



Principles-Focused Evaluation: Collaborating for Equity and Justice

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Principles inspire us and help us set priorities. When dynamic and complex systems like communities change, principles can

provide guidance to make choices and decisions.

Tom Wolff and colleagues developed six principles applicable to collaborating

for equity and justice (CEJ Principles, see below). The

use of participatory and trauma informed evaluation approaches are consistent with the CEJ Principles. They help to ensure that evaluators exercise sensitivity to mitigate the potential impact that social injustices and racism may have on stakeholders. Evaluation work focused on equity and justice inherently requires principles to frame the evaluation and ensure that the CEJ principles are not lost when developing measurement protocols and focusing on other collaborative outcomes.



*Figure 1 Photograph by Linda Fletcher
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Highlights

Equity and justice are core Community Psychology values.

Incorporating a Principles-Focused Evaluation approach maintains focus on the shared values held throughout the community.

“Incorporating racial equity and justice principles is a major change from traditional top down approaches to collaboration. Evaluators who are engaging with such collaborations need to be willing and ready to speak truth to power and sometimes manage the consequences of doing so.”

Principles for Collaborating for Equity and Justice

1. Explicitly address issues of social and economic injustice and structural racism.
2. Employ a community development approach in which community stakeholders have equal power in determining the coalition's or collaborative's agenda and resource allocation.
3. Employ community organizing as an intentional strategy and as part of the process. Work to build resident leadership and power.
4. Focus on policy, systems, and structural change.
5. Build in the extensive community-engaged scholarship and research over the last four decades that show what works, that acknowledges the complexities, and that evaluates appropriately.
6. Construct core functions for the collaborative based on equity and justice that provide basic facilitating structures and build member ownership and leadership.

From: Wolff, T., Minkler, M., Wolfe, S.M., Berkowitz, B., Bowen, L., Butterfoss, F.D., Christens, B., Francisco, V., Himmelman, A., Holt, C., & Lee, K. (2017). Collaborating for equity and justice: Moving beyond collective impact. Nonprofit Quarterly, Winter 2016, 42-53.

A Principles-Focused Evaluation can be incorporated into any type of evaluation, including developmental, formative, process, outcome, or summative. The authors synthesized the Principles-Focused Evaluation approach with the CEJ Principles and included guidelines for incorporating a Trauma-Informed Evaluation Approach. When working with evaluations of racial equity initiatives, the trauma-informed approach is particularly important. Addressing issues of social and economic injustice and structural racism essentially confronts the policies, systems, and structures that contribute to individual and community trauma. We created sample questions and used examples to show how this model can be overlaid on the conditions and constructs associated with coalition frameworks such as Community Coalition Action Theory and Collective Impact. We included a case example to demonstrate how this looks in action.

Case Example – One Principle

Our team incorporated these principles into a developmental evaluation of a project that funded new collaboratives across several sites to promote mental health and well-being, especially among historically excluded populations. We used the *Community Coalition Action Framework* developed by Fran Butterfoss and Michelle Kegler (2009) as the foundation for the evaluation so we would have a common framework to compare across sites. At the time this chapter was written, the project had only been operating for a few months, so the example focused on initial observations and project design. As an example, for the principle “*explicitly address issues of social and economic injustice and structural racism*”, we found wide variation across the sites regarding their readiness. Whereas one community was already having community-wide discussions, others would require that the white population receive

cultural humility and training on racism before they would be ready to collaboratively work with historically oppressed racial groups without inflicting trauma. The design also included structures such as mission and vision statements and by-laws. The team created rubrics by which to assess the extent to which equity and justice were incorporated into training, other activities, and meeting minutes. We employed similar measures to assess the extent to which the remaining principles were followed as well.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: Now more than ever, community coalitions need to incorporate equity and justice principles into their work in order to bring about the structural and systemic change they are seeking on behalf of their stakeholders. The incorporation of equity and justice requires evaluation protocols and frameworks that are inclusive of such principles and highlight their importance in this work.

Practice: Practitioners need to incorporate equity and justice into their work with coalitions and ensure they are focusing on systems and structural changes.

Social Action: Action should be inclusive of and guided by the stakeholders who are most affected by the focal issue.

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