

Use of Process and Impact Evaluation to Gauge Effectiveness of the Advisory Committee Engagement and Short-term Outcomes of a Health Impact Assessment

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Background

The Committee on Health Impact Assessment has identified the documentation of HIA practices and their effectiveness in influencing decision-making processes as a necessary step in advancing HIA¹. In the US, few HIA evaluations have been carried out or, if completed, are not made readily available. This work adds to the field of HIA evaluation by providing a methodology on how HIA Advisory Committee (AC) engagement can be assessed and understanding how effective short-term outcomes of an HIA are in influencing decisions that promote public health.

To meet the field experience requirement of my MPH program, I worked with Oregon Health Authority (OHA) HIA program staff to perform a process and impact evaluation of their Climate Smart Communities Scenarios (CSCS) HIA completed in April 2013 intended to support Metro (Portland's regional government) as they consider public health and health equity in the selection and implementation of transportation and land use options related to greenhouse gas reduction policy in the Portland metropolitan region and throughout the state^{2,3}.

Research Methods

Qualitative and quantitative methods were utilized in this evaluation. A nine question online survey was sent to all 37 AC members to gain perspectives on their experience serving on the AC (37% response rate). Responses were analyzed and used to finalize qualitative interview questions. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 2 OHA HIA staff members, 2 Metro staff members, and 6 AC members to gain more detailed accounts of their experience. AC members were chosen by OHA and Metro staff to be representative of the entire group.

Quantitative Data

Online Survey

Purpose: To allow all AC members to provide input on their experience.



Qualitative Data

In-Depth Interviews

Purpose: To gain detailed perceptions and experiences of a representative group of AC members and project staff.

Interview responses were analyzed by identifying topics and keywords. Themes were developed from the topics by exploring responses across different respondents. Online survey results are integrated into the discussion of qualitative themes. Each theme is discussed and supporting quotes from respondents are included.

1. National Research Council of the National Academies. (2011). *Improving health in the United States: The role of Health Impact Assessment*. The National Academies Press: Washington DC.
 2. Green M., Hamberg A., Main E., Early-Alberts J., Dubuisson N., & Douglas J.P. (2013). *Climate Smart Communities Scenarios Health Impact Assessment*. Oregon Health Authority: Portland, OR.
 3. Metro Regional Government. (2013). *Climate Smart Communities Scenarios (CSCS)*. Retrieved from: <http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by/web/id-36945>

Identified Themes

General Attitudes of the CSCS HIA	Advisory Committee Engagement	Advisory Committee Expectations
Ability to Provide Input	Partnership building	Framing of HIA Findings and Recommendations for Decision-Makers
OHA as HIA Practitioners and Furthering HIA in the State	Importance of Incorporating Health into Projects	Consideration of HIA for Future Projects

Notable Findings from Select Themes (Process Evaluation)

Ability to Provide Input

"I was really happy to see that one thing I brought up in the scoping meeting I saw addressed later on."

"It seemed like there were only two primary meetings for the AC...I felt like there should have been one more in the middle and that would have provided more opportunity for input."

"I was able to give input in the scoping meeting. The pathway diagrams that came out of that meeting reflected my thinking. In the draft findings and recommendations webinar, I was able to provide feedback and OHA staff provided good responses to the questions that were raised."

Framing of HIA Findings and Recommendations for Decision-Makers

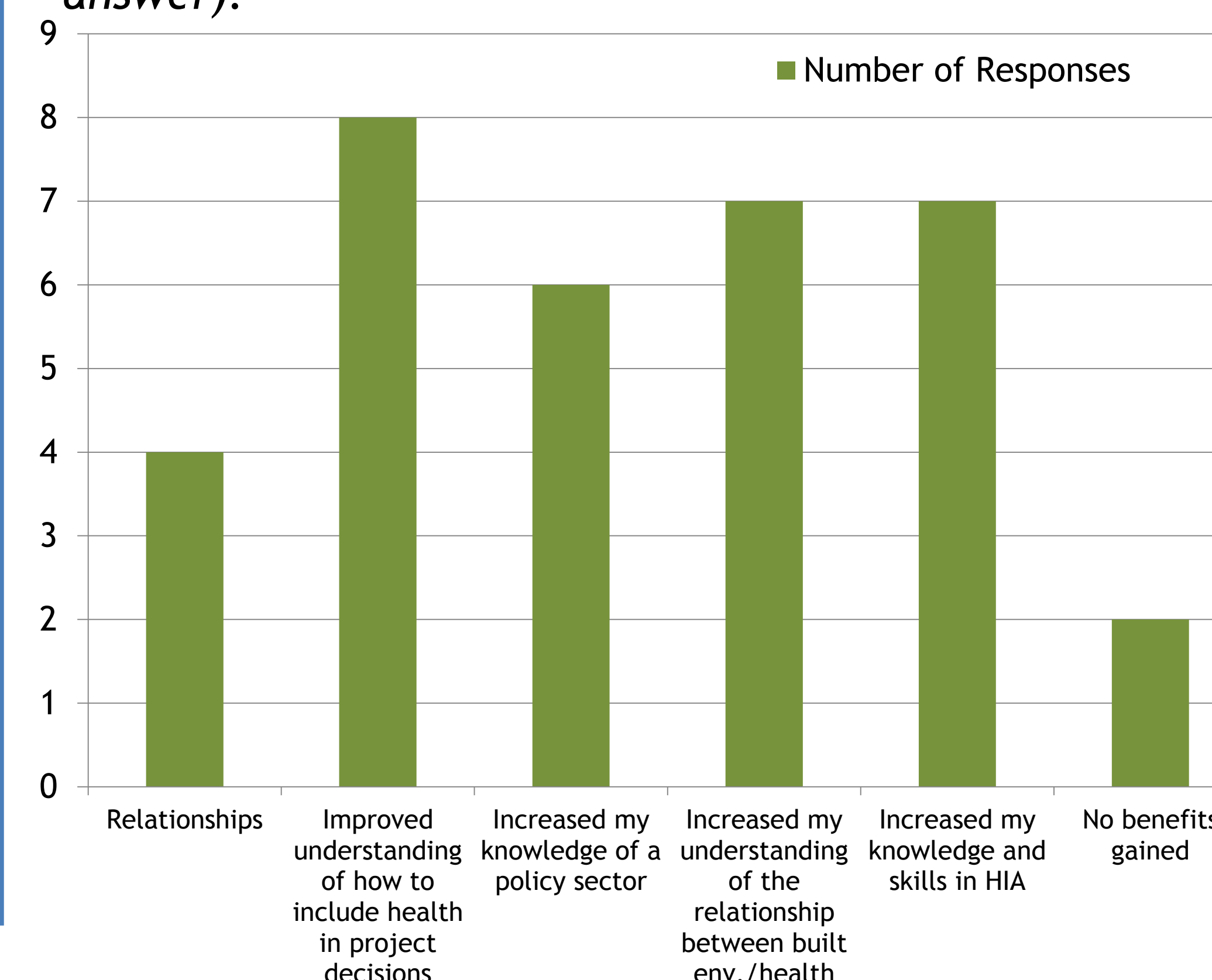
"We are definitely seeing policy-maker's desire to bring in co-benefits and health benefits of our work and they expect answers. I did not think the HIA would answer all the questions but it starts to build capacity and provide information that they are asking for."

"A lot of our work is political and it is important for us to figure out how to frame recommendations based on our experience with policy-makers and decision-makers and framing in a way that is relevant to them is very important."

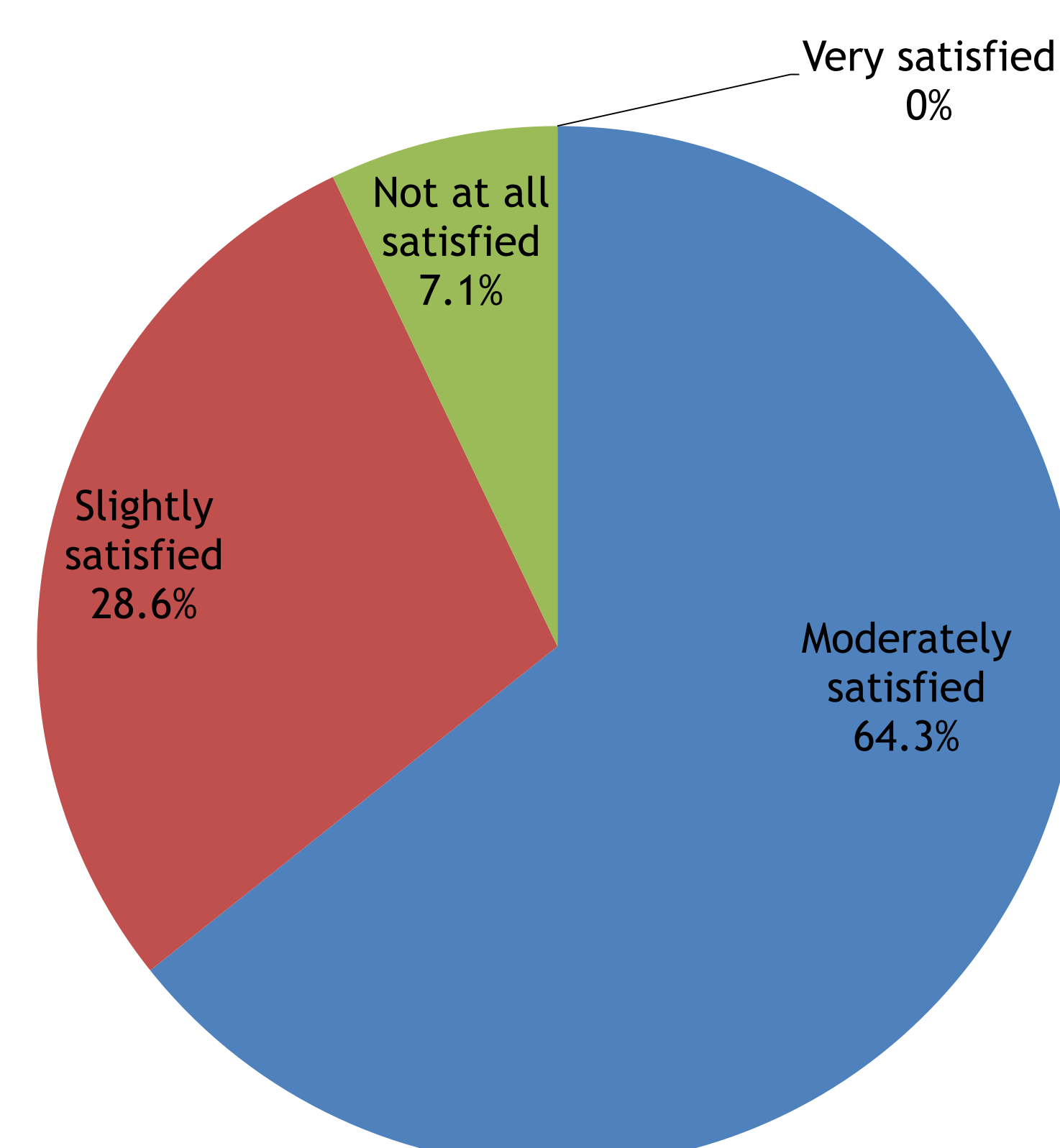
"What are policy-makers going to care about? It is important to translate health information into economic information."

General Attitudes of the CSCS HIA

Online Survey Question: What benefits have you gained by participating on the CSCS HIA AC (multiple answer)?



Online Survey Question: How satisfied were you with the opportunity to provide feedback as an AC member?



Short-term Outcomes (Impact Evaluation)

Metro has developed evaluation criteria to help them move forward on the CSCS project. Among the 8 evaluation criteria, Metro has dedicated one area to public health asking, "How will our choices affect our health?". To answer this question, Metro has determined evaluation measures and corresponding evaluation methods or tools as displayed below.

Evaluation Measure	Estimation Method/Tool
Physical activity per capita (walk trips and bike miles)	GreenSTEP and public health model output
Chronic illness (obesity, diabetes, asthma)	Public health model output
Traffic safety (change in fatalities and injuries)	Public health model

These measures and tools relate directly to the modeling tool used in the assessment portion of the CSCS HIA. According to Metro staff, the HIA recommendations provided awareness to the CSCS project policy and technical committees of the connection between health and community design and the need to consider public health in land use and transportation decisions.

Recommendations

Impact and outcome evaluation should continue of the project once Metro decision points have been reached to determine how the CSCS HIA has influenced health in the region.

Below are several recommendations for OHA to consider in their future HIA work.

- Anticipate changing timelines due to obtaining necessary leadership approvals and how changes will affect communication strategies with project staff and stakeholders.
- Consider decision-maker's priorities when determining what assessment tools to utilize in a project and how to effectively frame findings and recommendations.
- Increase communication with partner staff and the AC throughout HIA projects to ensure buy-in and increased sense of ownership by AC members.
- Incorporate evaluation and monitoring of HIA into grant proposals and encourage evaluation among HIA partners.

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