

Planning Meaningful Evaluations & Research Projects in Youth Mentoring

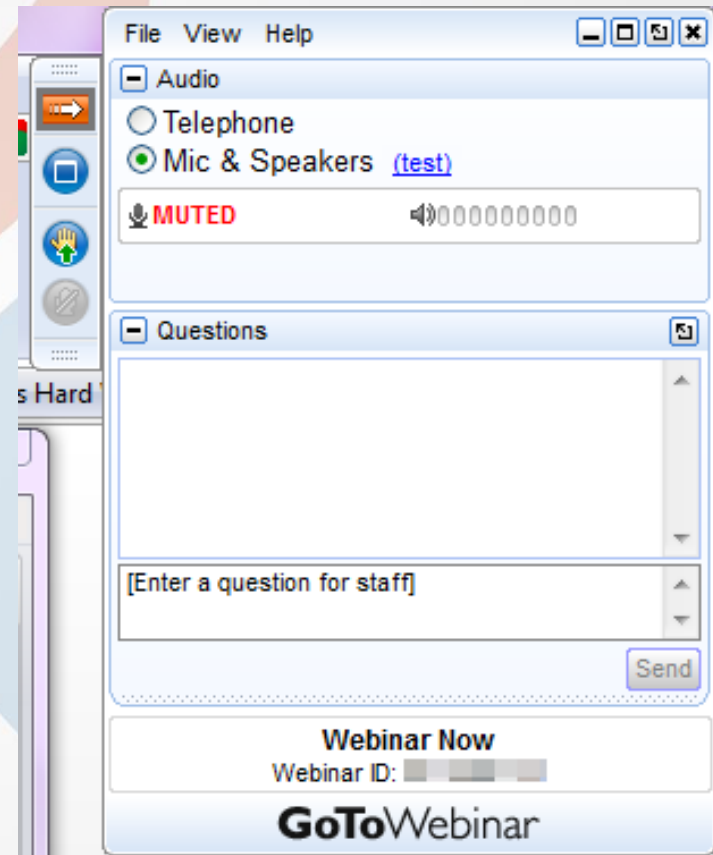
Michael Karcher – UT-San Antonio

Gabe Kuperminc – Georgia State University

Michael Garringer – MENTOR (facilitator)

Welcome!

- Thanks to OJJDP for their support
- A few housekeeping things...
 - Phones are muted during the webinar to ensure a good recording
 - Questions for our presenters can be submitted via the Question panel
 - We will leave time for Q&A
 - **Slides/recording will be available within a few days (via NMRC site)**



Introductions!



Michael Karcher – UT-San Antonio



Gabe Kuperminc – Georgia State University



Michael Garringer – MENTOR

Background

- **Work of the NMRC Research Board offers unique view on mentoring research**
 - Types of designs being implemented
 - Characteristics of peer reviewed research and other publications
 - Challenges measuring the important aspects of mentoring interventions
 - Challenges of detecting effects of mentoring

Goals and Objectives

- Review key aspects of organizational readiness to evaluate mentoring or conduct research on a program's services
- Discuss strategies for bridging the researcher-practitioner divide:
 - Expectations
 - Fidelity of implementation
 - Data collection planning and management

Organizational Readiness and Research on Youth Mentoring

Michael J. Karcher

University of Texas - San Antonio

The Program Evaluation Lifecycle: *Developmental, Formative, Outcome*

1. Know thyself—know thy program
2. Realistically assess its current state
3. Consequences of rushing to evaluate too soon
(case study of BBBS High School Bigs evaluation in 2009)

Steps Toward Measuring Impact*

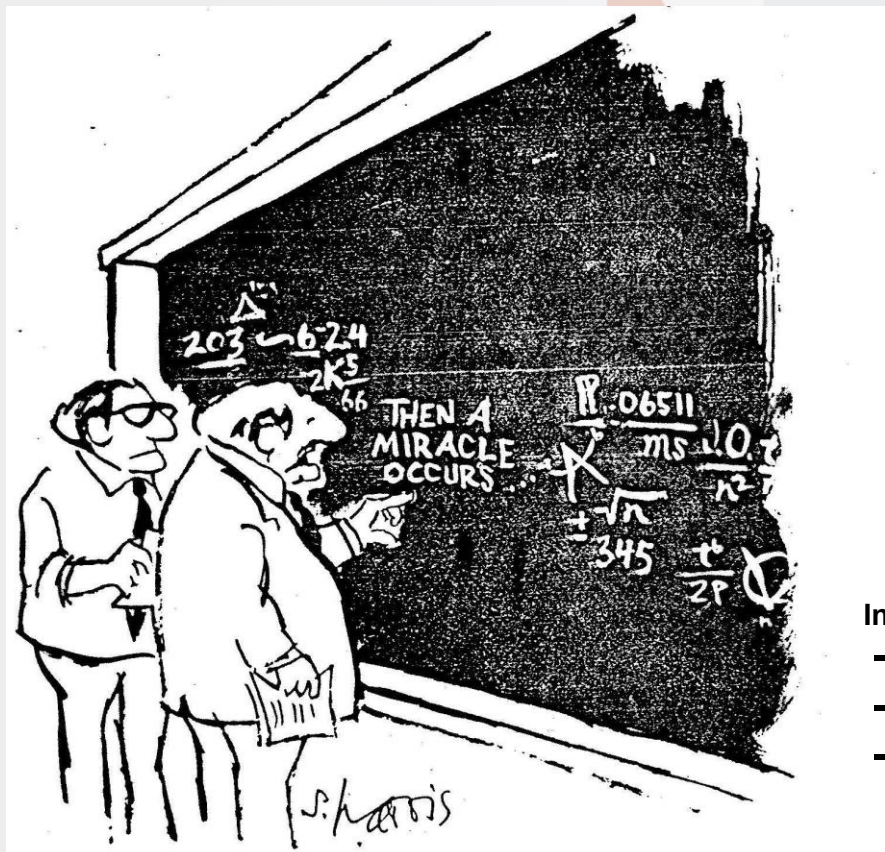
- **Explore: Build, refine, inspect (developmental)**
 - **Commit: Roll it out (implementation/formative)**
 - **Test through an outcome evaluation**
- * Some issues and terminology around scientific evidence: Empirically supported vs. evidence-based; statistically significant vs. meaningful (non-trivial) effect size

First step—Knowing what you’re doing

- Too often program stakeholders* want to “show its impact” or “prove its effective”
- But don’t really know:
 - *what* IT is (what’s happening on the ground)
 - or *how* IT works to reach outcomes
- First step: either agree on what IT’s goals are or identify program components and deduce likely effects

* stakeholders include program staff, administrators, funders and anyone else with a “stake” in the program

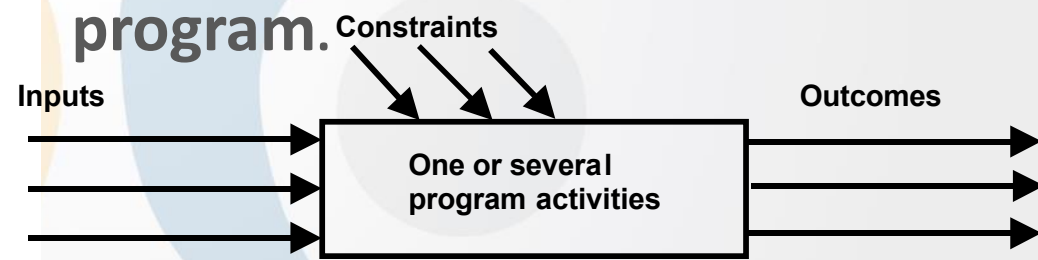
Modeling a Program



"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

Jean Rhodes shared this cartoon with me years ago

Identifying the program activities* (what is in the box), what inputs are needed for it to run, any constraints on its effectiveness, and what are logical consequences (outcomes) of experiencing the program.



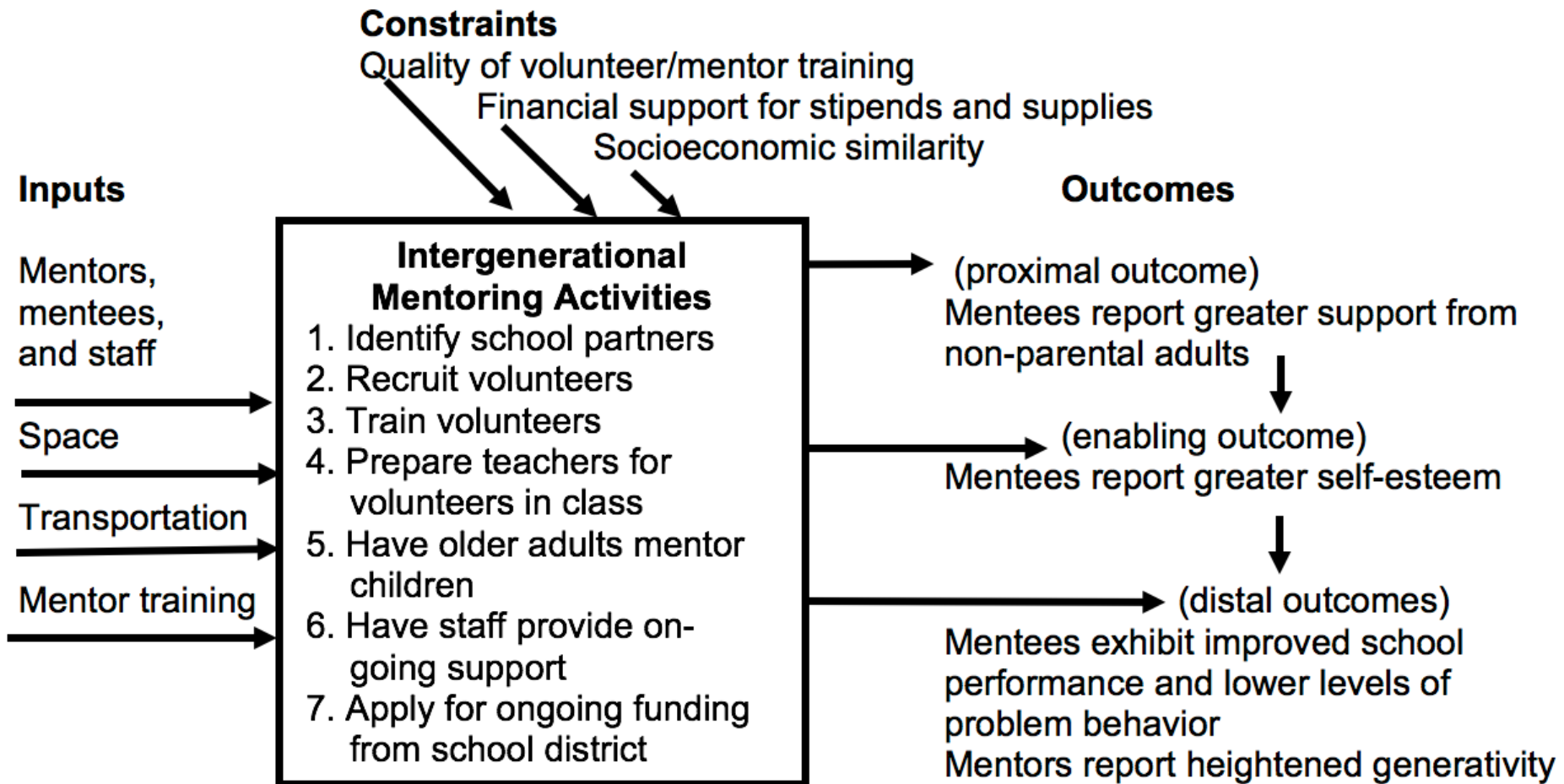
(Approach by Borich & Jemelka, 1980)

* Program Activities = Active ingredients, "causal agents," interactions (not just what games get played), and experiences

How to think about the system in which you'll try to effect change: Program modeling

- **Transactions:** Basic interactions or pieces of your consultation/program--mentoring activities
- **Inputs:** Things your program depends on (\$, clients, time, place, staff, supplies/games for activities)
- **Constraints:** Things that impinge on or effect the program's effectiveness
- **Outcomes:** What you believe to produce or effect through her work

An Evaluateable Program Model



Taken from, and described fully in Karcher, M. J., Kuperminc, G., Portwood, S., Sipe, C., & Taylor, A. (2006). Mentoring programs: A framework to inform program development, research, and evaluation. *Journal of Community Psychology, 34*, 709-725.

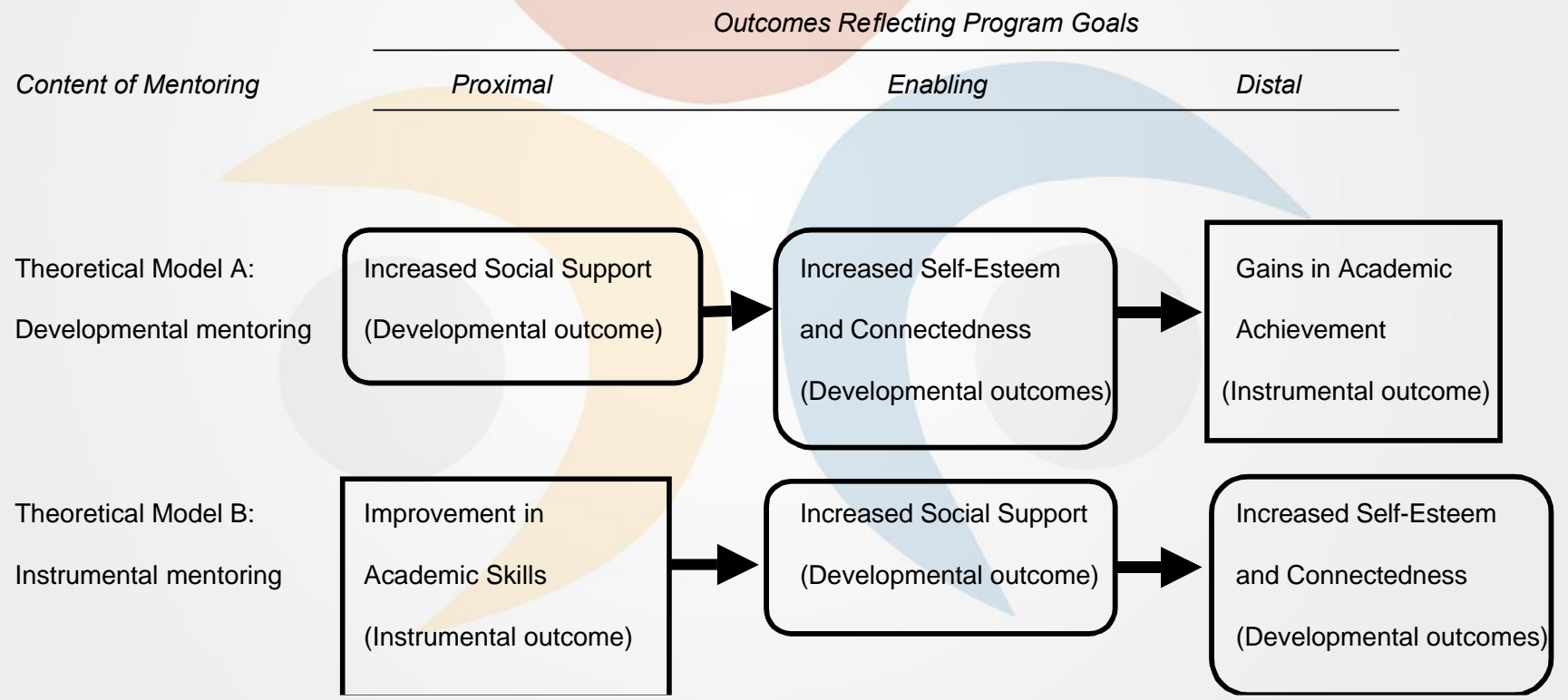
From Trust to Fidelity of Implementation

Can people trust that your program will be faithfully delivered as promised?

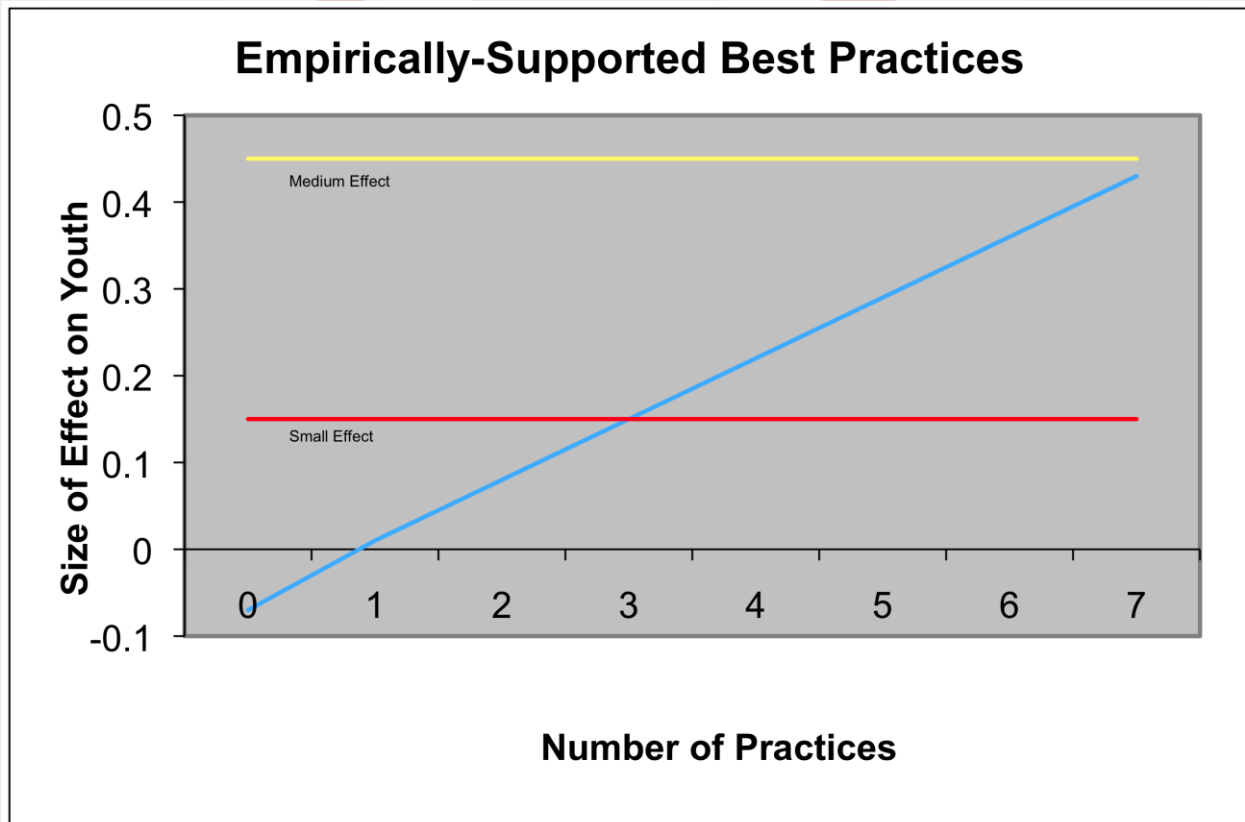
- Erik Erikson described “fidelity” as the psychological virtue that emerges when there is synchrony between environmental support (societal demands and rewards) and youth’s developmental needs and abilities.
- Fidelity, like dependability, means consistency in the delivery of all program component activities across:
 - Time
 - Context
 - Population

Toward Outcomes from a Theory of Change (with sequence of proximal to distal outcomes)

Program modeling the causal relationships between proximal and distal outcomes



Early in Developing a Program Model: Determine Needed and Affordable Practices




DuBois et al.'s (2002) **meta-analysis** also taught us that mentoring program effects are larger when programs better mentor the mentors through training, support, and program monitoring practice.

Look to meta-analyses of evidence-based program practices

Biggest effects found by DuBois et al. in programs providing:

- Monitored implementation (e.g., matching, meetings)
 - Structured activities
 - Ongoing training (not just orientation or supervision)
 - Parent involvement
 - Clear guidelines regarding frequency of contact
 - Matches in community or workplace (not in schools*)
- FREEBIE: Being able to document the number of best practices used in your program (e.g., using validated QMS reports) is one of the best ways to justify/explain the likely impact your program would have were you to do a million-dollar RCT on it. Based on findings from DuBois et al. (2002) meta-analysis showing the expected program effect size as a function of the number of best practices a program employs



Bridging the worlds of research and practice in evaluation planning

Gabriel P. Kuperminc
Georgia State University

Objectives



- **Research and Practice Partnerships**
 - What are they?
 - Understanding and Managing Expectations
- **Agreeing on measurement tools and data collection protocols**
- **The importance of measuring implementation fidelity**
- **Planning for participant attrition and other data collection challenges**



Contexts of Evaluation

- **Evaluation for Hire**
 - Mentoring org hires evaluator/researchers
 - E.g., Evaluator deliverables to help organization meet funding requirements
- **Research Site**
 - Grant to research mentoring processes or outcomes
 - E.g., Mentoring org agrees to research protocols to help researchers meet grant requirements
- **Partnership**
 - Researchers and Mentoring Org receive funding together
 - E.g., Power and decision-making shared

From Evaluation Contract to Partnership

- **Partnerships are**
 - Long term
 - Focused on problems of practice
 - Committed and mutual
 - Intentional
 - Produce original work (synergy)

For more info: <http://rpp.wtgrantfoundation.org/>

Expectations



- Research ethics framed in terms of IRB requirements
- Research methods emphasize internal validity (strong causal claims)
- Procedures and measures emphasize standardization and reliability
- **Strong conclusions rely on:**
 - Fidelity – was program delivered as planned?
 - Minimizing unintended problems (e.g., differential attrition)
- Practice ethics emphasize safety & maximizing service delivery
- Methods emphasize external validity (useful knowledge)
- Procedures and measures emphasize minimizing burden on volunteers, participants, and staff
- **Strong conclusions rely on:**
 - Meeting organization's benchmarks
 - Value added – confirm what already known and learn something new



Who Cares?

- **Stakeholders**
 - Organization Board of Directors
 - Program Administration (Director, Managers)
 - Program Staff
 - Volunteers (mentors)
 - Youth
 - Parents
 - Researchers/Evaluators
 - Funding Agencies
- **Differences in**
 - Levels of interest and influence
 - What they hope for and worry about



Some Practitioner Issues with Research Orientation

- **Ethics**
 - IRB focus on rights of participants feels overly constricting, burdensome, unconcerned with issues of greatest concern to mentoring org.
- **Methods**
 - Need for control groups means services denied to some youth who need them
- **Procedures and Measures**
 - Having to do everything the same way keeps us from tailoring our services to client needs
 - Keep evaluation short and to the point (why do surveys have to ask the same questions over and over?)
- **Fidelity, Monitoring, and Minimizing Attrition**
 - Can't we be trusted to do the right thing?
 - If someone chooses to leave the program, isn't it intrusive to try to follow up with them? What if they make us look bad?

Some Researcher issues with Practice Orientation

- **Ethics**
 - No choice but to follow IRB guidelines; how to ensure program staff trained and compliant
- **Methods**
 - Ensure best possible design to answer research questions
- **Procedures and Measures**
 - Some flexibility, but need to know what the program is and isn't
 - Good evaluation requires significant effort, payoff is stronger conclusions and results
- **Fidelity, Monitoring, and Minimizing Attrition**
 - Can't evaluate effectively if critical activities not documented



Issues Specific to Evaluating Mentoring

- **Mentoring models/philosophies**
 - Developmental (“friendship”) vs. Instrumental model
 - Interaction/Alliance between mentor(s) and mentee(s) always central
 - Needs to be considered as part of “fidelity”
- **Program supports for mentors, mentees, & families**
 - Match support, ongoing training
- **Distinctions between studying “youth” vs. “match”**
- **Issues with understanding “Intent to Treat”**
 - Never matched (e.g., more youth than mentors available)
 - Early termination of matches vs. dropout from study



Bridging the Divide



- **Formal agreement on questions to be answered**
- **Regular communication/trouble shooting plan**
 - Ongoing monitoring of progress
 - Disseminating to key stakeholders
 - Anticipate potential conflicts and agree on resolution strategies
- **Dissemination plan**
 - Reaching different audiences with meaningful info
- **Action plan**
 - Making sure findings are used
 - Clear roles for partners

Researchers/Evaluators

- **Facilitate New and Unfamiliar**
 - Make training as easy and accessible as possible
 - Explain reasons and consider alternatives
 - Be bilingual – learn to “talk” research and practice
- **Integrate new procedures into existing ones**
 - Fidelity assessment as part of match support
 - Data collection as part of intake
 - Sensitivity to practitioner concerns (e.g., length of surveys)
- **Listen and adapt to staff suggestions**
 - Avoid top-down approach, ensure buy-in at all levels
 - Do it over and over again to ensure continuity (reminders of why we’re doing this, attending to staff turnover)

Program Administrators

- **Commit to addressing research questions**
 - Understand strengths and limitations of chosen methods
 - Work with researchers to develop language both can understand and use
- **Follow through on promised resources**
 - Researchers/evaluators need your input, expertise & access to program staff and materials
- **Ask the questions you need answered**

Importance of Implementation Fidelity

- Can only know that program works if you know it happened as intended
- Identify key components, e.g.,
 - Expected meeting frequency and duration
 - Completing all curriculum activities (if applicable)
 - Relationship quality
 - Program supports
- Can use variations in implementation for deeper understanding of “what’s in the black box”

Data Collection Challenges



Recruiting Participants

- Informed consent and assent – long and legalese, constraints on who (IRB certified personnel)
- **Ensuring effective completion of measures**
- **Maximizing retention throughout study**
 - Follow-up even if match terminates before expected duration
- **Managing timing**
 - pre-tests, on-going assessments, follow-ups

Minimize Attrition

- **Study not same as program participation**
 - Interested in what happens even if leave program early
 - Importance of each youth's point of view
- **Keep in touch**
 - Send birthday cards, holiday cards, thank you notes
 - Include self-addressed card for address changes
 - Foster sense of belonging in study
- **Collect locator information**
 - Address, phone numbers, other contact info
 - Info for others who would know how to reach
- **Provide incentives**
 - E.g., increase incentives for each step of study completed
- **Provide updates**
 - Inform mentors, youth, parents about what you're learning



Questions?

- Use the Question Panel on the screen to submit your questions!

Reminder!

- Look for email about slides and recording
- Second webinar in the series will be held **April 20th at 1:00 eastern**
 - Register on the NMRC site
- Programs can request **free technical assistance**, including planning support on evaluative work
- Look for Measurement Guidance Toolkit updates over the summer
- Please fill out evaluation that pops up!!!!

On behalf of the NMRC and OJJDP...

Thank you!!!