stakeholders throughout the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>b. Add clarity to program dynamics</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c. Quality of data collected</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Identify purpose of evaluation for the YHESP project</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Ability to adapt to cultural context of the program</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Usefulness to program management</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Ability to inform future program planning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Determine evaluation resources available</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Opportunities to share strategies with stakeholders</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Quality of evaluation assistance provided</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Ability to reflect organizational system characteristics</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you rated any below good, please explain why:

The next section asks you to indicate your level of agreement with statements specifically about your organization’s CULTURE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9) I believe that my local organization:</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Values learning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Cares about this project succeeding</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Values evaluation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Supports evaluation use</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Creates a culture of inquiry in programming</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Has the necessary systems in place for engaging in evaluation practice</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Provides communication opportunities to access evaluation information</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Provides communication opportunities to disseminate evaluation information</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Would like to implement evaluation processes but does not know how</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following two questions ask specifically about the frequency of evaluation use within your YHESP project. If this is not part of your job responsibility and feel you cannot respond please select the first option. Otherwise, please indicate by completing the statement with how often you use evaluation to:

| 10) I use evaluation to: | NOT PART OF MY JOB | PART OF MY JOB |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| j. Better understand the student perceptions of the program | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
Now, think back on your experience using a logic model during the project year for evaluation planning. If it was not part of your job, please indicate that in the first column. Otherwise, indicate your USE of the logic model to:

| k. Make decisions about program activities | O | O | O | O | O |
| l. Make decisions about program content | O | O | O | O | O |
| m. Monitor program services | O | O | O | O | O |
| n. Make a funding decision | O | O | O | O | O |
| o. Make a program staffing decision | O | O | O | O | O |
| p. Analyze my students’ performance compared to their peers | O | O | O | O | O |
| q. Better understand the extent to which my program has been successful | O | O | O | O | O |
| r. Adhere to funding guidelines | O | O | O | O | O |
| s. Communicate with program stakeholders | O | O | O | O | O |
| t. Reflect on the weaknesses of my program | O | O | O | O | O |
| u. Reflect on the strengths of my program | O | O | O | O | O |
| v. Change one of my program’s priorities | O | O | O | O | O |
| w. Other, please specify: | O | O | O | O | O |

11) I used the logic model to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOT PART OF MY JOB</th>
<th>PART OF MY JOB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| a. Assist in designing my program curricula | O | O | O | O | O |
| b. Understand what data needs to be collected related to program outcomes | O | O | O | O | O |
This last section asks you to indicate your level of agreement with perceptions of any influence the collaborative evaluation process had on YOU as a Program Administrator or Director and then, on the ORGANIZATION overall.

11) First, indicate its influence on YOU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>I am more comfortable answering questions about my program</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>My understanding of evaluation has been strengthened</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>The evaluation plan for my program reflects its local context</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Become more aware of elements related to my program (e.g., participant reactions)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Evaluation findings were useful</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>The evaluation assistance provided increased my ability to do evaluation</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g.</td>
<td>Gained one or more new skills (e.g., survey design, ability to work collaboratively, etc.)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h.</td>
<td>The evaluation process provided an opportunity to learn more about Higher Education programming</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Changed my attitude/opinion about my program</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12) Now, indicate its influence on the organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>My organization’s knowledge about evaluation has increased</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>My organization’s ability to conduct evaluations has increased</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>My organization’s personnel have</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My organization’s better able to meet its evaluation responsibilities

My organization is more likely to integrate evaluation activities into their existing programs

My organization’s utilizing evaluation more than before

My organization improved its data collection strategies

My organization increased program staff’s understanding of their program

My organization’s quality of data collected has increased

13) Prior to this YHESP effort, using a scale of 1-6, (1=not at all experienced and 6=highly experienced) please indicate your level of comfort integrating the following evaluation activities in program planning?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Not at all Experienced 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Highly Experienced 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Planning</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic Model Development</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument Development</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Reporting</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next questions are optional, but help us to better understand who is completing this survey.

14) What is your primary job responsibility?

15) What best describes your highest educational level?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>O</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS DIPLOMA</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOME COLLEGE</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TECHNICAL CERTIFICATE OF TRAINING</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 YEAR ASSOCIATE’S DEGREE</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDY BEYOND THE 2 YEAR ASSOCIATE’S DEGREE</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACHELOR’S DEGREE</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRADUATE STUDY</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MASTER’S DEGREE</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOCTORATE</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16) Anything else you would like to add:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey, your feedback is extremely valuable to us.
Overall Goal: Enhance students’ academic, financial, and social success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals and Objectives</th>
<th>Process Objectives</th>
<th>Outcome Objectives</th>
<th>Process Objective Evidence</th>
<th>Outcome Objective Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
Hi NAME,

Program Experiences (Part I)

OK, let’s begin with you sharing about your current higher education activities?

1. What influenced your decision to participate in the YHESP project?

2. What were your program goals for this project?

3. How, if at all, are these goals different from what you have done in the past? Organizational goals?

4. How, if at all, did participation in this evaluation initiative help meet your program goals?

5. What, if anything, has been sustained with YHESP services since two years ago?

6. What, if anything, has been the impact of YHESP on the organization?

7. Please describe for me how this process has influenced your program efforts?

Evaluation Experiences (Part II)

1. Please describe any experience you have had with evaluations prior to YHESP?

2. What are your expectations of evaluation for your projects and programs at your YMCA?

3. Describe how the evaluation usually affects your organization?

4. Thinking back on your experience with the YHESP project, what were your goals in the evaluation for this project?

5. How would you describe the collaborative evaluation process for the YHESP initiative?

6. How, if any, would you describe the differences in previous evaluations and the YHESP collaborative evaluation approach?

7. How, if at all, have you changed your program evaluation strategies since the YHESP project?
8. In what ways, if at all, have your evaluation or project expectations changed throughout the duration of this project?

9. How, if at all, have you been supported or provided support to others throughout the planning and implementation of your program evaluation?

10. What are the challenges to using a collaborative evaluation approach for this project?

11. In what ways, if any, has the evaluation influenced the YMCA community?

12. How are you and your team using this evaluation?

13. Is there anything else you’d like to add?
References


U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2001). *Paving the Way to Postsecondary Education: K-12 Intervention Programs for Underrepresented Youth, NCES 2001-205*, prepared by Patricia Gándara with the assistance of Deborah...
Bial for the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative Access Working Group. Washington, DC.


