PUSHING THE ENVELOPE OF MIXED METHODS EVALUATION TO LEARN FROM IMPACT STUDIES

Virginia Knox, MDRC

Westat-APPAM Institutional Member Forum
June 5, 2019
FOUR ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

- **Design** mixed method impact studies to understand effectiveness and inform future improvement
- **Decide** on a deep dive that will inform the field
- **Distinguish** between studying the program model and its implementation
- **Deploy** integrated and iterative data collection and analysis approaches
FOUR ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

- **Design** mixed method impact studies to understand effectiveness and inform future improvement

- **Decide** on a deep dive that will inform the field

- **Distinguish** between studying the program model and its implementation

- **Deploy** integrated and iterative data collection and analysis approaches
Does this program work?

How can this study provide an empirically-based road map for greater impact the next time this strategy is implemented?
Implement

Assess the need for impact evaluation

Build Impact Evidence

Adapt

Apply the evidence in a new context

Knox, Hill, Berlin 2018
Fidelity

We often need to ask what was intended and whether it was implemented as planned.

➢ Was the intervention implemented as intended?
➢ What were the roadblocks? What challenges did the staff face in implementation?
Beyond fidelity

Asking questions about how may be more likely to inform future improvement

- How does this model propose to change people’s behavior or outcomes?
- How do these potential mechanisms differ from business as usual?
- How does implementation or responses of participants vary depending on characteristics of participants, front line staff, implementation organizations, communities, systems, or policies?
FOUR ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

➢ **Design** mixed method impact studies to understand effectiveness and inform future improvement

➢ **Decide** on a deep dive that will inform the field

➢ **Distinguish** between studying the program model and its implementation

➢ **Deploy** integrated and iterative data collection and analysis approaches
DEEP DIVE:

THE THEORY OF CHANGE

“UNDERSTANDING MECHANISMS”
EXAMPLE: Making Pre-K Count

➢ Scant research on model’s key component, differentiated instruction

➢ Research challenge: Document an individualized process

➢ Solution: Observations followed immediately by teacher interviews to hear teachers’ reflections on their process
EXAMPLE: Making Pre-K Count

➢ Findings: Teachers had more difficulty differentiating instruction for low-skilled students

➢ Impact study: Larger impacts for students with higher skills

➢ Implication: Teachers may need different support to differentiate instruction for low-skilled students:
DEEP DIVE:

EMBED TESTS THAT SYSTEMATICALLY VARY IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

➢ Example: Paycheck Plus
FOUR ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

➢ Design mixed method impact studies to understand effectiveness and inform future improvement

➢ Decide on a deep dive that will inform the field

➢ Distinguish between studying the program model and its implementation

➢ Deploy integrated and iterative data collection and analysis approaches
Interventions often aim to change the behavior or outcomes of two different sets of people – program staff and participants

Implications:

➢ Be intentional about which level(s) of the theory of change your study aims to illuminate

➢ Your data collection and analysis may require different units of analysis – entire program; individual staff members; or individual participants
Example: Head Start CARES

Implement new social-emotional curriculum in preschool

Train and coach teachers on the curriculum

Children experience more activities about identifying and understanding their emotions

Improved social emotional outcomes for children
FOUR ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

➢ **Design** mixed method impact studies to understand effectiveness and inform future improvement

➢ **Decide** on a deep dive that will inform the field

➢ **Distinguish** between studying the program model and its implementation

➢ **Deploy** integrated and iterative data collection and analysis approaches
EXAMPLE: PACE Center for Girls

➢ Research challenge: How to estimate costs for different program components?

➢ Mixed methods approach:
  ➢ Conducted initial site visits to understand program components
  ➢ Used that information to define program components in time-use surveys
  ➢ Concluded that social services (and not other components) were much more intensive for the program group than the control group
FOUR ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

- **Design** mixed method impact studies to understand effectiveness and inform future improvement
- **Decide** on a deep dive that will inform the field
- **Distinguish** between studying the program model and its implementation
- **Deploy** integrated and iterative data collection and analysis approaches