PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION IN A COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION: FOSTERING STAKEHOLDER EMPOWERMENT AND UTILIZATION

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to design and implement an evaluation that fits the needs and values of our program environment, we used a participatory evaluation (PE) methodology in the context of a formative evaluation within a grass-roots community economic development (CED) organization. The evaluation was designed to meet the twin objectives of promoting the empowerment of stakeholders who became involved in designing and in implementing the evaluation, and of fostering the utilization of findings in program planning. Participating stakeholders represented the following constituencies: staff members, program funders, community agencies and institutions, service users and students. We gathered information to document the PE implementation process, its advantages, drawbacks and effects, through interviews with participating stakeholders and participant observation. Respondents reported increased self-efficacy within the organization as well as the acquisition of new skills and information. They also reported instrumental and conceptual uses of evaluation results. Based on this experience, we offer suggestions for improving PE methodology. Copyright © 1996 Elsevier Science Ltd

INTRODUCTION

As our knowledge about decision-making processes within social programs has become more informed and complex, evaluation practice has been transformed (Shadish & Reichardt, 1987). The trend has been moving towards conducting inquiries that are tailor-made to answer the needs of program stakeholders and to fit in with the values of the organizational environment (Dehar et al., 1993; Rossi & Freeman, 1993).

The methods and goals of scientific inquiry in the Social Sciences have shifted away from the exclusive use of experimental designs to demonstrate the effectiveness of specific interventions and to foster their adoption in other settings (Patton, 1986; Rappaport, 1987). Accumulated evidence indicates that social programs with similar aims are implemented differently across sites and tend to evolve in different directions over time, according to the needs of clients and to staff experience and expertise. Early thinking about the ways in which evaluation would be of use (e.g., leading to direct changes in programming, to the termination of ineffective programs, etc.) gave way to the realization that such instrumental use did not occur as often as anticipated because programmatic decision making is an intricate political process based on a wide range of relevant issues (Weiss, 1983b).

Evaluators have adapted their practice to this more
complex view of social programming. As detailed by Rossi & Freeman (1993), adapting to the social context of evaluation entails considering three important dimensions. First, the social ecology of the evaluation site, the concerns and problems that stakeholders want to address, as well as the relational and political context of the organization must guide the evaluation process. Second, in order to provide methodological expertise in a wide variety of settings adhering to distinct value systems and covering many different domains of intervention, evaluators must be familiar with a wide range of research methods. Third, as applied researchers, evaluators must strive to make a relevant contribution to the social change process. This can be achieved by setting up evaluations in ways that will foster their actual use in the development, implementation and planning of effective social policies and programs.

The evaluation process described in the present article sought to address these concerns about the quality and relevance of program evaluations by linking the principles and objectives of the evaluation to those of the organization being evaluated. We detail the work domain and philosophy of intervention of this organization in the next section. A description of the tenets, methodology and goals adopted in the evaluation follows.

Description of the Organizational Environment: Community Economic Development as Initiated by a Grass-Roots Coalition

The community economic development (CED) movement in North America represents efforts by grass-roots groups to develop collective interventions in the economic realm (Bennett, 1992; Phifer, 1990). The experience these individuals have in managing non-profit organizations is perceived as transferable in the context of establishing individually or collectively owned businesses. This proactive stance is seen as complementary to social programs in order to reduce poverty.

The CED organization evaluated in the present study arose through a cross-cultural coalition of community groups operating in an urban neighbourhood. These agencies had been involved in promoting social change and in providing popular education, social and employment services to single parents, unemployed youths, immigrants, refugees and persons on social assistance. The coalition used a participatory action research (PAR) process to create new solutions in answer to the needs identified by community members.

The PAR model has been elaborated to involve members of the community as full participants in the exploration, adaptation and implementation of solutions for a wide diversity of social, environmental and economic problems (Rahman, 1987). Hall (1981) defines PAR as an “integrated activity that combines social investigation, educational work and action” (p. 7). A major goal of PAR is to develop community interventions that promote participant empowerment. Researchers have detailed the changes to be attained through an empowerment process, concentrating on a multi-level analysis delineating individual, group and community-wide processes. For the purposes of the organization’s PAR process, we developed an operational definition of empowerment through a review of the multidisciplinary literature aimed at defining the essential components of empowerment. We synthesized the authors’ descriptions to retain consensual elements (Davis, 1989; Kieffer, 1984; Wallerstein, 1992; Whitmore & Kerais, 1988; Zimmerman et al., 1992). This process led to a conception of empowerment that notably includes the following aspects: (1) perception of self-efficacy and control; the transformation from a self-perception of powerlessness to viewing oneself as efficient, competent at carrying out activities to attain goals, and in control of one’s life; (2) acquisition of resources, knowledge and skills: accessing or developing the political, social or economic resources, information and skills needed to accomplish personal and collective goals; (3) participation in concerted action: the empowerment process involves individuals taking collective action to effect change, adapting social structures including organizations and programs to improve the quality of life and to sustain community members in developing their full potential and taking control of their lives.

The PAR process, leading to the creation of the organization evaluated in the present study, followed a cycle of research and action. Having analyzed their community’s present situation, grass-roots coalition activists decided to create new avenues of employment for low-income community members. Enlisting the help of professionals from educational institutions, coalition members studied several possible employment generation models and adopted a CED strategy. They contacted practitioners from other communities with functioning CED projects to gather information about the pros and cons of different implementation strategies.

The coalition created an organization that offered training to assist low-income community members in starting a business. Using a popular education approach based on the Highlander Center model (Kobak & McCormack, 1988; Luttrell, 1988), facilitators modified course content and format according to the expressed needs of participants. Service users learned from each other by sharing their personal experience as well as by going out into the community in small groups to gather information. Finding alternate sources of funding for entrepreneurs with little collateral then became a priority. Accordingly, the PAR process was extended to the study of revolving loan funds models (Whyte, 1987). A fund was initiated under the aegis of the CED organization. However, this type of fund could not accommodate all the needs of entrepreneurs, starting...
home-based micro-businesses (most of whom were women). This led the organization to study the loan circle model and to adapt it for its own use (Accion International, 1988).

We had conducted a pilot study to evaluate the organization's early impact (Papineau & Kiely, 1994). A year later, once funds were secured to hire full time staff members, the issue of creating a permanent internal evaluation framework for the CFD organization surfaced in the context of the PAR process. Participants wanted to document the organization's impact for internal and external use, although an evaluation was not specifically mandated by funders who required only periodic activities reports. We reviewed the evaluation literature in a search for suitable models.

Participatory Evaluation (PR): A Model Tailored to the Values and Needs of the Organizational Environment

The organization under study was created through a process that values democratically shared control over program planning by stakeholder groups. Concurrently, increasing stakeholder participation in evaluation was being suggested (Mark & Shotland, 1985) for three main reasons: (1) to increase the utilization of evaluation results; (2) to represent the values and concerns of the multiple groups involved in decision making; (3) to promote the empowerment of disenfranchised stakeholder groups previously left out of the process.

In the U.S., stakeholder-based models were initially considered in response to a utilization crisis. Evaluation results were thought to be under-used in decision making and in constructing a better understanding of a program's action and effects (Dawson & D'Amico, 1985; Patton, 1986). Involving stakeholders in designing an evaluation, it was suggested, would increase their commitment to evaluation results and to their utilization.

Traditional evaluation methods have also been criticized for failing to accommodate value pluralism (Weiss, 1983a). Programmatic decision making is now known to result from a political process involving many parties, both within and outside the organization. Including representatives from different stakeholder groups could widen an evaluation's focus, targeting information needs and concerns on many levels.

Furthermore, an evaluation designed and controlled by program managers and funders leaves out the voice of less powerful stakeholders such as clients and frontline workers (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). PE methodology was initiated in the context of assessing development projects in Third World countries, to allow local stakeholders such as service users, community members and frontline staff to bring forth their perspective within the context of evaluation and decision making activities that previously had usually been controlled by international funding agencies (Brunner & Guzman, 1989).

The issue of promoting stakeholder empowerment in PE, however, goes beyond the notion of shared control over the evaluation process, an important objective of PE is to focus on changing larger social structures through a process of grass-roots empowerment. In recent years, participatory research and evaluation processes have become an integral part of many community development projects in the U.S. often involving collaborations between grass-roots groups, city, church, school and university leaders (Chavis, 1993). Individual benefits accrued from participating in PE activities were documented by Whitmore (1991). They include: (1) a perception of enhanced self-efficacy and self-confidence; (2) the acquisition of new skills and of specialized knowledge about conducting an evaluation, and about the program itself; (3) a perception of increased control over one's life circumstances when collective action is taken to improve the program, making it more responsive to the needs and goals of all involved constituencies.

In these circumstances, utilization of evaluation results can be seen as contributing directly to a process of empowerment.

There are two issues to consider when attempting to increase participation: (1) the type of stakeholder groups to involve; (2) the nature of stakeholder and evaluator involvement. In recent studies, the term PE has generally replaced the term stakeholder-based in characterizing approaches that focus on stakeholder involvement. In practice, however, the stakeholder groups involved and the functions they assume within the evaluation are quite variable. We review a sampling of the ways in which these two issues have been addressed to provide an overview of the different approaches that have been advocated or implemented in the last decade to increase stakeholder involvement. The approaches taken are summarized in Table 1, and regrouped according to the main objective of the authors in adopting a stakeholder-based or PE strategy.

Increasing the Utilization of Results

In order to maximize the utilization of results, Mark and Shotland (1985) suggest involving stakeholders that have the most power in decision making, such as top administrators and staff with lobbying power. Barrick and Cogliano (1993) adopted a similar strategy in their evaluation of a university nursing department's programs. They restricted involvement to the nursing faculty. Alternatively, Patton (1986) notes that the important factor is not power per se, but rather the level of interest in seeing one's questions answered by the evaluation and the willingness to invest time in the process. He advises involving all relevant constituencies. Greene (1987, 1988a) chose a related approach in evaluating programs in two community agencies. She formed all inclusive evaluation committees and restricted the evaluation's focus to one question through a consensual decision making process.
Stakeholder tasks vary across studies. Several authors (see Table 1) suggest that only extensive involvement in evaluation design, exploration of findings, interpretation of results and drawing up final recommendations will increase utilization. In addition to a role as facilitator and advisor, the evaluator is generally responsible for performing statistical analyses and other technical tasks.

**Representing Multiple Interests**
To denote the multiple interests involved in an evaluation, Mark and Shotland (1985) advise including powerful decision making stakeholders in evaluation design. Alternately, Shapiro (1988) invited comments from a plurality of interests while conducting a PE of a women’s studies program. However, the stakeholders’ role was limited to answering evaluation questions while the evaluator was responsible for all other tasks.

**Empowerment**
When focusing on promoting stakeholder empowerment, Mark and Shotland (1985) recommend that groups with low power but high legitimacy, such as

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**Table 1**
**APPROACHES TO PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Goal</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Stakeholder Groups</th>
<th>Collective Tasks</th>
<th>Evaluator’s Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase utilization of results</td>
<td>Mark and Shotland (1985)</td>
<td>decision makers</td>
<td>not specified</td>
<td>not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patton (1986)</td>
<td>service deliverers</td>
<td></td>
<td>collect data</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>primary intended users</td>
<td>determine focus</td>
<td>facilitate discussions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>represent relevant constituencies</td>
<td>methods decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barrick and Cogliano (1993)</td>
<td>nursing faculty</td>
<td>analysis</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>interpretation of results</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Represent multiple interests</td>
<td>Mark and Shotland (1985)</td>
<td>decision makers</td>
<td>not specified</td>
<td>not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shapiro (1988)</td>
<td>service deliverers</td>
<td>answer evaluation questions</td>
<td>design</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>faculty</td>
<td></td>
<td>collect and compile data</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>recommend ways to improve program</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>students</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Mark and Shotland (1985)</td>
<td>greater power to clients and social</td>
<td>evaluation planning and practice</td>
<td>not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brunner and Guzman (1989)</td>
<td>service recipients</td>
<td>program formulation and</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Whitmore (1991)</td>
<td>beneficiaries</td>
<td>design and implementation</td>
<td>advise and facilitate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>lay facilitators</td>
<td>collective analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>staff</td>
<td>report to community</td>
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<td>for action</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>community advisory committee</td>
<td>design and implementation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>act to change program</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>service users</td>
<td>publicize results</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>facilitate process</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>report to advisory committee for advice</td>
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service recipients, be prominently involved. Evaluators who engage in PE to sustain the empowerment process of community development project members also tend to involve disenfranchised groups prominently. Brunner & Guzman (1989) explain that even though there is no standard PE technique in the community development context, the evaluators are usually project participants selected by their group who work in collaboration with indigenous and professional project staff. For example, Whitmore (1991) chose such an approach in designing the evaluation of a prenatal education program for single parents on social assistance. She hired four participating mothers as paid assistants and sought feedback from a community advisory committee of professionals and target group members. In practice, she worked intensively and collectively with the team of four assistants on all evaluation tasks, from defining the research question to disseminating results to the community, reporting to the committee for feedback and advice.

Guiding Principles for the Evaluation

The preceding discussion exemplified the considerable variations in the design of participatory evaluations. These differences stem from the evaluator's expertise and values and from the ecology of the program under study. To appreciate the role of the evaluator in the participatory evaluation process, we propose the following goals and guidelines for the evaluation process. They were ratified by the board of directors.

In accordance with the principles of PAR, the choice of stakeholder groups would be broadly inclusive, centering on the participation of staff, volunteers and clients that are actively involved in the organization. Participants would be collectively responsible for evaluation design and implementation, sharing control over decision making. To stimulate participation, the extent of each stakeholder's involvement would vary according to each person's interest and availability. The evaluator would facilitate discussions, teach, advise, and coordinate the PE process.

Since the organization had been set up recently, with its programs still evolving, the evaluation would be formative, directed at improving services and broadening stakeholders' understanding of the programs. To ensure that all major concerns would be addressed, there would be no a priori restrictions on the number of evaluation topics.

An important guiding principle of the organization was its focus on individual and community empowerment through collective action. The evaluation was specifically set up to sustain participants' empowerment process along the following lines: (1) promote participant's perception of self-efficacy and control by fostering collective control, consensual decision making and full participation in implementation throughout the evaluation process; (2) promote the acquisition of knowledge and skills through learning research and evaluation skills that would be transferable to other contexts; (3) promote concerted action by fostering instrumental, conceptual (educational) and symbolic (political) use of evaluation results (Greene, 1988b; Rich, 1977), resulting in a deeper understanding of program functioning, to be applied in action. Such action could include using evaluation results to produce immediate changes in programming and program development through strategic planning.

Promoting both empowerment and utilization of results were thus seen as compatible and complementary goals of the PE to be undertaken. The evaluation process followed Patton's (1986) guidelines for utilization-focused evaluations, while extending the possibility of participation to more technical aspects such as data collection.

This article is part of a series of three papers in which we outline the process and results of program evaluation and planning activities within an organization involved in community economic development. The present study sought to document: (1) the PE process as actually implemented; (2) the advantages and disadvantages of a PE approach; (3) the extent to which the twin goals of promoting stakeholder empowerment and increasing utilization were achieved. The two other studies in the series report: (1) the results of a pilot study assessing the impact of participation in the organization on service users' and practitioners' process of empowerment at an early stage in the organization's existence, before it had permanent employees (Papineau & Kiely, 1994); (2) the results of the PE with respect to the organization's community coalition building program (Papineau & Kiely, in press).

METHOD

Description of the Organization

The organization was set up by a cross-cultural coalition of community groups working in an urban neighbourhood undergoing gentrification. Their goal was to develop new responses to the economic needs of their clientele: immigrants and refugees, single parents, the unemployed and persons receiving social assistance. These groups provided services to the Francophone, Anglophone, Chinese, Latin-American, Portuguese and South Asian communities. For 2 years after its incorporation, the organization was run by staff on loan from coalition agencies, by community volunteers, and by staff hired through non-renewable short-term grants. Collaborating with two universities, the organization provided community internship placements for students and received advice from professors in many disciplines. Funding, renewable on a yearly basis, was then secured.
from the municipal and federal governments. Seven full-time employees were hired. The organization was administered internally through collective decision-making, and by a board of elected volunteers.

At the time of the evaluation, the programs operated included:

1. **Community coalition building.** Promoting CED in the community: linking with organizations involved in community development to start joint initiatives.

2. **Training and technical assistance.** Sustaining the development of small, individually or collectively owned, businesses by offering training and technical assistance. Business promoters can attend group training sessions or become part of a loan circle. In the circles, four to six low-income women with no start-up capital carry out a feasibility study then start to operate a micro-enterprise, collectively acting as guarantors for each other's business loans. The circles were targeted at women entrepreneurs in response to a needs assessment.

3. **Revolving loan fund.** Operating a community revolving loan fund (RLF) created to amass low interest loan capital for community businesses, loan circles and housing projects that meet social impact criteria. Individuals, charitable, corporate and government institutions are approached to provide capital. Fund borrowers receive technical assistance on an expressed need basis and through ongoing monitoring of their business operations.

The RLF program became incorporated as a separate organization, with its own board of directors, as the PE was getting under way. The board composition policy stipulated an equal representation of men and women members, a majority of directors also had to be selected by members of the initial organization.

**Participants**

**Evaluator.** I (D.P.) am a community psychologist and had volunteered to facilitate the evaluation as part of my doctoral research. I had been a staff member of a community group that belonged to the coalition initiating the organization and during this time, I had coordinated the pilot study that documented the early outcome of the organization. A charitable foundation that had supported the coalition's work provided a small grant for this pilot study. The study's results were used to engage coalition members in a process of reflection about the organization's work and in program planning (Papineau & Kiely, 1994).

**Stakeholders.** A guiding principle we had adopted was to include as many stakeholders as possible rather than inviting only one representative from each constituency. I approached individuals from the following constituencies: program staff; volunteers and students; service users.

The volunteers served on the standing committees and/or on the board of directors. They represented funding organizations such as the municipal government and religious institutions; community agencies and educational institutions; target groups from the community. The students were completing clinical internships as part of their social work studies at the undergraduate or master's level.

The participants, 21 women and 14 men, 23 belonging to different cultural communities and 12, including myself, from the majority French Canadian culture, had training in the following disciplines: business, community planning, education, history, psychology, social work, sociology, environmental and religious studies. Several individuals had participated in informal yearly evaluation meetings to review an organization's goals for the next year. However, I was the only one who had formal evaluation training and experience.

Since participants were allowed free choice in the level and timing of their participation, their involvement varied in each phase of the evaluation process, as reported in Table 2. Service users had little time to devote to evaluation purposes. We asked them to contribute evaluation topics or questions during group interviews exploring their satisfaction with program services. Several clients participated in strategic planning sessions, commenting on the results of the evaluation and making program development suggestions.

As part of the data gathering process to document the impact of the PE, I interviewed 22 stakeholders, either individually or collectively. This group was composed of three clients, nine volunteers, one donor and nine workers as there was staff turnover during the evaluation. These individuals reported on their personal involvement as members of the PE team.

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase of the Evaluation</th>
<th>Number of Stakeholders Involved</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation phases</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing evaluation questions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument design</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic planning</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference presentations</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation Design and Implementation

The evaluation plan, as initially conceptualized, is outlined in Table 3. In practice, the evaluation generally proceeded within these guidelines. The PE process was approved by the two boards of directors. As part of my tasks as evaluator, I then attended the working committees of the organization to explain the evaluation process and to enlist stakeholder participation. Program staff, students, funders, service users and other volunteer members were involved in these committees. This phase lasted 2 months.

The evaluation questions were selected through an in-depth 6-month consultation process. Meeting in small groups, each concerned with one of the programs, was an efficient way of proceeding. I assisted each group in developing and clarifying the topics and questions to be addressed. Some stakeholders were too busy to attend group meetings. I consulted them individually, explaining topics and questions that were being considered and collecting their feedback and suggestions about additional topics. Two staff members and I prepared two documents regrouping proposed evaluation topics. Two general meetings of stakeholders were called to discuss these documents. Nine stakeholders examined questions about the RLF, while eight stakeholders prioritized topics for the other two programs. Small groups were reconvened in order to devise measuring instruments that would be used to collect answers for evaluation questions. These instruments are described in the measures section. This process took 3 months.

Data analysis was the task that stakeholders were most reluctant to undertake. Participants asked me to analyze data regarding the community coalition building program. A staff member and a volunteer (both of whom had a master’s degree) took part in the data analysis, each concentrating on one of the remaining programs. We then outlined the results of the evaluation in several reports. Staff members from the RLF were extensively involved in this process. We outlined program information to be included, made recommendations and targeted evaluation results for in-depth discussion at strategic planning meetings and within committees. I was assigned sole responsibility for writing reports about the other two programs. This phase lasted approximately 3 months.

As the evaluation reports were being drafted, a funding crisis that had been growing for some time came to a resolution with the organization splitting into three separate entities. The loan circle and RLF programs continued operating as distinct organizations with funding from the provincial and municipal governments, respectively. The initial organization was amalgamated with a community economic development corporation (CDEC) that had operated in the area for many years. This reorganization was mandated by new government funding policies.

Although the evaluation report for the community coalition building program was circulated to stakeholders, it was not possible to complete the strategic planning process at this time as the program would be substantially reorganized.

Strategic planning did proceed with the two remaining programs, now two distinct organizations. The loan circle group opted for informal discussion of the evaluation report within its advisory committee. After reviewing the report, members decided to increase the focus on accounting skills during the training sessions, to expand publicity and fund raising activities, and to contact committee members for regular updates in between formal meetings. As part of the process to prepare a 3-year strategic plan, the RLF held two special meetings to review the results of the evaluation with stakeholders. The process then continued with further planning and action by the working committees and by the board of directors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3</th>
<th>BLUEPRINT FOR THE PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION PROCESS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiation phase:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Presentation to the board of administrators for their approval</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Identification of interested stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Selecting the topics and questions to be addressed:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Interested stakeholders meet several times in small groups, each centring on one of the services offered by the organization, in order to brainstorm ideas for questions; guidelines outlined in Patton (1986) are followed to explain tasks such as focusing evaluation questions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Questions are rephrased clearly, regrouped for each program, and collated into one document</td>
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<tr>
<td>- A general meeting of stakeholders is called to prioritize questions according to their potential utility, and to plan how the evaluation results will be utilized once they are available</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instrument design and data collection:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Small groups are reconvened to decide on the final wording and format of questions retained at the general meeting</td>
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<td>- Data is collected by the program evaluator and other interested participants who are given appropriate training</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data analysis and reporting:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Data analysis proceeds in small groups, with the evaluator participating in all groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Individual reports are drafted for each program; the evaluator is responsible for writing reports in consultation with stakeholders; the reports are to be geared for use in drafting the next year’s funding proposals, in discussions regarding strategic objectives to be adopted in a 3-year plan and in writing the annual report and summary of activities</td>
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<td>Strategic planning:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- A series of strategic planning meetings are convened to study the evaluation reports and decide on follow-up steps in view of the utilization plan developed earlier</td>
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<td>- The evaluation questions are revised for future use on an ongoing basis; program workers are expected to coordinate future evaluation efforts</td>
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Measures
In this section, we describe the various measures used in the context of the PE. A sub-sample of the questionnaires developed are reproduced in their entirety to illustrate the scope of questions developed through the PE.

Documenting the PE Process. To document and revise the PE process as it unfolded, and to explore the different ways in which participation could contribute to stakeholder empowerment, as evaluator I interviewed stakeholders that had participated in small group work. These interviews took place at three time periods, following the design, data analysis and strategic planning phases. We devised a questionnaire including six open-ended questions to gather information (Table 4). For several questions, I used prompts (e.g. labelled a. to c.) to gather more specific information once respondents had answered the initial question. I also used participant observation and document reviews to gather additional information regarding utilization of evaluation results.

Evaluating the Organization’s Programming. Stakeholders working in small subgroups composed of staff member(s), volunteer(s) and myself, established confidential client identification sheets for the three programs to gather data about the service user population. Such information was not collected prior to the evaluation.

Community Coalition Building Program. Stakeholders wanted to find out if their organization was known and credible in the community. A 12-item questionnaire was prepared by staff members and myself for use during individual interviews with workers from selected community organizations. We addressed the knowledge issue through six questions including “What are the services offered by our organization?” We measured the credibility dimension through six questions including “Do you think we are presently fulfilling our job creation mandate?” The results of this study were presented in Papineau and Kiely (in press).

Training and Technical Assistance Program. Service users were targeted in evaluating the group training sessions. Staff members, students and myself devised an interview schedule for use on the last training day. Two different forms of the interview were used consisting of nine questions for work coop members and four questions for individual micro-business owners. The questions asked clients to elaborate on the outcome of: (1) their involvement in starting or running a business (e.g., “In which ways do you think that planning/starting a coop is influencing you?”); (2) their participation in the training sessions (e.g., “Do you feel able to interact more in group situations as a result of your contact with our organization? How so?”).

To evaluate the loan circle approach, circle members were asked to evaluate the 6 week training course covering information about starting a business and rules governing participation in a loan circle. A written questionnaire measured their satisfaction with the training through eight Likert-type scale items, and two open-ended questions.

Volunteers participating in the loan circle advisory committee were interviewed individually and answered five open-ended questions (Table 5). For the third question, prompts were used (a. to c.) to gather additional information.

Revolving Loan Fund Program. We consulted three groups I queried fund borrowers through individual interviews at their work place. The questionnaire consisted of 15 open-ended questions (Table 6).

We sent written questionnaires to fund lenders and volunteers, composed of 12 and 14 questions, respectively, and mixing Likert-type and open-ended items. Questions ascertained their satisfaction with their involvement and included such items as “Are you sat-
TABLE 5
LOAN CIRCLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How have you heard of the loan circles?
2. What did you find interesting about the loan circle format?
3. For many months, we have been working together to implement the loan circle program; are you satisfied with the way our work is progressing?
   a. What are the strong points?
   b. What could we have done differently?
   c. What would you suggest we change in the future?
4. Do you feel that stronger links are being established to others in the neighbourhood through the loan circles? If yes, how?
5. Do you find it important that we keep working together? What do you hope to achieve through our collaboration?

TABLE 6
RLF BORROWER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What expectations do you have in relation to the social impact of your business?
2. What are your expectations in relation to the economic impact of your business?
3. How do you think you have managed so far in terms of your expectations?
4. What type of support did you expect from the RLF?
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the support actually provided by the RLF?
6. How do you think starting your own business has influenced you?
7. How many hours are you required to devote to your business in an average week? Are your working hours flexible? Are you able to take enough time off?
8. How has starting your own business influenced your relationship to your family (spouse, children)? your role in the family?
9. What have been the positive and negative impacts of your involvement in a business for your spouse? for your children?
10. How would you describe the support you have received from your extended family and friends regarding your business involvement?
11. How do you think that the product or service you offer is benefiting your clientele or the community?
12. Have you developed links to other businesses in the community which you find supportive?
13. Do you think that your business is addressing any environmental issues? Which ones?
14. How do you imagine your business in 5 years? What evolution do you foresee (in social and economic terms)?
15. Overall, how would you sum up the relationship you have had with the RLF? What has it brought you? What do you think you have contributed?

satisfied that your investment in the Loan Fund has supported the type of projects you expected?”.

Data Analysis
We performed an inductive analysis of the qualitative interview data gathered to document the PE process using the three factor operational definition of empowerment as a sensitizing concept (Blumer, 1969).

As Patton (1990) explains: “Sensitizing concepts are concepts that the analyst brings to the data. These sensitizing concepts have their origins in social science theory, the research literature, or evaluation issues identified at the beginning of a study…. The inductive application of sensitizing concepts is to examine how the concept is manifest in a particular setting or among a particular group of people” (p. 391). Verbatim transcripts of the interviews were prepared, the data was then coded to identify respondent’s comments relating to the concepts of self-efficacy and control, of knowledge and skills, of instrumental, conceptual and symbolic use of evaluation data.

For PE results regarding the organization’s programs, gathered through an open-ended interview schedule, verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were prepared. We then conducted a content analysis, which involved coding the data with key words to identify commonalities and variations in respondents’ answers, identifying common and variable patterns within and across each group of respondents, and identifying patterns which link or explain the data (Patton, 1990).

In the case of quantitative evaluation data gathered through Likert-type scales, I computed means for each item. Results were presented through bar graphs and included in the evaluation reports.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
We will now report and discuss stakeholders’ perceptions of the PE process and its influence on promoting participant empowerment and evaluation utilization.

Perceived Advantages
The democratic and collective nature of the PE process, the possibility for genuine sharing, participation and ownership in all evaluation tasks, leading to more informed group decision making, was cited as the most rewarding and important aspect of PE: “A process like that, it dilutes the ego, the personalization, it’s not anyone’s baby. It minimizes the ego trip of power internally and in the committees, it will help our organization keep its initial objectives (staff)”. The process created opportunities for “exchanges, discussion and synergy (volunteer)” between different groups of stakeholders. Service users became more cooperative and open in the group. PE had a positive impact on the organization’s internal group processes for the team and for the board of directors where members now “talk more frankly, there is a climate of confidence, of cohesion, with information circulating democratically (volunteer)”. In this
regard, the evaluation fulfilled expectations for increased value pluralism and democracy as raised by proponents of stakeholder-based evaluation models (Mark & Shotland, 1985). Many respondents noted that participating in the evaluation deepened their involvement and commitment to the organization. Such increased commitment was another potential benefit of PE approaches (Weiss, 1983a) that was derived in the context of the present evaluation.

Other advantages relate to task accomplishment. Participants felt that once the evaluation foci had been targeted, the PE process evolved in a well structured and coordinated fashion as individuals took responsibility for specific tasks and task coordination proceeded in small groups. Choosing to gather evaluation data from all the groups involved in the organization, rather than concentrating on service users’ opinion, was found to be quite valuable in giving an accurate assessment of the programs. Lastly, the strategic planning meetings were seen as especially efficient, focused and productive. These sessions created an opportunity for individual and collective reflection, for assessment of the work being done, from several new angles, using previously unavailable information: “It was interesting to see globally how everyone is involved. Before I had trouble using the information we were getting as board members, a lot of pieces of paper, I didn’t get the answers I wanted (volunteer)”.

The evaluation served as a model for outside organizations. Volunteer participants from other community groups were impressed with the quality of the discussions generated by the strategic planning process and by the deepened involvement of stakeholders from the various groups. A staff member who became executive director of another community group is in the planning process. This workshop (Papineau & Norton, 1993) would involve an actual run through of the entire evaluation process: selecting topics to address, data collection (in between the two sessions), analysis and reporting. Participants would work individually and in small groups. The evaluator would describe PE, explain its potential uses and answer questions, while participants gained practical experience with all phases of a PE modelled after this one.

Comments about the evaluator’s role underscored the importance of having a designated person in charge of facilitating the PE process, coordinating and following through on the various tasks. Participants described me as being flexible and respectful of their needs: (1) by taking the time to explain evaluation notions through written materials, charts and oral presentations, “I think it’s been very respectful of the organization and individuals involved, the time taken to explain and re-explain as need be. It’s become clear in my mind and those of others (volunteer)”; (2) by letting people express their fears concerning the PE process and providing answers; (3) by meeting individually with those who could not attend group discussions; (4) by starting from stakeholders’ ideas, and asking them to edit a transcript of their questions for use by the group as a whole.

**Perceived Drawbacks and Suggestions for Improvement**

The drawbacks of the PE process were concentrated in the design phase while targeting the topics to address.

The large number of program aspects to consider and the diversity of participants made the process lengthy and complex: “I found it long because there are so many people involved and groups. It’s long to coordinate all that together (staff)”.

Not everyone was consistently involved in the process, extending the time in between meetings needed to clarify and then prioritize topics among the numerous options suggested. Participants voiced several suggestions to improve the evaluation design process. These included making more demands on individual stakeholders and following a stricter timetable for this phase of the process.

These perceptions are in line with the reported comments of stakeholders from other participatory evaluations (Greene, 1987) who found the design process long, cumbersome and slow-moving, but also open and comprehensive. The evaluation process was of similar length in both Greene’s (1987) and the present study which would indicate that it may not be necessary to force the group to choose only one question to address as Greene did, thereby by-passing potentially important evaluation issues.

Stakeholders reported experiencing some specific problems during the PE process. Having no hands-on experience to rely on, participants had difficulty picturing the evaluation process in its entirety and understanding how to determine the suitability of evaluation questions. Several stakeholders explained that it took them a long time to feel at ease with the steps of the PE process, to understand its potential outcome and utility: “I found it very difficult at the beginning to situate myself. The kinds of things I have been doing up to now are participating in different groups. It is difficult to evaluate the work we have done. I am not familiar with this type of process. I wasn’t quite sure what it entailed, what it would give me or other people (staff)”.

This drawback of PE methodology could be addressed by holding a two-session workshop as an initiation into the PE process. This workshop (Papineau & Norton, 1993) would involve an actual run through of the entire evaluation process: selecting topics to address, data collection (in between the two sessions), analysis and reporting. Participants would work individually and in small groups. The evaluator would describe PE, explain its potential uses and answer questions, while participants gained practical experience with all phases of the process. The theoretical workshop content could be adapted to the participants’ evaluation and research skill level.

**Empowerment of Stakeholders**

Participatory evaluation’s potential for promoting stakeholder empowerment reflects Kieffer’s (1984) conception of empowerment as “a long-term process of adult learning and development”. In the present study, working climate changes brought about by the PE pro-
cess provided a supportive, growth inducing learning environment. Specifically, participants in the evaluation reported change along two dimensions of individual empowerment (Whitmore & Kerans, 1988; Zimmerman et al., 1992): (1) self-efficacy and personal control; (2) knowledge and skills. Change along a third dimension of empowerment referring to taking action collectively will be examined in conjunction with evaluation utilization issues.

**Self-Efficacy and Control**

In their study of the empowerment process, Lord & Hutchison (1993) define one of its components, self-efficacy as: “People’s evaluation of their capabilities to organize and carry out activities required to attain personal goals... In this sense, positive self-efficacy is seen as fostering confidence in ways that enhance participation and taking initiative” (p. 13).

Similarly, the PE process increased participants’ perception of self-efficacy within the organization: “This process helped empower board members who felt marginalized. They had not participated in the early building phase. This evaluation gave them the opportunity to name their knowledge and they have acted on it in very positive ways (volunteer)”. Participants also felt increased self-efficacy and personal control regarding program evaluation. They are now more self-confident about being able to carry out and control such a process in collaboration with others, whereas several persons had initially expressed fears that the evaluation would proceed in inappropriate directions.

Obtaining confirmation through the evaluation results that their work was effective, that they were attaining their goals, was validating for staff members, once again increasing their confidence and sense of self-efficacy: “I was very impressed with some of the outcome we found. With groups we have objectives, but it is so subjective, without the evaluation, we never know the impact. It is interesting that people used words like increased self-confidence that we were in fact hoping to do, that was encouraging (staff)”; “For me, sitting and talking with borrowers really reaffirmed the mission of our association. Empowering they said this organization was doing that for them and suggested better ways to do it. This was so exciting to G. and myself and I wished we had 60 people to hear us there (volunteer)”.

**Knowledge and Skills**

Active participation in the various steps of PE gave stakeholders a hands-on experience of evaluation with acquisition of the corresponding knowledge and skills. For example, participants realized that answering research questions is work intensive and learned to target critical evaluation issues. Performing the data collection put respondents’ answers in a meaningful context, it created a sense of ownership. “Questioning the work collective women helped me to appreciate their strengths and also my impact on them (staff)”. For some, participation led to a genuine understanding of evaluation’s link to program planning: “This process demystified strategic planning and how it must be carried out in an organization (volunteer)”. Overall, participants changed their attitude towards evaluation, becoming more aware of its potential usefulness. A staff member considered changing careers to become a program evaluator.

Those most involved in the PE process, staff and several volunteers, felt confident about their ability to revise and expand the evaluation process in future years, or to coordinate an evaluation in another organizational context. A few participants noted that they had applied their new evaluation skills in other settings in which they are active: “It’s also helped me in my outside investment as a volunteer, my general implications with other community roles, to be more discriminating. analyzing in the processes I am involved in... It greatly influenced me to use and encourage the use of PAR and PE in all the other programs and organizations I am involved in (staff)”.

The evaluation process also helped participants to increase their understanding of issues relating to the work of the organization. For example, getting direct feedback from the clients participating in strategic planning discussions helped other stakeholders to “link the theory to the reality, the mission with what we were doing” (volunteer). For others, the evaluation generated a process of critical thinking, reading, and exploration of program issues: “I found it very interesting, it has encouraged me to read and to be more aware of qualitative evaluations that reflect some of the work I am doing or trying to do... Through the discussions we’ve had while creating this evaluation process, I’ve thought about different things and read empowerment articles and discussed issues that are important about the work I am doing but may not have done outside of this process (staff)”.

Finally, stakeholders felt that their participation had contributed to their personal development. They named specific skills perfected through their involvement including: (1) computer skills while producing reports; (2) planning skills that meshed with their university studies; (3) process skills: “It’s incredible how I can be the type to focus on tasks and forget the human aspect. It’s a good thing that I have to keep learning, I will keep working on this over the next year... I want the solution now right away, I have trouble waiting for other people. I know the answer. That’s what I’ve learned through this, to wait (staff)”.

**Evaluation Utilization**

For the PE process to promote empowerment, it is important that the evaluation be able to meet stake-
holder goals and result in concrete action. An important dimension of an empowerment process is its culmination in action that benefits individuals, a group or the community (Lord & Hutchison, 1993; Zimmerman et al., 1992). Since PE is generally time consuming and work intensive, it would be disempowering for participants to contribute so many hours to a process that was not ultimately useful on an individual or organizational level.

In the evaluation utilization context, action relates to instrumental use: the specific use of findings by stakeholders to guide decisions about changing and retaining various aspects of a program (Shadish et al., 1991). When specifying their goals in conducting the evaluation, many stakeholders referred to instrumental use. They wanted to access information that could be used to improve the organization's functioning. This included information about program effects and user satisfaction. Stakeholders also had goals relating to conceptual use, i.e., using evaluation results to influence their thinking about program issues (Rich, 1977), particularly to help articulate a common vision of issues facing the organization. Lastly, stakeholders were hoping to make symbolic use of evaluation results: to leverage funding and to serve as a model for other organizations.

Instrumental Use

Instrumental use of the evaluation results was somewhat curtailed by the funding crisis occurring as the evaluation was being completed: “If the funding crisis had not usurped such a large amount of team energy, I think the process would have been more useful to workers and the programs (staff)”.

The Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) program had the most stable funding during this period and was best able to use evaluation information to plan and concretize programmatic changes. Participants described instrumental use of evaluation results internally, as expected in the context of a formative evaluation, in three main areas of programming. First, there were changes to RLF objectives and mission: “After hearing the results of the evaluation we changed the mission. The Board became more realistic in terms of its objectives, for example, the economic viability criteria for projects were made stricter (staff)”.

Second, there were changes in internal policies, guidelines for board members regarding conflict of interest were drawn-up. Evaluation data brought out the fact that a conflict of interest had occurred involving some board members. This information was discussed at a Board meeting and procedures were changed to the satisfaction of all members.

Third, the critical comments and expressed needs of clients who borrowed money from the Fund (as voiced during evaluation interviews and strategic planning sessions) were instrumental in guiding staff to revise the timing, form and content of technical assistance provided to borrowers. Furthermore, fund raising efforts directed at increasing operating funds to hire a third staff member were included in the strategic plan. This worker would provide technical assistance, recruit and train volunteers with business expertise, and organize service exchanges with other organizations. A client volunteered to help organize and coordinate a self-support group for borrowers.

Conceptual Use

Generally, participants in all three programs felt that the evaluation had precipitated a deeper process of reflection about the mission and the objectives of the organization: “There is now a clearer common vision and recognition of what needs to be worked on in the organization (volunteer)”. It also stimulated a re-conceptualization of the programming and indicated program development avenues to be included in the yearly action plan submitted to funders: “It clarified many issues in our community involvement, so that I participated more in drawing up the action plan, I kept it more in mind (staff)”.

Volunteers, especially, felt that they had acquired relevant information about the organization which had previously been inaccessible. The stakeholder discussions helped them to assimilate this information and put it in context: “When you start to bring together a whole number of people, you start to get a collective image. This is important when it is brought together in a report and you are able to talk about it to each other. That adds to the insight and the learning that takes place (volunteer)”.

Symbolic Use

Initially, some stakeholders were planning to use evaluation results to leverage additional funding. Such direct persuasive use of results did not occur, and indeed rarely does in the context of formative evaluations. In a larger context, the CED movement as a whole, is still attempting to demonstrate its viability as a solution to structural economic problems.

The evaluation did influence individuals from community agencies to increase their voluntary in-kind contribution to the RLF through provision of technical assistance for clients and participation in activities including fund raising. The presentation of evaluation findings at scientific conferences (Papineau et al., 1992a; Papineau et al., 1992b), with the direct participation of stakeholders, was aimed at disseminating findings to an outside audience. Some stakeholders were also interested in sharing their PE expertise with other community groups, for example, by creating a PE training manual.
LIMITATIONS

There are limitations pertaining to the process of PE, since the evaluation is designed and implemented by stakeholders it can be characterized as a form of internal evaluation and there is a risk of co-optation by some stakeholders seeking to promote their interests (Rossi & Freeman, 1993). In the present study, the fact that several groups of stakeholders with different stakes in the program such as service users, funders, students and volunteers were asked to participate in the evaluation constitutes investigator triangulation that reduces the risk of co-optation (Denzin, 1978). However, some groups of stakeholders, especially staff members and volunteers, had more time to devote to the evaluation, they participated more actively in the evaluation than service users. This may have resulted in some bias, such as giving priority to exploring staff and volunteer issues of concern. On the other hand, in the context of a formative evaluation to gather necessary information to fine tune and build services, an evaluation designed by stakeholders is more likely to have relevance to their immediate concerns so that the results can serve as a guide to make necessary changes. Van de Wall and Bolas (1981) found that, on the whole, the findings of internal evaluations tend to have a higher rate of impact on organizational decisions. Yet, staff members conducted some of the face to face interviews with service users or peers from other organizations. While this enabled staff to get a first hand impression of the evaluative interview situation, to choose their own additional prompts and to gain added insight from interviewees' non-verbal communication, service users may have been more reluctant to bring up critical observations about the program than they would have been in the presence of an interviewer external to the organization or of another service user.

CONCLUSION

A final consideration of the ways in which the PE process was adaptive in the social context of evaluation (Rossi & Freeman, 1993) is in order. First, there was a good fit between the social ecology of the organization and the PE methodology, Greene (1988a). Greene (1991) contrasts the characteristics of program environments in which PE is a good choice (receptive staff members; collegial agency climate) or a poor one (hierarchical context; minimal group skills). In the present study, the organization was developed using a PAR process emphasizing shared control, collective analysis, research and planning. Participants had good process skills and were trained in democratic decision making. Inviting participation in all aspects of the evaluation, including the more technical data collection and analysis phases, an option in PE, built up stakeholder feelings of ownership and responsibility for the evaluation.

Second, this study underscored the need for evaluators to possess a comprehensive knowledge of research methods. Participants favoured the use of open-ended interview questions requiring qualitative analysis and expected me to provide expertise in this area.

Third, the evaluation of this small grass-roots organization can be linked to a social change process. On an individual level, participating stakeholders acquired transferable skills and a better understanding of the outcome of their activism. On a group level, the evaluation helped to strengthen and energize internal and external links to further the programs' social objectives. On a community level, the restructured organizations are now able to share their positive evaluation experience and expertise with other grass-roots groups that are part of their network.

Within the context of empowerment theory, the present study used a qualitative methodology to continue the exploration of components of the empowerment process. An inductive analysis of interview data indicated that stakeholders felt that their participation in PE had contributed to increasing their perception of self-efficacy within the organization and had enabled them to acquire new evaluation related skills and information. Building on these results, future research on the PE process could incorporate a mixed-method approach to study stakeholders' experience of empowerment by pairing open-ended questions with Likert-type scale items exploring, for example, the degree of control stakeholders felt they effectively exercised over the PE process and the degree to which specific evaluation skills have been acquired or perfected.

Lastly, two areas for further research in developing PE methodology can be delineated. As noted by participants, the challenge for PE lies in combining efficiency with wide stakeholder participation in all phases. Participants' comments indicate the following avenues for exploration: (1) giving stakeholders a hands-on experience of the entire PE process through an initial workshop; (2) finding ways of selecting individual participants that represent all important program constituencies and are highly committed to the PE process; (3) keeping the process flowing within a well publicized and tight time frame.

Furthermore, the search for optimizing PE methodology can only be conducted by factoring in the ecology of the program environment. Greene (1991) proposes the implementation of PE in "challenging" settings with a tradition of hierarchical decision-making. However, the PE process is already lengthened by the need for consultation and consensus building. Attempting to guide stakeholders from a hierarchical, task-oriented organizational environment through a PE
would require additional built-in time to teach process skills and small group work to ensure optimum participation. Given the relatively small number of evaluations that have been conducted using a PE methodology, more information is required regarding the characteristics of a suitable organizational environment. Such knowledge would serve to guide evaluators in considering the fit between PE methodology and a particular organization and in adapting their specific implementation of PE to a program’s ecology.

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