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ABSTRACT

As the procedures of evaluation research have developed during recent years, it has become clear that the results of evaluation studies have failed to provide policy decision makers with useful information. An approach towards designing and implementing more useful evaluations--the stakeholder survey--is discussed. Stakeholders are individuals, or groups, who have a direct interest in the program being evaluated. The central premise of this paper is that the information needs of stakeholders should be incorporated directly into the formulation of evaluation objectives, and the design of the evaluation to achieve those objectives. A rationale for the stakeholder survey is presented, and its three primary functions (identification, contact and information synthesis) are described, as are application of the approach in a multi-year evaluation of a national supplemental food program. Also considered are key issues involved in applying the approach. The evidence from this study suggests that such surveys are not only feasible, but also of considerable value to the evaluation team. (Author/AL)

# INCORPORATING INFORMATION NEEDS OF KEY CONSTITUENCIES IN PROGRAM EVALUATION DESIGN: AN EMPIRICAL APPROACH



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ABSTRACT

The failure of program evaluations to provide policy decision makers with useful information is a familiar complaint. This paper discusses an approach towards designing and implementing more useful evaluations--the stakeholder survey. Stakeholders are individuals, or groups, who have a direct interest in the program being evaluated. The central premise of the paper is that the information needs of stakeholders should be incorporated directly into the formulation of evaluation objectives, and the design of the evaluation to achieve those objectives. The paper presents a rationale for the stakeholder survey, describes its major components, and reports on the application of the approach in a large program evaluation. Key issues involved in applying the approach are also considered. The evidence from this study suggests that such surveys are not only feasible, but also of considerable value to the evaluation team.

# DESIGNING USEFUL EVALUATIONS: THE STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social services programs involve both individuals and organizations having interests or "stakes" of various kinds in program operations and outcomes. Collectively, this set of constituencies is sometimes referred to as the "stakeholders" for the program, and includes those who pay for, carry out, or receive program treatments. It follows that these same organizations and individuals can be characterized as stakeholders in evaluations of their programs.

As the procedures of evaluation research have developed during recent years, it has become clear that the results of evaluation studies may be little used because they failed to provide answers to questions troubling key stakeholders. Hence, it is now considered desirable, and possibly imperative, to assess in some depth what various stakeholders expect and need from a given program evaluation. Accordingly, evaluation researchers have emphasized that, as part of predesign efforts (such as literature reviews, data-base reviews, evaluability assessments etc.), research resources should be directed towards identification of relevant program constituencies, and various mechanisms for receiving and using stakeholder input during the formulative stages of an evaluation.

This paper presents a rationale for such formal assessment of stakeholder information needs, examines the theoretical background and available methodologies, and discusses the implementation of one approach in a survey recently conducted as part of a major federal program evaluation.* The process is briefly described, methodological issues presented

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and finally, the implications are discussed of this research tool for evaluation research.

## II. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS IN EVALUATION RESEARCH

The last 20 years have seen rapid growth in evaluation research, particularly in government sponsored studies on public social programs (Rossi, 1979). One consequence of this growth is wider interdisciplinary interest in the conceptual, methodological, and operational problems of program evaluation, and the corresponding adaptation or generation of methods or approaches from a variety of social science perspectives (Davis and Salasin, 1979; Ianni and Orr, 1979). Moreover, considerable emphasis is currently placed on the predesign phase of program evaluation (Ruttman, 1977). The predesign phase is so called not only because it precedes finalization of the actual design to be used in the study, but because it essentially informs the selection or refinement of research approaches originally proposed by the evaluators.

Predesign activities are directed towards constructing the evaluation so as to maximize the probability of scientifically credible research results of practical value to decision makers. In working to structure the research so it may be more useful for program policy and management decisions, evaluators should recognize the complex and frequently changing program environment within which they operate. And yet, the absence of attention to the dynamic political and operational contexts both of program operations, and of evaluations themselves as separate enterprises, has repeatedly been noted (Weiss, 1972; Levine, 1977; Grant, 1978; Rossi, Freeman, and Wright, 1979; Wholey, 1979). For example, Scanlon et al. (1977) characterized two major failings of evaluation as follows:

> Statisticians worry about two types of errors...: Type I error is rejecting a hypothesis when it should be accepted; Type II error is accepting a hypothesis when it should be rejected. Evaluators commonly make two types of errors in doing evaluations: Type III error is measuring something that does not exist; and Type IV error is measuring something that is of no interest to management and policy makers.

Evaluation researchers would therefore seem justified in directing part of their resources towards avoiding these kinds of mistakes. As Carol Weiss notes:

> "Only when the evaluator has insight into the interests and motivations of the other actors in the system, understands the roles that [s/he]...is consciously or inadvertently playing, realizing the obstacles and opportunites that impinge upon the evaluative effort, and the limitations and possibilities for putting the results of the evaluation to work--only with sensitivity to the politics of evaluation research can the evaluator be as creative and strategically useful as [s/he] should be" (1975, p. 14).

More recently, in addressing the need for evaluation standards, the case was again made for understanding the complex setting into which each evaluation should be individually framed (Baron, 1981).

> Frequently, evaluators have failed to acknowledge the importance of the social and political context within which the program operates and the evaluation must be conducted. The failure to recognize and act upon these dimensions have too often both undermined the success of the evaluation study and jeopardized its potential utility..." (p. 165).

The value of including decision makers' interests in evaluation design considerations has also been emphasized by those agencies sponsoring and monitoring evaluations in the public sector (Berlin, 1977; General Accounting Office, 1976). The user oriented approach in evaluation is described by Patton (1978) as discriminating between evaluations which are directly relevant to subsequent decision making and those which are not.

> The focus in the utilization-focused approach to evaluation research is on identification and organization of relevant decision makers and information users...Where such a person or group was present, evaluations were used; where the personal factor was absent, there was a correspondingly marked absence of evaluation impact...The reason for identifying and organizing relevant decision makers and information users is to be sure that the people who are going to be the primary users of evaluation findings are the same people who decide what the focus of the evaluation will be. This means that the evaluation should focus on their information needs--not on their speculations about what someone else wants to know (p. 64).

Furthermore, the tapping of multiple perspectives and data sources in program evaluation to capture the most comprehensive view of the social intervention being studied is the basis of the strategy of "data triangulation" in evaluation research (Denzin, 1970; Reichardt and Cook, 1979). Finally, attention to the context of program evaluation before finalizing evaluation design strategies reflects a recent trend in evaluation research towards linking process analysis with impact analysis, and towards emphasizing the "narrative history" sections of evaluation research reports as essential to the planning and execution of research studies, rather than as cosmetic afterthoughts (Campbell, 1979). As a result, standards have been recommended (Standards, 1980) reflecting a general consensus concerning the need for program evaluations to be responsive to client interests, with specific recommendations for audience identification at the outset.

However, while there seems to be a prescription in the literature for achieving at least a working consensus among major parties to an evaluation on the scope, political environment, expectations and expected outcomes of the research, there is little empirical guidance on how to accomplish the task. For example, although Cook and Campbell

(1979, p. 2), explicitly define as a "crucial evaluation issue..." the incorporation "into the evaluation of concerns of various constituencies with an interest in the eventual findings," no discussion of methods or supporting data are included.

"Evaluability assessment" is one kind of predesign activity that is intended to assist in defining, for example, original program purpose, current program purpose, and the perceptions of and reasons for differences, if any, between them; the purposes of an evaluation of the program, potential users of evaluative information; the actual expectations of these identified users for the outcomes of the evaluation, and where appropriate, specific information needs of such users. Evaluability assessment is also concerned with many other tasks, such as the construction of "rhetorical" vs. "actual" program models, assessment of program data availability, and other dimensions of evaluative feasibility (Wholey, 1977, 1979; Rutman, 1980). The part of evaluability assessment that is of particular interest here, however, is that in which are determined the major dimensions of program impact of interest to policy makers, the existing and anticipated policy context both of the program during the span of the evaluation and of the evaluation itself, and finally, the specific information needs of policy makers that are expected to be addressed by the evaluation study. Developing these kinds of predesign data requires that relevant groups of policy decision makers be firstly identified, and secondly contacted appropriately, and that thirdly the information gathered be synthesized adequately and in time to be incorporated into the eventual study design. Many purposes are served by this approach.

Hollister et al. (1979) note that program staff are almost always convinced of the effectiveness of the program they are running, such conviction being necessary for continued high motivation. Pre-evaluation discussion between evaluators and program administrators or advocates (or opponents) can assist in surfacing these biases and hypothetical reasons for them, reduce the naiveté of the researchers, and alleviate the danger of the "ivory tower" posture toward program evaluation sometimes attributed to outside evaluators. Conversely, the explanation by evaluators to key policy makers of the nature, duration, and type of evaluation prior to the potential programmatic disruption of evaluative data gathering efforts can inform evaluators regarding operational aspects of the design (e.g., initial approaches to state and local administrators, on-site data gathering and quality control procedures), and reduce the threat of evaluation and suspicion of evaluators encountered among program administrators and participants (Knapp, 1979a; Ianni and Orr, 1979).

The three primary functions of the stakeholder survey, (identification, contact and information synthesis) are discussed separately in the following sections.

A. Identification of Stakeholder Set

Selection of the specific method for identification of key constituencies depends upon several factors, including the resources for predesign activities, the receptivity of the sponsoring agency to multiple predesign points of view, and the political salience of the program. Currently, however, there are only scattered references to methodology for surveying stakeholders, and no recognized or systematic approach exists. At best, guiding concepts can be borrowed from evaluability

assessments; "open-system" theories of organizations as interacting continually with relevant environments, and more particularly from management strategies for revealing assumptions in organizational problem solving. Wholey et al. (1975, 1977, 1979) have developed a number of techniques for soliciting information on stated program purposes from relevant program administrators and others in the immediate program policy environment. The major thrust of their approach is towards the construction of "rhetorical models" of program operation that expose the assumed linkages between program treatment and program effects. By eliminating unrealistic or untestable assumptions, an evaluable program model and testable hypotheses result. Empirical evidence of this approach is concentrated mostly however on program management as the user, and there is less guidance as to methods for accessing relevant 'others' or affected parties in the program environment.

Krause and Howard (1976) introduce the concept of "multiple other parties" in the evaluation context, and the need to take the interests of each of these parties into account in evaluation design. Two problems face the researcher: "knowing what ultimately matters to each party...(and) knowing what findings from what research operations would be credible to, and usable by each party" (p. 294). The early identification of these multiple publics is recommended, and establishment of a forum for continued interaction and dissemination of research results is suggested, although again empirical evidence of the application of this approach is lacking.

From an "open-system" perspective of institutions, evaluation is seen as a rational determination of fitness for future survival and action in the face of environmental uncertainty (Knapp, 1979b). The

institution's (or program's) search for evidence of effective functioning is dependent on what are perceived to be salient and visible criteria by key actors within both the institution and its relevant environment (Dill, 1962; Thompson, 1967). The selection of appropriate constituencies is limited to the identification of central decision makers within the institution and its immediate political context whose standards and beliefs about program impact are most influential.

"Stakeholder analysis" (Ansoff, 1965; Ackoff, 1975) derives originally from an objective-setting theory of the firm which "maintains that the objectives of the firm should be derived from balancing the conflicting claims of the various "stakeholders" in the firm: managers, workers, stockholders, suppliers, vendors. The firm has a responsibility to all of these and must configure its objectives so as to give each a measure of satisfaction" (Ackoff, p. 62). In evaluation research, the technique can be adapted to uncover key assumptions on program and evaluation goals from relevant audiences for the evaluation, i.e., those managers, policy makers, or affected parties perceived to be primary users of evaluative information, or to have some "stake" in the evaluation outcomes (Mitroff et al. 1979).

Approaches for identifying specific agencies/personnel in both public and private sectors for stakeholder interviews should therefore be similar to those an organization will employ to define its own "relevant environment", for example distinguishing other agencies with which regular communication is established, or which are concerned with either the flow of resources into, or services being delivered by the program agency that is involved in the evaluation. Strategies to determine the

stakeholder universe therefore may include identifying major organizational representation at legislative hearings concerning the program to be evaluated, and systematically inquiring of program administrators and other decisionmakers in the program itself as to who should be considered stakeholders for the evaluation. Stakeholders might be expected to include such agencies as those: (1) funding or conducting the evaluation; (2) administering, managing or delivering program services; (3) delivering related services; (4) controlling or monitoring the flow of funds into the program agency; (5) advocating or opposing services delivered; and (6) professional societies or other external organizations of agency personnel.

B. Accessing Stakeholder Information

Once stakeholders are defined, the following information can be sought (1) how stakeholders define the program and its objectives; (2) whether there is consensus or disagreement over appropriate measures of program performance; (3) what are stakeholders' particular information needs relative to the current evaluation; and (4) what if any dissatisfactions with prior evaluations should suggest current improvements (Wholey, 1973, pp. 53-54). Available methods for soliciting and analyzing information range from qualitative to highly quantitative, depending on the instrumentation for the information survey and the resources for the analysis. Structured interviews offer techniques such as paired comparisons, forced choice, Q sorts, Likert scales, or judgemental ranking schemes that provide ratio data based upon the subjective judgements of a number of individuals (e.g., Edwards, 1971).* Suggestions

*For a discussion of the Ward Edwards technique and its use in prioritizing public sector agency interview data, see Drewes et al., 1976, pp. 17ff.)

have been made not only to prioritize audiences (Standards, 1980) but also to prioritize information needs within audiences (Wargo, 1981).

Although rigorous quantitative schemes may be more desirable, factors affecting their use include the following. Prioritizing meaningfully the between-agency responses implies either assigning equal weights to each response or prioritizing agencies and weighting accordingly. Agencies sponsoring, as well as those conducting evaluations may be understandably reluctant to make overt their weightings across constituencies in this manner. Furthermore, it may prove more difficult to (1) find and access spokespersons for stakeholder agencies under these conditions, and (2) elicit the frankness and depth in responses encountered in less demanding frameworks. False precision may be associated with stakeholder information collected and quantitatively analyzed for example, without sampling a sufficient number of stakeholders within each constituency to assure data are representative of the constituency identified. In addition, development and pretest of the requisite instrumentation, requiring OMB clearance if ten or more persons are formally surveyed through the use of identical questions, (Office of Management and Budget, 1976) can inhibit structured approaches and quantitative analyses.

C. Incorporating Results into the Evaluation Design

The stakeholder survey can affect choice of an evaluation design from available alternatives both indirectly and directly. Indirectly, the development of study objectives, research questions and associated hypotheses are instrumental in determining the type of evaluation design. Stakeholder emphases on particular target groups for study, on the procedural feasibility of certain data collection approaches, or on

certain aspects of program service delivery may influence the selection of design variables. Alternatively, stakeholders may display biases on concerns that reflect directly on choice of study design, such as dissatisfaction with previously used study designs, the sensitivity of particular measurement approaches or the length of time between baseline and follow-up data collection points. In the study reported here, the major impact was indirect through identification or refinement of study objectives, although some technical concerns were expressed by methodologically oriented stakeholders towards such issues as selection of appropriate controls, and representativeness of study samples.

## III. IMPLEMENTING THE STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

The stakeholder information assessment described in this paper was conducted during the initial stages of a multi-year evaluation of a national supplemental food program.

The purpose of the stakeholder surveys was to make the research team more knowledgeable about the key dimensions of the programmatic and political context within which the evaluation was to be conducted. Major objectives therefore were to:

- define the appropriate stakeholder agency set;
- identify agency representatives and solicit information regarding
  - perceptions of the program,
  - expectations of the evaluation,
  - information needs from the evaluation, and
  - decisions the evaluation data should inform;
- collect and analyze all data during the predesign phase of the evaluation study so as to permit
  - identification of research questions,
  - subsequent refinement of evaluation objectives, and
  - input into development of an appropriate research design.

The method used to gather and analyze the data consisted of four steps:

- identifying and selecting stakeholders for interview;
- selecting the method of access (telephone interview, in-person interview, written response);
- conducting the interview using an interview guide, or letter; and
- organizing and presenting responses.

The research approach was that of a semi-structured, open-ended interview, with content analyses performed on the resultant data to derive central issues and research questions of importance to stakeholder

constituencies. Specific procedures used to complete the above steps are discussed briefly below.

A. Identifying and Selecting Stakeholders

A preliminary list of stakeholders and stakeholder agencies was generated through:

-- review of legislative hearings involving the program agency, to identify sources of testimony;

-- preliminary tracing--by review of documents (e.g., organizational charts, position statements) and discussion with agency personnel at different levels--of the flow of resources and information through federal, state, and local levels of program administration;

-- discussion with a previously convened project advisory panel concerning relevant audiences for the evaluation; and

-- preliminary review of previous research on supplemental food program evaluation to determine important research constituencies.

Major stakeholder groupings emerged as: the agency conducting the evaluation;* agencies with legislative or executive oversight for the program; national, regional, state and local program administrators; and related professional or advocacy groups and associations.

After review of the list by project staff and the agency sponsoring the evaluation, the set of agencies was finalized consisting of agency personnel at federal and regional levels, congressional staff in appropriate committees, members of the congressionally mandated National Advisory Council for the program, and representatives of eleven other federal and non-federal public and private stakeholder agencies, including various key advocacy and professional groups.

*A separate evaluation arm of the overall agency administering the program.

One further method of identifying stakeholders--asking respondents during the interview to recommend other key actors who should be contacted--extended the original list out of range, beyond available resources, and necessitated an arbitrary cutoff point dictated primarily by the deadline date for a draft report. The bias created by the selection of stakeholders predominantly from federal or national constituent agencies was recognized, and offset by other activities in the predesign phase (e.g., a survey of all 1,517 local program agencies, local agency field visits, and use of state and local agency consultants).

B. Selecting the Method of Access

Three methods were used for interviewing stakeholders: in-person interview, telephone, and letter. A national professional meeting for state program directors that also involved federal and regional representatives and a number of the stakeholder groups provided an operationally efficient way to solicit information quickly through in-person interviews with many stakeholders. Telephone interviews were conducted with most other respondents, excluding National Advisory Council members or respondents who indicated they would rather respond in writing. Because of their unique position and perspectives on the program, National Advisory Council members were each sent a formal letter inviting their guidance and assistance in this part of the evaluation. In order to minimize the additional program-oriented burden on the respondents' time they were further given the options of telephoning or mailing in their responses. A small number of similar letters were sent to the few respondents to the telephone interview who indicated a preference for written responses.

C. Conducting the Interview

All personal and telephone interviews, and letters to National Advisory Council members followed a similar format. The interview was preceded by a brief preamble that explained the evaluation and the purpose of the stakeholders' interviews in the context of that evaluation. National Advisory Council members and telephone interviewees stating a preference for written responses were sent a brief abstract of the evaluation project accompanying the letter. All identified stakeholders, therefore, obtained similar information upon contact.

Interviewers were in all cases experienced, professional project staff with key project responsibilities (task leaders). To maximize the utility of information obtained in a few clear cases where it was appropriate, interviewer expertise was matched to specific respondents (e.g., the task leader of the medical component of the evaluation research team interviewed representatives of medical professional groups). Interview emphasis, stressed in pre-interview briefing sessions, was on the two chief components of the interview: (1) respondent perceptions of the program, its original intent, and current context major changes in program focus, accomplishments and shortcomings of the program; and (2) purposes the program evaluation should serve in its current context, specific decisions the evaluation could inform, and discrete stakeholder information needs the evaluation was expected to meet. Finally, respondents were asked to suggest other key constituencies or actors to be contacted as stakeholders.

Respondents were encouraged to be frank and informative, and each was assured that specific information would not be formally linked to particular respondents in the ensuing report.

Interviews were expected to take approximately 30 minutes, and respondents were advised of this anticipated duration. Although no data were collected on actual interview lengths, it is estimated that the mean interview time for personal and telephone interviews approximated 45 minutes.

## IV. RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Respondents

The type of stakeholder/agency from which responses were forthcoming and the method of access are illustrative of the coverage of the survey. Forty-three stakeholders from eleven different constituency groups were invited to participate in the interviews. Thirty-four stakeholders (79%) responded or were interviewed in time for their contribution to be reflected in the study. Eighty-eight percent of the interviews were evenly divided between in-person and telephone interviews (fifteen each respectively) and the remaining four responded in writing. The breakdown of respondents by agency and by type of response is as follows:

| | Type of Interview | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | In-Person | Telephone | Written Response |
| Regional Program Offices | 7 | | |
| State Program Offices | 5 | 1 | |
| Professional Associations | | 5 | |
| Advocacy Groups | 1 | | 1 |
| National Advisory Council | | | 2 |
| Federal Executive Agencies | 2 | 7 | 1 |
| Federal Legislative Agencies | | 2 | |
| Total | 15 | 15 | 4 |

A national conference of program directors permitted in-person interviews with state and regional program administrators which otherwise would have been conducted by telephone.

B.- Findings

Because the actual substantive results of this study are less central to the purpose of this paper than the methodological issues raised as a function of conducting the survey, only relevant references to the data are included here. In the main study, results were organized according to major subject headings in the interviews, and amounted to a considerable volume of data presented in both tabular and textual detail elsewhere (Lawrence 1980). A brief summary of the organization of findings is included below, followed by a discussion of ways in which these findings were useful in refining evaluation objectives and in consideration of alternative designs.

Results were reported by five information categories, corresponding to the format of the interviews (program purpose, program context, evaluation purpose, evaluation context and evaluation information needs). Narrative summaries were prepared of responses in the first four categories, consisting of agency and individual perspectives of both the program and the forthcoming evaluation. Evaluation information needs were firstly categorized by stakeholder constituency into five substantive groups as they related to:

-- client health and nutritional status variables;

-- client food and nutrition-related or health-related behaviors;

-- programmatic behaviors;

-- other client mediating variables; and

-- not-elsewhere-classified information needs.

Secondly, information needs were re-classified into the three components of a functional service system model of the program:

-- service production and delivery;

-- service utilization; and

-- program outcomes.

No attempt was made to sort testable from untestable research questions at this point, since an important objective of this activity was to present information needs as they were currently perceived by stakeholders, and whether or not stakeholder expectations were realistic from a research standpoint.

The narrative summaries of individual and agency perceptions of the purposes and operational contexts of both the program and the evaluation provided a rich source of information on the various and quite differing perspectives of key stakeholders. Critical differences in perceptions of program purpose were documented, for example, across federal agencies responsible for administration or oversight of, or coordination with the program. Greater consensus was noted in both the collective perceptions of evaluation purpose and respondent's support for the evaluation.

The two break-outs of specific information needs permitted some estimation of the preponderance of information needs by category and by agency as they related to types of variables and program model components. Further prioritization was achieved by focusing on information needs of a subset of those public sector agencies with immediate authority to direct program policy and administrative decision making. It was possible, thus, to identify more restrictively key information needs of those agencies most directly involved in shaping the future of the program.

The data were useful in the following ways. Firstly, prior to completing the survey, the evaluation team had only inchoate impressions

of issues and concerns central to agencies in the WIC environment interested in or affected by the operation of the program. Examination of the program regulations and conversations with a limited number of program people had until the survey, been the main source of information. The results permitted considerable expansion in and differentiation among both sources and types of information relevant to designing a large scale field evaluation: perceptions of the program, expectations of the evaluation, information needs held by various stakeholders, and the decisions the evaluation data should inform. As such, the data were perceived by the research team as a valuable part, but only a part of the set of initial data gathered during the objective-setting stages of the evaluation. In particular, the information was useful in refining the conceptual model of the program originally developed from the literature review.

A second outcome was the opportunity to provide information on the evaluation to those interviewed. The informal nature of the survey permitted the research team to explain evaluation purposes as developed to that point, and the general framework within which it would be conducted. Given the varying familiarity with the evaluation across various stakeholder groups, a uniform description of the evaluation was thus provided with concomitant opportunities to correct inappropriate expectation or perceptions. Furthermore, the process of stakeholder interviewing permitted the initial generation of a network of contacts used repeatedly for information and communication purposes throughout the early part of the study.

Thirdly, while research issues and questions identified through the survey clearly exceeded the resources available to explore them all in

the current evaluation, selection of the specific study objectives for the evaluation as well as development and refinement of the research hypotheses to be tested were directly informed by the survey results. Although other information sources were used in this process, such as the literature review, an important part of the justification for study objectives and hypotheses was the ability to document specific stakeholder interest (Cook et al., 1981). Through the shaping of the evaluation objectives and hypotheses the survey results impacted on the design and analysis strategy for the evaluation, primarily through suggesting key mediating and outcome variables of interest, as well as not only specific aspects of program delivery and utilization of importance to stakeholders, but also preferred study designs. For example, the implicit concern of major stakeholders to obtain credible comparison subjects from comparable populations in areas not served by the program strongly encouraged the recommendation by the study team of a nonequivalent control group design.

Finally, stakeholders themselves appeared interested in the findings, particularly in how other stakeholders viewed the program, its purposes and expected outcomes. Survey results also constitute a source of suggestions for further research beyond the resource capacity of the present evaluation. In short, the survey accomplished its purpose, providing important information to guide the course of the evaluation, and providing also an identified set of constituencies with whom information might be exchanged as the evaluation progressed.

C. Conclusions

The stakeholder survey was one of four pre-design activities in a large, multi-year National evaluation.* The survey took approximately one month to complete at a cost of about $10,000, which was less than one-half of one percent of total project resources. We have pointed out the usefulness of the results in helping to set the research objectives for the evaluation.

In the present study the informal nature of the survey was emphasized, in that no attempt was made to set priorities for the information needs identified. This was in line with the purpose of the survey: to be exhaustive in the identification of research issues to guide the evaluation. The unstructured interview format increased the likelihood that the respondents would be less guarded in their responses. Informal conversations were judged more appropriate than fixed-response interviews, since several of the interviews had to be conducted by phone.

Still, there may be situations where the researcher will want to quantify survey responses and, thereby, attach priorities to the information needs identified. There may be a need, for example, to distinguish among the information needs, or research issues, in terms of relative importance; project resources may then be allocated to information needs or research issues that rank high in the total set identified. While several priority ranking methods are available as already indicated, overt priority setting across agencies may be politically sensitive. In addition, research teams need flexibility to, on occasion, weight implicitly, or even ignore a constituency with a particular axe to grind (Sechrest, 1981).

*The other three were: telephone survey of all local agencies; review of extand data bases; comprehensive literature review and synthesis.

Finally, it is hoped that this study sets the stakeholder survey in some theoretical and empirical context, and can serve heuristically to guide future predesign efforts. In the author's experience prior to this study, there was more recognition of the need for stakeholder involvement in evaluation planning than practical guidance as to how best to obtain this involvement, and still less empirical evidence of its advantages (Smith, 1980). It is our feeling, having conducted this survey, that efforts to define, identify and coopt constituency concerns into the design of major field evaluations are increasingly warranted.

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