Program Theory-Drive Evaluation Approach – An Exercise in Practice

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ABSTRACT

Chen, H. (1990) provided a comprehensive framework on the use of theory-oriented perspectives in program evaluation, discussing the nature and functions of program theory, approaches to constructing program theories, and the integration of program theory with evaluation processes. The framework relied on the ability for program implementers and evaluators to conceptualize understand programs through the use of program theory and/or logic models. Since then, the increasingly frequent use of logic models has been seen in energy efficiency as a tool for program conceptualization. In Chen, H. (2005), an updated version of conceptual modeling is introduced. The program theory model, seen in Chen, H. (2005), incorporates the use of a change model, explaining the descriptive assumptions, and the action model, describing the prescriptive assumptions, to provide a conceptual framework of program theory.

For Southern California Edison’s Local Government Partnership Program, a program theory model, using Chen, H. (2005) as a guide, is developed as part of the program’s strategic business plan. The purpose of the model is to provide a succinct and useful program conceptualization for stakeholders involved in the program process. The program theory model describes (1) the explicit and implicit assumptions made by program stakeholders about the actions required to obtain greater energy efficiency, and (2) how these actions will lead to specific outcomes that result in the program accomplishing its goals. The exercise allows us to study the implications of how the current applications of theory-driven program evaluation may be improved upon by the use of the Chen, H. (2005) program theory model from the commonly used logic models.