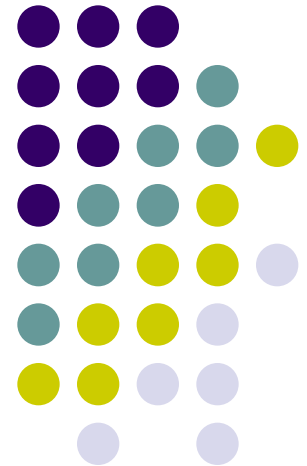# Building Evaluation Capacity for Communities of Color: Lessons from the Field

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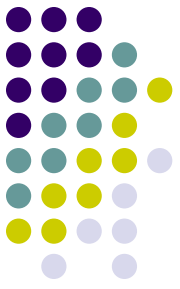
Mental Health Center of Denver

MHCD

Enriching Lives and Minds

Evaluations Conducted with Communities of Color at MHCD
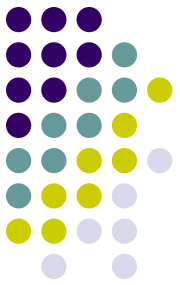
- MHCD is a large non-profit community-based mental health organization in Denver, CO

- Fortaleciendo la Communidad project
  - SAMHSA funded project to provide HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infection and substance abuse prevention in the Latino community in Denver, CO

- Project Redemption
  - SAMHSA funded project to provide HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections and substance abuse to the African American and Latino communities, focusing on the re-entry population, in Denver, CO
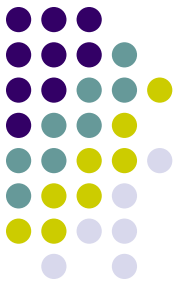
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#1 Lesson Learned

- **Approach each group as a learning community** (not as an expert)
  - First 2-3 interactions should assess where the organization providing the services is at in term understanding evaluation (mini needs-assessment)
  - At the begin, LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN!!!
  - Building relationships with the service providers
    - Create a circle of open communication
    - Establish trust/ reducing prior stigma with evaluation and research
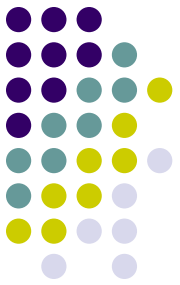
#2 Lesson Learned

- **Do not avoid the difficult conversations**
  - By difficult conversation we mean discussions regarding roles, preconceptions about evaluation/evaluators, labels and the intent of the evaluation
  - Engaging in these conversations at the beginning will reduce hassles in the long run
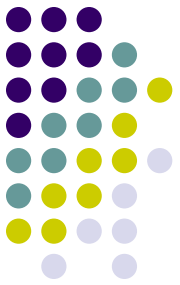
#3 Lesson Learned

- **Being very clear about limits and possibilities of evaluation**
  - What can evaluation do?, What can evaluation not do? (based on your project's capacity)
  - Take an "empowerment" appropriate to evaluation
  - Evaluation is commonly associated with the research
    - People are used to research were there is they are required to provide an input, but not output is presented to the service providers (mostly only in journals)

#4 Lesson Learned

- **We approach evaluation from the perspective of Community-based participatory research (CBPR), but with different players**
  - CBPR are commonly universities paired with community-based organization (CBO's), in which the universities are still the dominate power in the relationship
  - We apply a community-based participatory evaluation model in which MHCD and the service provider are equal partners

Questions

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