

Empowerment evaluation

A practical method for evaluating a national school breakfast program

Over the past decade, empowerment evaluation has demonstrated its worth as a practical and valuable alternative to traditional program evaluation methodologies. Following a brief overview of the development of empowerment evaluation, we outline its 10 underlying principles and the three key steps involved in conducting an empowerment evaluation. A preliminary case study on our use of this methodology to evaluate the Good Start Breakfast Club program is presented. The Australian Red Cross operates this program in nearly 100 primary schools around Australia with sponsorship and support from the Sanitarium Health Food Company and other organisations. This case study highlights the potential effectiveness of empowerment evaluation in improving and assessing the impacts of other public health and community-based programs in Australia and some of the lessons we have learned so far from using this methodology.

We identify strengths and limitations of empowerment evaluation and argue that a more critical approach is required to avoid the idealism that tends to underpin this approach. We suggest that greater attention needs to be paid to the communicative and relational dimensions of empowerment evaluation in order to increase its effectiveness.

Introduction

Empowerment evaluation (Fetterman 2001; Fetterman & Wandersman 2005) is distinguished by its clearly articulated underlying principles that allow for the extensive participation of program management and staff, funders, community members and other stakeholders in all stages of the evaluation. This approach can build evaluation capacities, give voice to a diversity of people involved, and enable open and honest discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of key program activities. It also enables collaborative planning and identification of the documentation or evidence required to assess the goals and strategies that participants develop to improve key program activities. The ultimate aim is for evaluation to become a normal part of planning and managing programs, resulting in ongoing improvement and learning.

To date, there has been very little literature on the use of this methodology in Australasia. To fill this void, this paper presents a case study of the use of

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empowerment evaluation principles to evaluate the Good Start Breakfast Club program, operated by Australian Red Cross (ARC) with sponsorship and support from the Sanitarium Health Food Company and other organisations. This case study also highlights some of the lessons we have learned so far from using this methodology and its potential for improving and assessing the impacts of other public health and community programs in Australia.

We argue that a critical approach to the application of empowerment evaluation is required to avoid the idealism that tends to be evident in publications advocating this approach to evaluation. Like McKie (2003), we suggest that greater attention needs to be paid to the communicative and relational dimensions of empowerment evaluation in order to highlight both the intended and unintended effects of the use of this methodology, and thus increase its effectiveness.

Overview of empowerment evaluation

David Fetterman from Stanford University in the United States of America initially developed empowerment evaluation in 1994 (Fetterman, Kaftarian & Wandersman 1996). Its roots are in community psychology, action anthropology and participatory and collaborative approaches to evaluation. Wandersman et al. (2005, p. 28) define empowerment evaluation as:

... an evaluation approach that aims to increase the probability of achieving program success by (1) providing program stakeholders with tools for assessing the planning, implementation, and self-evaluation of their program, and (2) mainstreaming evaluation as part of the planning and management of the program/organisation.

Community-based programs and organisations in the United States of America, Japan, Brazil, South Africa, the United Kingdom and elsewhere have successfully used this methodology to improve programs and other interventions in a wide range of fields.

Smith (1998, p. 255) suggests that empowerment evaluation 'provides evaluators with creative approaches to maximising an evaluation's usefulness'. Professional evaluators are required to balance a number of roles, including those of facilitator, critical friend, coach, teacher and evaluation expert. Thus the position taken by the empowerment evaluator is not neutral or impartial. Fetterman (2005, p. 12) argues that 'when evaluators have a vested interest in programs, it enhances their value as critics and evaluators. They will be more constructively critical and supportive of the program because they want the program to work, that is, to succeed'.

Principles of empowerment evaluation

The 10 underlying principles of empowerment evaluation, detailed by Wandersman et al. (2005), are:

- 1 **Improvement** of people, programs, organisations and communities to help them achieve results.
- 2 **Community ownership** with stakeholders taking joint responsibility for designing and conducting the evaluation and putting the findings to use.
- 3 **Inclusion** of participants, staff from all levels of a program or organisation, funders, and members of the wider community.
- 4 **Democratic participation** based on shared decision-making, deliberation, communicative action and authentic collaboration.
- 5 **Social justice** goals, with high value placed on addressing the larger social good and achieving a more equitable society through capacity building.
- 6 **Community knowledge**, information and experience is valued and respected and used to make decisions, understand the local context, and interpret evaluation results.
- 7 **Evidence-based strategies** and empirical justifications for action are utilised, recognising the need to adapt existing tools to the local environment, culture and conditions.
- 8 **Capacity-building** of program staff and participants to conduct their own evaluations through the appropriate tools and conditions.
- 9 **Organisational learning** through continual reflection on and evaluation of programs and organisations, resulting in increased responsiveness to changes and challenges and hence guidance for improvement.
- 10 **Accountability**, of individuals and organisations for the commitments they make and of funders in relation to their expectations.

Fetterman (2005, p. 213) states that '... interaction among the participants and the principles results in a rising level of empowerment and self-determination'. However, a more critical approach is required which questions underlying

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assumptions, for example that participation will automatically lead to empowerment. Other research suggests that these methodologies can produce unintended or contradictory effects, resulting from factors such as differences in power, status and knowledge among those involved (Gregory 2000; Lennie et al. 2004; Lennie 2005; McKie 2003).

Consideration should therefore be given to the unintended or potentially disempowering effects of an empowerment evaluation and to the limitations of this methodology.

The three-step empowerment evaluation approach

Fetterman (2001) outlines three steps in conducting an empowerment evaluation, through a series of workshops with as broad a diversity of stakeholders as possible.

Step 1: Developing a mission and vision

This involves developing statements that capture the mission and vision or unifying purpose of the program. The aim is to reach consensus on key phrases in the statements, which are seen as representing the values of stakeholders and the agreed purpose and long-term outcomes of the program. This process is undertaken even when an existing mission and vision statement exists.

Step 2: Taking stock

This step involves brainstorming, then rating the most important program activities to be evaluated and discussing the ratings in groups. This provides an opportunity for baseline data on the program and its strengths and weaknesses to be assembled.

Step 3: Planning for the future

Realistic goals for each of the key activities are identified, together with strategies that will help reach these goals and the forms of documentation or evidence (i.e. surveys, checklists, minutes of meetings, etc.) that will enable progress towards these goals to be monitored.

Once these steps are completed, a series of meetings and workshops are held to plan and implement the evaluation in more detail. Self-nominated participants undertake data collection and analysis with support from professional evaluators. The aim is for empowerment evaluation to become an ongoing cyclical process that is embedded into programs, leading to continual improvement, organisational learning and change.

Empowerment evaluation of the Good Start Breakfast Club program

The Australian Red Cross (ARC) has run a breakfast program since 1991, with support from the Sanitarium Health Food Company. The program was named the 'Good Start Breakfast Club' (GSBC) in 2003. This initiative has now become a national program with clubs in nearly 100 primary schools in New South Wales (NSW), Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. School and community volunteers who are coordinated by ARC staff conduct the program. Sanitarium and other businesses in the local community provide breakfast supplies. Over 1400

volunteers serve more than 300 000 breakfasts each year. Anecdotal evidence suggested that it increases students' ability to learn, and improves their social and behavioural skills and nutritional knowledge. However, no systematic evaluation had been conducted to determine the nutritional, social and educational impacts of the program on children.

Following an extensive review of the program evaluation literature, empowerment evaluation was identified as the most potentially useful and practical methodology to evaluate the GSBC program. This methodology had demonstrated strengths and simplicity, and was congruent with the values and objectives of the GSBC program. Principles of social justice, community ownership, community knowledge and capacity-building have strong linkages with the following vision statements for the program:

- The Good Start Breakfast Club program will continue to strive to provide assistance to the education of children through the provision of healthy food and voluntary community support.
- The Feeding Our Future (program within the program) initiative will become an agent of positive social change that educates children, families, organisations, government and consumers of the importance of the development of healthy nutritional decision-making practices for Australia's children.

A major outcome of the project¹ will be a detailed case study on the impacts of the empowerment evaluation approach on the delivery of the program. A preliminary version of this case study is now presented.

Preliminary case study on the use of empowerment evaluation in the GSBC program

The assembly of 19 state and regional GSBC coordinators and managers for a two-day GSBC forum at Red Cross House in Sydney in May 2005 provided an opportunity to begin the evaluation process with this important stakeholder group. A good working relationship had been developed with the National GSBC Coordinator and time was made available during the forum for a series of empowerment evaluation workshops. Prior to conducting these workshops, a questionnaire was sent to GSBC teaching staff and volunteers in most regions. Useful baseline data were provided by 41 respondents (33 women and eight men); 12 from Sydney and Greater Western Sydney, 12 from Tasmania, nine from Western NSW, five from Victoria and three from South Australia. These data included information on their mission and vision for the program, the activities they believed to be important to its success, their rating of these activities, and whether they would be willing to be involved in future evaluation activities. This information provided an early link with program staff working directly with participating children.

Ideally, if the empowerment evaluation principle of inclusion had been strictly followed, representatives from all key stakeholder groups including participating children and their parents or carers, and senior executives from ARC and Sanitarium would have been invited to come together in an open forum to begin the evaluation process. The logistics and costs associated with conducting such a forum ruled this out as an option. The process therefore began somewhat opportunistically with one group of key program stakeholders. This departure from the ideal resulted in some unanticipated consequences that are discussed later in the paper.

Workshop with GSBC coordinators and managers

Nineteen GSBC program personnel (15 women and four men) participated in the initial empowerment evaluation workshops. All were ARC employees with 10 being current or previous GSBC program coordinators, one assisted a coordinator, and eight held various managerial positions within ARC. Personnel worked in New South Wales, Victoria,

Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory.

To make the process more manageable, workshop participants were allocated to three smaller mixed groups for each step that were led by facilitators. Key data from the small group discussions were recorded for later presentation to the whole group.

Data obtained during the inaugural workshop included:

- revised mission and vision statements
- a list of 10 key program activities and ratings of these activities (see Table 1)
- information on the strengths and weaknesses of the program
- goals, strategies and forms of evidence for 10 key activities (see Table 2)
- feedback about the empowerment evaluation approach and indications of willingness to take part in future evaluation activities, collected via questionnaires.
- background information on participants.

TABLE 1: KEY PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND SUMMARY OF RATINGS FROM WORKSHOPS WITH GSBC COORDINATORS AND MANAGERS IN MAY 2005

Activity	Average rating /10	Activity	Average rating /10
Provision of breakfast	8.6	Seeking sponsorship	6.2
Social interaction and life skills	7.6	Risk management—child protection, volunteers, health	6.1
Volunteer management and support	7.4	Data collection	6.1
Gaining community support	7.4	Nutritional education	5.5
Program design	6.7	Sustainability	4.6

TABLE 2: EXAMPLES OF GOALS, STRATEGIES AND FORMS OF EVIDENCE FOR TWO OF THE 10 PROGRAM ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED BY GSBC COORDINATORS AND MANAGERS IN MAY 2005

Goals	Strategies	Evidence
<i>Social interaction and life skills</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Children know and follow social rules ■ Mealtime behaviour and processes ■ Personal hygiene ■ General behaviour ■ Respect for others (behaviour) code 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Behaviour code in place— supported by posters, role modelling by volunteers ■ Behaviour code for volunteers ■ Behaviour code for parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Children know and follow rules ■ Posters available and utilised ■ Volunteer training manual has relevant detail ■ Playground and classroom behaviour improved
<i>Data collection</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To collect and collate consistent data ■ To collect relevant and useful data ■ To change organisational culture of ARC to ensure decisions are based on evidence from data collected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ National data package ■ Training in data collection and analysis ■ Check what data exists already and coordinate with other agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Package disseminated, used and supported throughout program ■ Training completed ■ Evidence-based decisions made by ARC

Information on the strengths and weaknesses of the program

As Table 1 indicates, ratings for the various program activities varied greatly, as did the individual ratings for some activities. For example, there was general consensus that ‘Social interaction and life skills’ was an effective activity. One coordinator, who rated this 9 out of 10, commented: ‘This is fantastic—people relate on a first-name basis and older children help the younger children’. In contrast, there was much greater variation in ratings for the ‘Data collection’ activity. While one coordinator gave this activity a rating of 8 out of 10 and provided examples of extensive data collection work in her region, a manager gave this a rating of 3 out of 10 and commented: ‘This is horrible—the data that’s collected is often inaccurate’.

Feedback about the empowerment evaluation method

The majority of participants considered that the empowerment evaluation method was valuable for evaluating the GSBC program. Fifty percent of questionnaire respondents indicated that the method was ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ valuable. Comments included:

Empowerment evaluation method is very valuable. The model is definitely in line with the principles of our program and empowering the community.

I think it is a very fair way to gain a vast overview of very different socioeconomic areas and to consider all our opinions.

However, there were some concerns about issues such as how the whole range of program participants can be adequately involved in the evaluation process ‘to make it as meaningfully collaborative and wholly participatory as the theoretical model explained to us would seem to require’. Most participants reported that they appreciated the opportunity for information sharing and group discussion. Several valued the small group work and the diversity of the groups. An ARC manager thought the small groups seemed ‘to allow individuals enough time to discuss, reflect and consider’. A GSBC coordinator thought the workshops were a ‘great opportunity for information sharing and collaborative problem-solving’. However, various activities did not work as well as expected. The issues identified included: a lack of time to complete activities, time management, and problems with the mission/vision activity. Partially due to differences in views about the long-term aims of the program, the group found it difficult to reach consensus on the mission and vision statements. As a solution, a working party was formed to continue working on the inputs from the three small groups to create mission and vision statements that the whole group agreed with.

Suggestions for improving the workshops included:

- Allow more time for various activities.
- Use better time management practices.
- Hold the evaluation workshops after the information-sharing sessions on the program by regional coordinators that had already been scheduled.
- Provide clearer definitions of the terms ‘mission’ and ‘vision’.
- Convert strategies into actions and identify teams to work on particular issues.

An indication of the effectiveness of the initial workshop is that the National GSBC Coordinator subsequently reported that several of the goals and strategies and ideas for program improvement suggested at the workshops had been incorporated into a new ARC Strategic Plan.

Workshops with teachers and volunteers

Following the success of the workshops with coordinators and managers, support was obtained from ARC to conduct workshops with groups of teachers and volunteers who are directly responsible for the GSBC in schools. They were held in Sydney with six women and one man representing the Sydney and Greater Western Sydney regions, and in Dubbo with five women representing the Western region of NSW. Seven were volunteers in breakfast clubs, four were school coordinators of breakfast clubs and one was the school welfare contact. Four participants had various breakfast club positions, three had other paid occupations, while five were retired or worked as volunteers. The workshop participants represented breakfast clubs in eight schools—five in the Sydney and Greater Western Sydney region and three in the Western NSW region.

The evaluation team experienced some difficulty obtaining sufficient numbers from this stakeholder group to participate in workshops in both Sydney and Dubbo. Getting volunteers and teachers to commit to a one-day workshop amidst the busyness of their other lives is a challenge that faces this type of evaluation. Offering to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses and providing teaching relief, while a challenge to the budget, was invaluable, as input from teachers at both workshop sites would not have been provided otherwise.

In response to lessons learnt from the May workshop, the format used in the July 2005 workshops allowed more time on the Planning for the Future step. The Taking Stock step was streamlined due to key activities having been previously identified by this stakeholder group in questionnaires. This helped to overcome the earlier time management problems.

Data obtained during workshops with these groups of GSBC volunteers and teaching staff included:

- themes for revised mission and vision statements and comments on mission and vision statements suggested by the managers and coordinators and the existing statements from ARC
- a list of four key activities and ratings for these activities (see Table 3)
- information on the strengths and weaknesses of the program
- goals, strategies and forms of evidence for the four key activities (see Table 4)
- feedback about the empowerment evaluation approach and indications of willingness to take part in future evaluation activities
- background information on participants.

As Table 3 indicates, the key program activities identified by the volunteers had many similarities to those identified by the coordinators and managers but tended to have a somewhat narrower focus. For example, the volunteers did not select the activities ‘Risk management’ and ‘Program design’ as key program activities.

TABLE 3: KEY PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND SUMMARY OF RATINGS FROM WORKSHOPS WITH GSBC VOLUNTEERS AND TEACHING STAFF FROM SYDNEY, GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY AND WESTERN NSW IN JULY 2005

SYDNEY/GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY		WESTERN NSW	
Activity	Average rating /10	Activity	Average rating /10
Providing a healthy breakfast to children in need and a positive start to the day	8.7	Providing breakfast to children in need	9.6
Sustainability of the program	7.5	Learning nutritional skills through providing healthy eating examples or habits	9.4
Having adequate and reliable resources and a variety of food	7.0	Interaction/relationship between children and volunteers (providing opportunity for informal welfare contact)	9.0
Understanding and providing a healthy food model	7.0	Recruiting and retaining volunteers	4.6

TABLE 4: EXAMPLES OF GOALS, STRATEGIES AND FORMS OF EVIDENCE FOR TWO OF THE NINE PROGRAM ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED BY GSBC VOLUNTEERS AND TEACHING STAFF FROM SYDNEY, GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY AND WESTERN NSW IN JULY 2005

Goals	Strategies	Evidence
<i>Providing a healthy breakfast...</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adequate support from volunteers and teachers to be able to provide breakfast ■ Regularity and consistency from volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Talk to teachers at staff meetings ■ Clarify process involved in recruiting volunteers ■ Contact Volunteering Australia (VA) ■ Encourage corporates and others to get involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ARC coordinator talks to teachers at staff meetings ■ ARC coordinator contacts VA and VA shows awareness of GSBC ■ Increase number and diversity of corporates that become involved in the program
<i>Recruiting and retaining volunteers...</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ More volunteers are recruited and retained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Raise awareness by volunteers speaking at school and business forums ■ Provide support, make them feel comfortable, part of a team, appreciated—give out certificates at assembly ■ Gatherings of volunteers every year to share experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communication has happened—notes or minutes of meetings ■ Volunteers have received certificate of appreciation or other methods (morning tea brought by teachers) ■ Gathering takes place—story in local newspaper

Information on the strengths and weaknesses of the program

The ratings given to some of the key activities varied considerably, with the recruitment and retention of volunteers identified as the activity that required most improvement. A volunteer from Dubbo who rated this activity 3 out of 10 said: 'This is not so good. We are short of volunteers on some days. The program needs more publicity'. In contrast, both workshop groups gave 'Providing a healthy breakfast to children in need and a positive start to the day' the highest rating. A volunteer from Sydney who rated this activity 10 out of 10 reported that her club 'is providing breakfast to a range of different children, including special need children. It's working'.

Feedback about the empowerment evaluation method

All of the participants considered that the empowerment evaluation method was valuable for collaboratively evaluating the GSBC program and sharing knowledge and experiences about breakfast clubs. Sixty-six per cent thought the method was either 'extremely' or 'very' valuable while 33% thought it was 'quite' valuable. Participants appreciated the opportunity to discuss the program, to interact with other volunteers and school staff, to better understand how other clubs operate, and to overcome common problems. A volunteer thought the workshop had been a 'good forum' for 'exchanging different experiences and perceptions'. Some participants reported that they found the workshop very interesting, enlightening and enjoyable. A volunteer commented:

Considering the many facets and stakeholders of the GSBC program, I feel the workshop was very productive and enlightening for volunteers who so often are limited to understanding the needs of their immediate environment. Everyone got a greater understanding of GSBC's diversity.

However, there were some unintended impacts of the process. For example, in response to a proposed vision statement by the managers and coordinators, a school coordinator expressed great concern about the possibility that the program would eventually be phased out. This concern was due to her belief that there would always be a need for the breakfast program in special-need schools.

Suggestions for improving the workshops included:

- conduct as a two-day residential program
- make it shorter or slightly faster paced
- have longer breaks
- involve more volunteers and schools.

Most participants in both the May and July workshops reported that their knowledge and understanding of participatory program evaluation was enhanced, even those with a high level of

prior knowledge. This indicated that the method is effective in building some evaluation capacity in a relatively short time. The majority of participants were also willing to engage in future activities related to the evaluation of the GSBC program. This indicated that that the process had been successful in generating a relatively high level of cooperation in the ongoing evaluation process. However, a key learning was that sufficient time, resources and notice are required to facilitate the participation of volunteers and teaching staff in future workshops.

Future empowerment evaluation activities

During a meeting in early September 2005 with the GSBC research management group, comprising senior executives from ARC, Sanitarium and the Adventist Development Relief Agency, there was a call for an empowerment evaluation workshop to be conducted with that group and other key senior personnel with an interest in the program. This was due to some members of this stakeholder group feeling that they should have more input into the evaluation process, since others involved in the program now had a stronger input than themselves. An important learning from this is that steps should be taken to include senior personnel from funding organisations at the earliest possible stage of the evaluation process to obtain their support for the empowerment evaluation process and thus ensure greater success.

Following this workshop, we plan to conduct further intensive work with volunteers and teachers who participated in the empowerment evaluation workshops in July, regional GSBC coordinators, and interested school and community members to engage in more detailed planning of the evaluation of key program activities identified during the workshops. Workshops will be conducted with program personnel at six pilot sites (three urban and three rural) that operate a GSBC. Once this pilot work is completed, a practical, user-friendly Evaluation Toolkit will be developed that can be effectively used by GSBC coordinators and school and community volunteers. This would be published on the GSBC website and in hard-copy format for implementation across the whole program.

Strengths and limitations of empowerment evaluation

Based on this case study, our critical reflections on the empowerment evaluation methodology, and relevant literature, the strengths and limitations of this methodology have been summarised in Table 5.

Conclusion

Empowerment evaluation has several strengths that make it a practical and valuable methodology for improving and assessing the impacts of community-based programs such as the GSBC program and increasing their long-term sustainability and success. However, several limitations and issues need to

TABLE 5: STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF EMPOWERMENT EVALUATION

Strengths	Limitations and issues
<p>The methodology can be effective in building evaluation capacities and can eventually help to create a culture of evaluation based on continuous improvement, accountability, and community and organisational learning.</p>	<p>The full commitment and support of senior management and provision of sufficient resources is essential to successful implementation (Smith, 1998). It can take considerable funding, time and resources to train staff and community members to effectively plan and conduct evaluations and build a culture of evaluation. Effective strategies and adequate resources are required to involve groups such as teachers, community volunteers and school children.</p>
<p>The methodology is robust and responsive and has been shown to be effective in improving community-based programs and helping to achieve collaboratively agreed goals and outcomes.</p>	<p>Some people may initially resist taking part in the evaluation because they see evaluation as a judgemental process that could affect program funding and support or jobs, rather than one that enables ongoing learning and improvement.</p>
<p>The evaluation is collaboratively designed and controlled by program management and staff, funders, community participants and other stakeholders. They take greater ownership and responsibility for the sustainability and success of the program and its ongoing monitoring and evaluation.</p>	<p>The potentially conflicting agendas, values and perspectives of program management and staff, funders and community participants and the power relations involved need to be carefully managed. Evaluation consultants require significant skills in facilitation, negotiation and conflict management.</p>
<p>The various steps and processes involved are highly participatory and aim to be inclusive of a broad diversity of people involved in or affected by the program.</p>	<p>Effectively planning and conducting evaluation workshops requires significant time, energy and resources that are not always available in community-based programs. It can be difficult to actively involve a broad diversity of program staff and community participants over a long time.</p>
<p>The methods and processes used aim to be democratic, action-oriented and empowering for participants.</p>	<p>Participatory evaluations can have unintended or disempowering effects, as well as empowering effects (Lennie 2005). A more critical approach to community participation and empowerment is therefore required. The theories and assumptions of empowerment evaluation need to be continually questioned.</p>
<p>The knowledge, skills and experience of program staff and community participants are valued and used to design and implement more effective evaluations and impact assessments that take community needs and the local context into account.</p>	<p>Using the methodology to assess the impacts of national community-based programs such as the GSBC program can be a complex undertaking that requires a detailed knowledge of the many different communities and contexts in which the program operates.</p>
<p>The various participation processes used can enable more open and honest dialogue about the strengths and weaknesses of a program. They also enable mutual trust and understanding to develop between those involved in the evaluation.</p>	<p>Only the program staff and community members who participate in evaluation workshops develop a better understanding of the program and the diverse perspectives of those involved. In large-scale programs, not everyone can participate.</p>
<p>The methodology encourages the ongoing collection of reliable, evidence-based data, using strategies that are adapted to the local culture and conditions.</p>	<p>The time and effort of community volunteers involved in undertaking data collection and analysis needs to be appropriately recognised and compensated.</p>

be considered before deciding to implement this methodology. These include the funding, time and resources required to build evaluation capacities and include a diversity of program staff and community members in designing and conducting the evaluation. To be effective, a strong commitment is required to the principles of empowerment evaluation by senior management, staff and community participants and adequate resources are required (Smith 1998).

A more critical approach is required to avoid some of the idealism that underpins the theories and philosophies that guide this methodology. The effective management of potentially conflicting agendas, values and power relations, and finding appropriate ways to train and involve community volunteers as well as paid program staff in the evaluation, are other key issues that need to be considered.

McKie (2003) suggests that more attention should be paid to the communicative and relational dimensions of participatory evaluations that can affect their outcomes in unintended ways. Based on the case study presented, attention to these dimensions of empowerment evaluations would increase the effectiveness of this methodology by improving participation and communication processes in ways that better meet the diverse needs and goals of the people, communities and organisations involved.

Note

- 1 Associate Professor Heather Yeatman, Head of the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Wollongong is the first Chief Investigator on this Australian Research Council Linkage Project. Professor Tony Worsley of Deakin University is the Co-supervisor and Dr John Ashton of Sanitarium is a Partner Investigator.

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