Simple, Participatory Assessment of Real Change (SPARC): An Evaluation and Learning Approach

Jules Dasmariñas and Rhonda Schlangen
Nov-Dec 2017
Contents

The SPARC Idea ................................................................................................................. 1
SPARC Development ............................................................................................................ 2
The SPARC Pilot Process ..................................................................................................... 3
Partner-level SPARC .......................................................................................................... 4
Network-level SPARC ....................................................................................................... 5
Harvested Outcomes .......................................................................................................... 8
SPARC Lessons .................................................................................................................. 10
Where We Go From Here .................................................................................................... 13
Appendices ......................................................................................................................... 16
I. The SPARC Idea

This report presents outcomes generated from a participatory monitoring and evaluation process AVAC developed and pilot tested with its partners, as well as learning about the process. In 2016, AVAC received funding from USAID to develop and implement the Coalition to Advance and Support Prevention Research (CASPR) project, aimed at cultivating a sustainable, Africa-centered network dedicated to helping accelerate biomedical HIV prevention research through advocacy, policy, regulatory, community engagement, and communications efforts.

AVAC initially developed a traditional, logic model-based monitoring and reporting framework, with the goal in part, of adhering to the funders’ reporting requirements. However, AVAC also recognized that such approaches often miss important details and useful learning that can be generated from the collaboration and insight of the nine CASPR partners (Box 1). In response to this need, AVAC designed a participatory monitoring and evaluation process called, Simple, Participatory, Assessment of Real Change or SPARC.

Drawing from Outcome Harvesting and similar participatory evaluation approaches, SPARC aspires to engage project partners in identifying signs of progress and outcomes across the network’s four priority objective areas and its development as a network. It also aims to encourage CASPR partners and AVAC project staff to see themselves as, and become active contributors in the evaluation process.

Box 1: CASPR Partners
From the start, we knew that we wanted to create an evaluation process that was participatory and one that puts collective learning front and center. We also realized that we did not have to reinvent the wheel so we reviewed other organizations' experience with outcome harvesting, adapted what we thought was useful, and made our own stamp on it. From this starting point, we developed SPARC as a test to see if a network-wide, participatory approach could be both robust and engaging.

II. SPARC Development

In early 2017, we developed a concept note outlining the idea of SPARC. From there, we started drafting the protocol, drawing on related evaluation experiences and informed by CASPR’s specific characteristics. The most significant considerations and adjustments were:

- Reflecting network diversity: CASPR is organized around complimentary but unique objectives, and individual members work on different objectives. In order to understand whether the whole of CASPR was greater than the sum of its parts, we needed an approach that facilitated sharing of information and analysis across areas of work.
- Starting simple: There were two motivations for keeping SPARC simple and accessible—partners' varying experience and appetite for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL). They have varying resources for and experience with MEL, and, we anticipated, mixed interest for a qualitative MEL process. Thus, the approach needed to be efficient and demonstrate clear value for partners’ time and other resources. While starting simple in the pilot phase, we have integrated kernels of more complex processes that partners can build on in the future. This is a conscious trade-off and as capacity and support develops, the process can become more sophisticated and rigorous.
- Enabling partners' independent use: The design of SPARC also hinges on network members' relatively independent application of the process at the organization level. We drafted a step-by-step guide and tools to facilitate this, and based on learning in the pilot, are recommending a data recording platform to help minimize barriers to partners' use.
- Facilitating a shift from outputs to outcomes: The process also aims to facilitate a more expansive analysis of change related to SPARC’s goals. This requires two shifts: from the easier to measure activities and outputs to outcomes, and from thinking only in terms of a project’s influence. Placing projects or activities at the center of analysis can distort perspective about what has changed or not and a project’s influence on that change. SPARC is oriented to progress related to CASPR’s target outcomes, and then identifying plausible influences on that change, including but not limited to CASPR. These shifts are intended to promote good evaluative thinking and should reinforce strong M&E practice in the
network. SPARC tries to facilitate this thinking through the process design and the guiding questions in each step of the process.

The SPARC guidelines (see Appendix A) integrate these details, and describes the step-by-step process to pilot SPARC. We will continue to update the guidelines in response to learning from the pilot and subsequent ideas about making SPARC as useful as possible to CASPR members.

III. The SPARC Pilot Process

SPARC was a new process that requires relatively uniform application and utilization across a newly formed network. This created conditions we might not encounter in other settings, such as a single organization. Since uptake was unpredictable, a pilot process in the first year was intended to improve buy-in and interest in adopting more broadly throughout the network. AVAC also wanted to test SPARC to see if it added value to CASPR, in terms of members’ experience of the process and the information generated as a result.

SPARC is designed as a three-step, iterative process. During the first step, all individual members collect, analyze and prioritize “outcomes stories” based on their respective specific spheres of work and context. Next, all the partners come together and share and interrogate the outcomes they identified, generate new outcomes, and then process and prioritize them to understand progress related to CASPR’s priority objectives and network development.

Figure 1: SPARC Process
In July 2017, we initiated the pilot with a set of orientation briefings, initially with the CASPR project management team and then in a conference call with all partners. The purpose was to review the rationale for SPARC, the mechanisms to undertake it, and to gather initial thoughts and suggestions. We then solicited volunteers to test the SPARC process at the partner level (Step 1). Two organizations—NVHAM and AVAC—volunteered and each appointed a staff member to facilitate the process. Aside from the guidelines, we also provided worksheets for the organizations to use in their processes. (See Appendix B.)

Next, the occasion of an all partners’ meeting was used to collate partners’ outcomes and develop network-wide outcomes (Step 2). “SPARCfest”, conceptualized as a fun, engaging day, brought partners through a process of generating, sharing, reviewing, synthesizing and prioritizing signs of progress and changes across all four CASPR objective areas and network development (see agenda in Appendix C).

This report represents the third step in this process—utilizing information generated at SPARCfest to develop a report of outcomes and progress, which will feed into the development of program plans.

IV. Partner-level SPARC

In August the two partner volunteers, NVHAM and AVAC, conducted their SPARC processes. Both organizations followed the guidelines but structured the process according to their organizational preferences. NVHAM’s three-person team dedicated a full day to the process; AVAC involved about ten team members and spent a half day on the process. Additional time was required to write up the reports. Both organizations reported finding the process a useful way to recap, synthesize and analyze their CASPR-related work. In addition, the process raised ideas relevant to future planning.

NVHAM’s Morenike Ukpong facilitated the local discussion, which ran for about eight hours. AVAC’s MEL lead was not present at the actual event since attempts to join remotely online were unsuccessful due to technical difficulties. Much of what transpired was documented through a very detailed report that NVHAM submitted to AVAC replete with pictures and short video clips.

AVAC, on the other hand, devoted four hours to SPARC, discussing with project technical leads and selected staff about the most significant outcomes of the project. This process was facilitated by CASPR project manager, Navita Jain with support from the MEL team, both in-person (Jules Dasmariñas) and remotely (Rhonda Schlangen).

NVHAM and AVAC approached SPARC similarly, using creative exercises facilitated by one or two staff members to stimulate discussion among participants. Although it is difficult to compare the two organization-level pilot tests, as the evaluators had a more
direct observation of AVAC’s process, the insights we draw here are based on the quality of the outcome stories developed at the end of these two separate sessions.

In terms of strengths, there were clear efforts from both organizations to draft their stories in a manner that was descriptive and informative. For instance, NVHMAS developed four outcome stories that focused on its training of community educators on PrEP literacy; HIV Prevention Academy and LeNNiB Champion program; community education and awareness building in social media and with journalists; and its push for the development of a national roadmap for PrEP in the country. AVAC, meanwhile identified five outcome story threads but had only time to develop two full stories that each focused on the improved frequency of clinical trial engagements with uneven implementation of good participatory practice (GPP), and the building of a network of advocates (e.g. Africa Free of New HIV Infections or AfHNi; and APHA) that bodes well for a more sustained and less episodic advocacy in HIV prevention research. These stories were also written and submitted for review by us, the evaluators, quite rapidly that allowed us to give improvement suggestions.

There, however, was a tendency among these draft stories to focus on results emerging from specific activities that the organization undertook (read: outputs). For instance, NVHMAS’s change stories cast the advocacy trainings or campaigns they held as their lead story. The real outcomes or what came out of these efforts—the supposed highlight of the narrative—was either lost or hidden in the narrative. This could have been a mere function of writing style but is telling of how the approach may have been misinterpreted. It also may relate to the early stages of CASPR but just as likely could indicate a gap in monitoring. The partner-level outcomes were often output-heavy, and perhaps asking critical questions about audiences’ reactions could help develop more robust outcomes.

Another strength was that working as a group to identify and analyze outcomes also enabled participants to ask questions and challenge each other about what happened and the significance to CASPR outcomes. Through this process, participants were able to refine and hone in on outcomes relevant to their CASPR remit as well as overall organizational goals and objectives. During this process, ideas also arose that could inform future planning.

V. Network-level SPARC

In September CASPR partners convened in Cape Town, South Africa for a 3-day meeting. The first day was devoted to SPARC. All, save for one partner organization, were able to attend the “SPARC Harvest Festival” or SPARCFest. This was the moment when partners were to contribute the outcomes they observed in their own areas of work, and engage in collection and analysis of outcomes across the network.
In preparation for SPARCfest, we asked all partners to consider signs of progress and outcomes related to the particular objectives and goals they were trying to advance through CASPR. The pre-work was intentionally kept light, but was aimed at encouraging partners to start thinking about outcomes in advance. We also distributed a SPARC Fact Sheet and FAQ to provide further grounding about the process (see Appendix D).

Once gathered in Cape Town, we kicked off SPARCfest with an introduction to SPARC. NVHMAS and AVAC immediately followed their presentations of their partner-level SPARC process and outcomes. This was intended to model more fully developed outcome stories and stimulate thinking among the partners. The outcomes by these two organizations became the foundation for integrating the outcomes (not fully-developed as outcome stories) identified by the rest of the coalition partners prior to the SPARCfest.

Through facilitated exercises and group work, partners shared and compared the outcomes, positive and negative, they observed in their respective areas of work during the first project year. These were synthesized as cross-network outcomes, shifting from a partner-level to network-level focus.

They then worked as groups to refine the outcomes and deliberate their significance and CASPR’s potential direct and indirect influence.

These summary outcomes were presented to the full group, who subsequently voted on those they identified as “most significant”. These outcomes are listed in detail in Box 2.

To conclude SPARCfest, partners used visual art to express their sense of the most significant results of their engagement with CASPR.
Everyone received the SPARC process very well. Through discussion with partners during and after the process, and from debriefing with AVAC staff following the in-person meeting, we concluded that the SPARC process was successful and that the lessons we learned were all helpful in carving out the future of SPARC.

Their engagement in the different exercises and discussions was sustained all day, showing genuine enthusiasm about the novel MEL approach. We as facilitators took turns leading specific sections of SPARC; when one was leading, the other was supporting.
IV. Harvested Outcomes

The outcomes that CASPR partners identified for the first year of the program correspond to the network’s key objective areas. They are the result of deliberation, sharing stories and experiences, and thoughtful analysis. While there were many outcomes identified in the beginning, they were eventually streamlined to cover the following:

Box 2: CASPR Year 1 Outcomes

1. **Advocacy Network**
   Networks and advocacy coalitions linked directly and indirectly to CASPR, and within the greater field of HIV prevention R&D, have been established within the first year of the project. Examples include Advocacy for Prevention of HIV and AIDS (APHA), Africa Free of New HIV Infections (AfNHi), and African AIDS Vaccine Virtual network (AAVVi.net).

   Partners also observed that CASPR had enhanced the capacity of advocates, as evidenced by the incorporation of HIV advocacy within local organizations; and increased engagement of local AVAC Fellows Program alumni and other stakeholders with the research and development agenda.

2. **Research Preparedness**
   The most significant outcome for this area was that engagement in research has not been even across clinical trials. While there is acknowledgement of, and at times interest in stakeholder engagement, the objectives, expectations and priorities of the actual engagement have not been well-defined or transparent between research institutions and advocates. For instance, people were not able to articulate clearly what they see as meaningful engagement of communities in research.

   Nonetheless, the meeting highlighted a growing recognition of the importance of stakeholder engagement and Good Participatory Practice (GPP), including among a recent group of prevention research stakeholders: the private sector.

3. **Research Translation**
   In the first year of CASPR, partners observed that there has been an increase in public engagement with the HIV prevention field (e.g. around the PrEP and HIV self-testing launch in Kenya), where journalists and civil society advocates played a leading role. The number of high-quality stories that quote expert knowledge has increased.
However, partners agreed that journalists and advocates alike were having trouble keeping up with the growing complexity of the science. There is an ongoing need to clarify confusion in the community around, e.g., the distinction between a vaccine, PrEP and long-acting injectables, the meaning of trial results (e.g. 40% protection), and Standard of Care in HIV prevention trials.

Partners called for more support in research literacy, so they are better equipped to engage with HIV prevention researchers, and educate communities on protocols and processes.

4. **Policy Engagement**
   There has been sustained and increased global and national funding for HIV research. South-South collaboration between India and Africa on HIV research and development has recently received funding commitment, signaling what is hoped will be a growth in domestic financing for research.

5. **Network Development**
   The proliferation of emergent networks during the first year (e.g. APHA, AfNHi, AAVi.net) was noted. It is not clear yet how these new networks connect into a larger architecture of advocates, and what their accountability and mission will be within organizations and across networks. A mapping of HIV advocacy networks in Africa was strongly endorsed, as a means to positioning the CASPR coalition where it is most impactful.

6. **Gender Integration**
   The linkage between efforts around key populations and efforts around adolescent girls and women within the nexus of rights-based work and research agendas was recognized.

The process of developing them was earnest and energetic. Yet, as a review of the outcomes listed will illustrate, the substance and detail of the outcomes can be quite limited.

Other than the two partners who piloted SPARC within their organizations’ CASPR teams, we did not ask partners to prepare beyond considering possible signs of progress. Participants relied on recall. The outcomes may have benefitted from more
preparation by individual participants, in particular allowing elaboration of detail and a broader capture of cross-network outcomes.

During SPARCfest, there was limited attention to interrogating the outcomes or crafting them. The resulting outcomes would benefit from supporting data and more detail. The outcomes could also be strengthened by analysis of significance, such as whether the outcome represents a positive or negative change, what influenced it, etc.

Similarly, the process did not include substantiation of the outcomes—that is, incorporating perspectives of others who can confirm, refute, or, most likely, add a more nuanced perspective to the outcomes. This step is important to developing robustly supported outcomes. As this step is also more time and resource-intensive, we did not incorporate it in the SPARC pilot.

While these tradeoffs perhaps limit the evaluative heft of the outcomes, we felt it was a valuable inception process to start to corral a large swath of potential results to outcomes that the CASPR network feels are shared across partners. It is also important to note that this process was also conducted with a relatively new network that does not regularly meet together as a group. Therefore, SPARCfest served as an opportunity to share learning and analysis that could bridge silos that might naturally emerge as a result of working in different environments and tactics.

V. SPARC Lessons

This inaugural SPARC process was an introduction to participatory, qualitative evaluation. We deliberately kept the process simple in order to not overwhelm participants and to fit within the available time. Overall, partners benefitted from the process, which they say created time and space to reflect on progress and outcomes. The following lessons are aimed at optimizing this space and ensuring that SPARC becomes an integral part of project management.

The deliberative and communicative space that SPARC opens up to partners liberates the analysis of program results from a traditional and top-down approach.
Implementing SPARC at the Partner-level

- SPARC is best undertaken at the partner level with an evaluator present to act as co-facilitator and process monitor during the incipient year/s. The presence of the evaluator will ensure uniform application of the protocol before other creative deviations are taken.

- The approach offers flexibility and partners should feel free to structure the process in a way that aligns with team size, organizational culture, and, within some boundaries, available time. While both organizations followed the guidelines and completed the worksheets, they interpreted and fashioned their organization-level discussions differently.

- To amplify the robustness of the information available to work with during the network-wide process, more information needs to be collected and collated in advance of the SPARC process. Doing so will enable partners to draw on more rich and extensive information during partner-level SPARC processes, and should elevate the network-wide outcomes developed during SPARCfest.

Implementing SPARCfest

- SPARC takes time and is energy intensive for participants and facilitators. We should devote at least one full day to the SPARCfest and maintain two facilitators. This will allow partners to have more time to share and reflect on outcomes, and for facilitators to tag team.

- It also requires active, engaged facilitation. We intentionally set up the activities, and then let the process unfold in small groups. While we were on hand to answer questions, and partners were enthusiastically self-regulated in working in small groups, there needs to be an opportunity for facilitators to ask questions and provide feedback to support active learning of the process.

- SPARC is intentionally accessible to non-evaluators. In keeping with its participatory bent, it may be useful for partners to take turns co-leading SPARCfest in the future. This will allow them to master the approach and will serve them well in the future as they use or adapt it in their respective settings.

- Doing the process well can fill all available time, but some time should be reserved to gather feedback. We did not solicit feedback until after participants returned home, and received no responses. Gathering rapid feedback about the process by the end of SPARC would be optimal in the future. Asking for feedback later may yield little to no response given that partners will be back in “work priority mode.”

About Optimizing the Usefulness of the Process
- The process surfaces learning and issues that are useful for planning, so ideally SPARC would be timed more closely to decision-making points or planning processes.

- To maintain the learning momentum of SPARC, use existing program fora (e.g. quarterly meetings, newsletter, reports, etc.) to feature outcome stories and partner reflections on the approach/methodology.

Thoughtful and provocative, SPARC moves beyond outputs and activities and looks at the wider HIV prevention research field to surface significant outcomes.

About Generating (more) Robust Outcomes and Supporting Evaluative Thinking

- It is still very challenging to move away from an orientation of reporting against activities, focusing on demonstrating or “proving” influence or “impact”. Support and active facilitation is required to moderate a shift from acculturated focus on reporting activities and direct results to a broader orientation to field-level outcomes and critical analysis of the influences on those outcomes including but not limited to the specific project activities.

- The process is generative and produces, at the end, a set of agreed-upon outcomes, but these alone are insufficient to document the process and results. A process documenter is needed to take active notes and observation of people’s verbal and non-verbal reactions. The pilot-test did not have this luxury so discussion records produced by participants coupled with a triangulated recollection (debrief) between the two evaluators served as the primary basis for reconstructing what happened at the event.

VI. Where We Go From Here

Overall, SPARC was a useful and engaging process to support cross-network learning and analysis. Informal feedback from partners was highly positive. SPARC should be
continued as a complement to the CASPR monitoring and reporting processes. The challenge going forward will be to ensure the process is not burdensome and maintain the spirit of fun and positive engagement, while also making it more robust in order to generate more substantive outcomes.

Immediate priorities will be to integrate SPARC into ongoing CASPR information-sharing and reporting processes; use all opportunities to facilitate evaluative thinking and critical reflection; and capturing this information. Supporting partners to document and share outcome ideas will ensure continuity and provide a richer, more complete trove of outcome for SPARCfest 2018.

---

1. Partners’ sustained uptake of the SPARC process requires minor adjustments in MEL practices already in place and the development of new ones. We will continue to provide individual partner mentorship on its implementation and tap internal reporting forums to capture SPARC progress and outcomes. For instance, the quarterly reports partners send to AVAC should now include SPARC outcome stories (see Appendix E) whenever they emerge. They can also include a critical reflection on how SPARC implementation is proceeding in their quarterly updates. Some questions that may aid in their internal reporting are:

- Are partners able to undertake it?
- How do they organically integrate it in their daily work without creating additional burden for staff?
- Is it working? How can we ensure its sustainability?

2. Given the vertical reporting structure of the above, we will consider creating horizontal learning by using quarterly calls to share SPARC stories and experiences. The bi-weekly newsletter newly implemented can also have a dedicated section for SPARC (e.g. a featured outcome story of the quarter). There may be times when stories are
lean and that is fine; the point is to make SPARC integral to CASPR management and reporting practice.

3. In terms of innovation, we will develop a bespoke online portal (housed in www.Engage.AVAC.org, potentially) where partners can work on and file their SPARC stories. We will create this database and ensure partner input and training. Once established, this portal will be another excellent opportunity for partners to learn from each other’s work or achievements in real time; it could even spur a healthy competition for documenting outcome stories.

4. We will also augment active learning around SPARC by scheduling coffee break webinars with partners that are meant to provide technical assistance. Topics may range from training on the SPARC database to creative deviations partners may have undertaken to “domesticate” SPARC or make it more culturally appropriate.

The hope is that by the time partners convene their local staff or meet at the annual meeting to review their outcome stories and elect the most significant ones, they would already have their stories documented in the portal, their quarterly reports, and the newsletter. This practice of actively documenting and sharing outcome stories well before the partner and network-level SPARC convenings is not only efficient but minimizes recall bias too.

5. To ensure the robustness of outcome stories, an area that requires further attention and support will be the substantiation of outcomes through evidence-building and corroboration of outcome stories. While currently a part of the outcome story worksheet, this was an area of intentionally limited attention during the pilot. Going forward, partners will be encouraged and supported to identify, where possible, other sources of support for the outcomes. More visible, longer-term outcomes, such as adoption or implementation of new policies, are easier to validate through news reports, policy briefs, or media analysis. We recognize, however, that such documentation is often not available for interim advocacy outcomes, such as changes in the receptivity of certain audiences or commitment. AVAC/SPARC should give attention to supporting partners to identify appropriate sources of evidence.

Further, the corroboration of outcome stories is itself a form of evidence and is also an important step to enhance the reliability of the story. Here, partners would obtain the views of at least one person who is not part of, but is familiar with, the outcome and CASPR’s effort to influence it, in order to substantiate the outcomes story. This can be as simple as soliciting opinions of other stakeholders or as complex as undertaking more in-depth evaluative processes like focus groups or looking for rival explanations for the program’s claims. Using the analogy of forensics, the substantiation will try to prove that the program has in some way contributed to the harvested outcomes.
6. Finally, the value of the SPARC process is not just in the participatory identification of the program’s significant outcomes but ultimately lies in how implementers use the results to improve the program to achieve better impact. During the pilot phase, discussions about outcomes were frequently peppered with plans on what to do next, which we as facilitators tried to postpone or bracket until the outcomes were fully described and narrated. In our heads, however, these spurts of planning genius were a logical extension of the SPARC process. As originally conceived, we wanted SPARC to be a learning experience. Part of this requires the active use of results to identify and deliver the next program action. In CASPR parlance, this means attaching SPARC to the annual workplanning in which successful outcomes are built upon and where outcomes not yet fully realized are clearly identified in terms of concrete actions, and yes, activities.

Once done, the virtuous circle of program planning, implementation, outcome harvesting, and learning becomes complete.
APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A: SPARC Guidelines

Please refer to the separate file, SPARC Manual

APPENDIX B: Partner Outcome Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization Name:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Documentation Date/s:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic description of the outcome, including what changed, who was involved, and where and when it happened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why the change is relevant to CASPR goal and outcomes, and particular issue, challenge or barrier it helps address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How CASPR contributed and what other influences may have played a role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related evidence?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Any documentation, data or other evidence that support this outcome or analysis. Please provide a hyperlink to the evidence.
Corroboration?

This part in the process is not required during routine documentation of outcomes. Corroboration of outcomes become important once the most significant outcomes are elected by the partner team. See XYZ.

APPENDIX C: SPARCfest Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Facilitator(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DAY 1 – Thursday, September 14th</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00-9:00</td>
<td>Introduction, Expectations Check, SPARC Refresher</td>
<td>Stacey/Jules/Rhonda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:45</td>
<td>Partner Outcome Presentations</td>
<td>Florita/Navita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:45-10:15</td>
<td>Outcome Gallery Walk</td>
<td>Jules/Rhonda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15-10:30</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30-10:40</td>
<td>Transition Activity</td>
<td>Stacey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:40-12:00</td>
<td>Outcome Deep Dive</td>
<td>Jules/Rhonda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-1:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Ruth/Stacey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00-1:10</td>
<td>Transition Activity</td>
<td>Stacey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:10-2:00</td>
<td>Voting with Our Feet</td>
<td>Jules/Rhonda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00-2:50</td>
<td>State of the Outcome Report-Outs</td>
<td>Jules/Rhonda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:50-3:00</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00-4:00</td>
<td>What Did We Learn?</td>
<td>Jules/Rhonda / Stacey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Simple and Participatory Assessment of Real Change
A Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Approach

What is SPARC?

SPARC is a reflection and learning process that AVAC has developed and is piloting for CASPR. Drawn from qualitative evaluation approaches, notably Outcome Harvesting, it seeks to harness evaluative thinking and serve as a complement to a traditional and funder-focused monitoring and reporting framework.

SPARC looks beyond specific project deliverables and interrogates the bigger picture of the HIV prevention research field and CASPR’s contribution to those developments. It sparks honest and critical dialogue within and across partner organizations and, in so doing, forges strong collaborative relationships in charting the future direction of CASPR. Harvested results will feed into internal and external reporting.

Below are some of its distinguishing features:

**Outcomes-focused**

SPARC focuses on exploring and supporting outcomes stories often missed by traditional M&E. These rich narratives focus on changes in behavior, relationships, and practice of actors, as well as on processes and policies that CASPR is seeking to influence.

**Discourse-oriented**

SPARC promotes an open discussion within each CASPR partner organization and across the CASPR network. It aims to create a learning space that is social and active.

**Contribution-centered**

Since complex change is seldom attributable to a single act or actor, SPARC focuses on how CASPR has helped to cause the observed outcomes.

**Interactive**

Evaluation becomes more engaging when it promotes interactions among partners and allows them to voice and react to each other’s assessments.

**SPARC Pilot Process**

In Summer and Fall 2017, AVAC is piloting SPARC to test whether the approach meets partners’ needs and how it can be refined. Here’s what it will take:

**JUL: SPARK LAUNCH**

The overall concepts, approach, and methods are introduced to all partners. Three partners are identified to volunteer as pilot-testers.

**SEPT: NETWORK SPARC PROCESS**

Volunteers identify, prioritize, and agree upon the significance of their outcomes. They identify CASPR’s plausible contribution to the changes.

Volunteers share their harvested outcomes at the annual meeting. Other partners are engaged in collective analysis and identification of lessons across the CASPR network.

**OCT-NOV: SPARC REFINEMENT**

AVAC synthesizes network outcomes for reporting, and refines the SPARC approach and methodology for institutionalization.
SPARC FAQs

What is Outcome Harvesting?

SPARC is a very simple version of Outcome Harvesting, a qualitative evaluation approach. It was developed by evaluators in response to a need to capture the richness and range of changes in complex program environments. It collects evidence of what has changed in the field or among stakeholders and determines whether and how an intervention has contributed to those changes.

Why are we piloting SPARC?

We would like to go beyond “check-the-box” M&E and make it meaningful and creative. SPARC is our response to a growing demand for making M&E work for us.

In the SPARC pilot phase, we have integrated kernels of more sophisticated and complicated processes to introduce basic ideas that CASPR can build on in the future.

While outcomes are gathered for each of CASPR’s four objective areas—advocacy, research translation, research preparedness, and policy engagement—SPARC also seeks to unpack outcomes focused on network development and gender mainstreaming.

How widely is Outcome Harvesting used?

A dynamic community of practice continues to evolve and enhance learning about the approach as a systematic and useful way to enhance program evaluation. They include The Ford Foundation, Oxfam NOVIB, Global Network of Civil Society Organizations for Disaster Reduction, CPC Learning Network, SaferWorld, MercyCorps, World Bank Institute, UNDP, and USAID. This is by no means a comprehensive list but it gives a fair range of practitioners from development organizations to networks and donor groups.

Who is leading the SPARC implementation? And who among staff from partner organizations should engage?

AVAC’s Senior Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager (Jules Dasmariñas) together with support from an external evaluation expert (Rhonda Schlangen) will be directing the SPARC pilot test and implementation. All partner organization staff involved in CASPR will be encouraged to participate in their local process. At the Outcome Harvest Festival in September, partner lead representatives will convene to engage in network-level outcome harvesting.

How much time will it take for each partner and the entire network to go through the SPARC process?

The estimated time for doing the entire partner-level outcome harvest is 8 hours. This is staggered into planning and preparation (2-3 hours), organization outcome harvest (4-5 hours), and documenting and sharing outcomes (2-3 hours).

The network level SPARC process will be held at the annual meeting and will take about 8 hours. The exact amount of time for running these two phases will be determined at the end of the pilot.
Simple and Participatory Assessment of Real Change (SPARC): Frequently Asked Questions

What is SPARC?

It is a participatory evaluation approach, drawing from efforts honed over the years by evaluators and practitioners to help capture the richness and range of changes in complex program environments. The most recent evolution of these approaches is Outcome Harvesting. We designed SPARC to draw on the principles and steps of Outcome Harvesting, but modified it to reflect the realities and needs of the CASPR project. SPARC is aimed at helping CASPR partners collectively identify what has changed in the field or among stakeholders and whether and how we have individually or collectively contributed to those changes.

Outcome Harvesting is becoming a widely used approach for this purpose. A dynamic community of practice continues to evolve and enhance learning about the approach as a systematic and useful way to enhance program evaluation. They include a dynamic and diverse group of funders and development organizations, such as the Ford Foundation, Oxfam NOVIB, Global Network of Civil Society Organizations for Disaster Reduction, CPC Learning Network, SaferWorld, MercyCorps, World Bank Institute, UNDP, and USAID.

How do we know SPARC works?

The purpose of SPARC is to help CASPR partners identify supported outcomes to which we have individually and collectively contributed. It is also intended to support our learning and planning. SPARC is technically in “beta” stage, where we’ll test how well SPARC meets these needs. We’ve designed SPARC based on our research of qualitative, participatory evaluation methods, and now we are testing it for usefulness to partners and the quality of the outcomes identified as a result. After the September 2017 Annual Meeting, we will review your feedback about the process, as well as the outcomes “harvested”. Based on this we will further refine the approach. However, if it does not appear to be a useful or productive process, we will go back to the drawing board.

Is SPARC a robust evaluation method?

Yes and No. SPARC, like any evaluation approach focused on advocacy has limitations. We have intentionally simplified it for this beta stage. In the SPARC pilot phase, we have integrated kernels of more sophisticated and complicated processes to introduce basic ideas that CASPR can build on in the future.
If partners find the process useful, we will bolster aspects focused on evidence and validation.

**Will SPARC confirm our contribution to changes in actors, institutions, policies, and processes?**

Even with an intensive, focused evaluation in most situations, it is difficult and even impossible to define with certainty and credibility any individual organization’s contribution to changes in policies and practices. SPARC draws on practices that focus on *plausible contribution*, using organizations’ perspectives about what happened, and then testing and challenging that perspective. In this way, SPARC, along with Outcome Harvesting and similar approaches, tries to narrow the gap between what is known and not known.

**Is SPARC intended to evaluate individual CASPR partners’ performance?**

No. As the CASPR project is focused on developing a coalition, and achieving results in our four objective areas across the project, SPARC is aimed at understanding CASPR-level results. We need to understand whether our individual partner activities adds up to something greater than the sum of the parts, and SPARC is intended to help us do that.

**Can SPARC be used with our non-CASPR work?**

When SPARC is refined, and partners are acclimated to using it, partners can use it to inform evaluation of their work outside of CASPR or for other purposes.

**Is SPARC just telling positive stories?**

No. SPARC asks CASPR partners to capture a range of outcomes, These can be:

- “true” outcomes, that represent a key policy, process, or behavioral change;
- “pivotal” outcomes, that have affected follow-up decisions in major ways;
- “setback” outcomes that are unintended, negative, or reflect something that was expected to happen but didn’t; or
- “hold-the-line” outcomes, where a threat was averted, such as a harmful policy

**What special skills do we need to participate in SPARC?**

SPARC does not require M&E skills or training. SPARC is intentionally designed to optimize the skill sets of program implementers: you know the work and the context better than anyone, and SPARC is intended to support your analysis of it. We’ve tried to strip it of (most) M&E terms and jargon.

Skills that are needed include: knowledge of the CASPR project, ability to critically reflect on your own work, and willingness to challenge your assumptions and that of others about the role of your work in influencing change.
How is SPARC different from simply writing our report narratives? Why can’t we just report our outcomes to AVAC?

We would like to go beyond “check-the-box” M&E and make it meaningful and creative. SPARC is our response to a growing demand for making M&E work for us. There is also often positive bias in donor reports, because we are (rightly) focused on demonstrating accountability and effectiveness. SPARC and other evaluation approaches require that participants step away from a mindset of “proving” that we’re making a difference to genuinely asking whether we are making a difference.

A common challenge with reporting processes is that donor reports fail to capture the excitement and richness of the work. These “stories” people say, typically come out at informal moments, like tea time or hallway conversations. Another challenge is that the “learning” part of “Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning” is often neglected as well. We recognize the importance of simply having time and space to share these stories, and also to reflect on and challenge our assumptions and analysis. SPARC responds to this need but also creates a systematic process to do so.

Appendix E: Quarterly Narrative Template
Quarterly Report Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project:</th>
<th>Coalition to Accelerate and Support Prevention Research (CASPR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreement No.</td>
<td>AID-OAA-A-16-00031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subgrantee:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting Period:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Submission:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Purpose:** The quarterly report template was developed to reflect on and capture the achievements, outputs and challenges from the previous quarter. While primarily an internal reporting document, the report will also be used to prepare external reports, in particular to donors. Instructions are highlighted in yellow, and can be deleted when submitting the final report.

**Deadline:** Please send the final report by **Monday, Jan. 15th, 2018** to Navita Jain, Program Manager (njain@avac.org) and Jules Dasmarinas, MEL Senior Program Manager (jules@avac.org).

I. **Project Implementation Progress (no more than 1 page)**

Please provide a narrative overview of project implementation by objective area. Progress described in the narrative overview must fall within the reporting period highlighted above. Key questions to consider when developing this section are included below as reference (please note that a response for each question is not required).

- What progress has been made toward objectives during the reporting period and how was it achieved?
- What, if any, challenges or delays did the project face in implementing its work and how was it addressed?
II. News! Big Success, Thorny Issues, New Insights, Or Other Good Stuff? (<150 words)

Your perspective is invaluable. For the field to learn and grow from one another, we are asking you to share successes, setbacks, insights and innovations that you witness or devise as you navigate the work ahead. Please tell us all about it in whatever way works best for you.

Please note that this section is not intended to repeat information in Section I: Project Implementation Progress, but to focus on specific news-worthy pieces of work. Please also feel free to include pictures and quotes. Below are some thought questions to help guide the process (no need to answer them all!).

- Did something intriguing, interesting or surprising happen in the project this quarter?
- What frustrated you and/or really made you feel proud of the work?
- What part of the project has excited you the most?
III. Work plan Progress

Please indicate in the table below if the work plan activity is complete, ongoing, delayed or has been revised. Additional detail concerning the activities should be captured in Section 1: Project Implementation Progress. Please note that you do not need to include updates for activities that are not relevant to the reporting period.

If there are activities for the current reporting period that are not currently captured in the work plan below, please add these activities to the workplan and highlight to indicate they are new.

Table 1: Work Plan Progress Table – YEAR 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CASPR Objective Area 3: Research Preparedness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Objective 3.1: Enhance Good Participatory Practices (GPP) for HIV biomedical prevention R&amp;D in low- and lower middle-income countries, including community engagement, gender balance, equality, and female empowerment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. Monitoring and Evaluation (1/2 page)

Please summarize outputs (e.g. trainings, workshops, meetings conferences seminars, etc.) completed during the reporting period. Please use attendance records from convenings to disaggregate participant information by gender and age if possible.

In addition, for trainings/workshops with learning objectives (e.g. GPP training, media cafés, etc.) please indicate participant satisfaction ratings and include age/gender disaggregation if possible. Additional information can also be provided as an attachment.

Table 2: Summary of Outputs for Quarter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Convenings</th>
<th>Total # Planned</th>
<th>Total # and % of Convenings Completed</th>
<th>Participant Details</th>
<th>Average Satisfaction Results (Trainings/Workshops ONLY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td># Survey respondents *Average Satisfaction Rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXAMPLE 1:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (50%)</td>
<td>•Total: 15</td>
<td>•Total: 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPP Pilot Training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•# Male: 7</td>
<td>•# Male: 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•# Female: 8</td>
<td>•# Female: 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 20 years: 0</td>
<td>&lt; 20 years: n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20-29 years: 4</td>
<td>20-29 years: 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30-39 years: 10</td>
<td>30-39 years: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40-49 years: 0</td>
<td>40-49 years: n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50+ years: 1</td>
<td>50+ years: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXAMPLE 2:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
<td>•Total: 20</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate Think Tank Meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•# Male: 12</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•# Female: 8</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15-19 years: n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20-24 years: n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25-49 years: n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50+: n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Average Satisfaction rate: Scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is lowest/poor and 5 is highest/excellent

Please describe your efforts to undertake SPARC (Simple, Participatory Assessment of Real Change) in the last quarter by answering the questions below:
• What has your organization’s experience been with SPARC in terms of the following?
  o Documenting stories of change
  o Deliberating and electing with your peers the most significant stories (i.e. partner-level SPARC)
  o What would you consider as your wins and challenges in undertaking SPARC?
• What kind of support do you need to better integrate SPARC in your project work?

V. Gender Integration (3-5 sentences)

Please provide additional information on how you are aligning your ongoing work with the Gender Integration Strategy. If you have recommendations on how to improve the way the CASPR is integrating gender across the project, or opportunities for strengthened integration, please include here.

VI. Reflection & Feedback (3-5 sentences)

This section provides an opportunity to provide additional information as needed on key lessons learned in implementing project activities and recommendations on how to improve the way the CASPR networks communicate, collaborate share information, and other critical feedback.

VII. Budget Period Progress (2-3 sentences)

Briefly explain any notable budgetary issues (overruns, under expenditures, high unit costs, etc.) during the reporting period as applicable.

VIII. Attachments

Please provide additional documentation as relevant (e.g. photos of project events, policy documents, etc.)

  • Attachment Name #1
  • Attachment Name #2