

NEWEST resources

Evaluat|e is always looking for additional ways to help ATE projects and centers improve their evaluation endeavors.

We recently added new materials to our Web site. Find these at resources.eval-u-ate.org:

Our latest webinar on survey data collection, including a supplementary handout on the topic, can be found by searching “data” in our resource library.

Search “logic model” to find our January webinar on evaluation tools. View the whole webinar or download just the slides.

Check out the vita for our Resource Center by searching “vita” in our library. It lists our activities, which was helpful in completing the annual survey. Feel free to use it as a model.

We now have a Facebook page and a LinkedIn group! Join us by searching for “Evaluat|e.”

Conduit editor: Stephanie Evergreen

Increasing Response Rates

Higher response rates result in greater sample sizes and reduce bias. Research on ways to increase response rates for mail and Internet surveys suggests that the following steps will improve the odds that participants will complete and return your survey, whether it is by Internet or mail.

Make the survey as salient as possible to potential respondents.

Relevance can be tested with a small group of people similar to your respondents.

If possible, using Likert-type questions versus open-end questions may increase response rates.

Generally, the shorter the survey appears to respondents, the better.

Limit the number of questions of a sensitive nature, when possible.

Additionally, if possible, make the survey anonymous versus confidential.

Include prenotification and follow-ups to survey respondents.

Personalizing these contacts will also increase response rates. In addition, surveys conducted by noncommercial institutions (e.g., colleges) obtain higher response rates than those conducted by commercial institutions.

Provide additional copies of or links to the survey.

This can be done as part of following up with potential respondents.

Provide incentives.

Incentives included in the initial mailing produce higher return rates than those contingent upon survey return, with twice the increase when monetary versus nonmonetary incentives are included up-front.

Additional considerations for mail surveys include these:

Sending surveys using recorded delivery, using colored paper for mail surveys, and providing addressed, stamped return envelopes.

When conducting an Internet survey also consider:

A visual indicator of how much of the survey respondents have completed or alternately how much of the survey they have left to complete.

Although there are no hard-and-fast rules for what constitutes an appropriate response rate, many government agencies require response rates of 80 percent or higher before they are willing to report results. If you have conducted a survey and still have a low response rate, it is important to make additional efforts or use a different survey mode to reach nonrespondents to ensure that they do not respond differently than initial respondents and that the survey mode itself did not produce bias.



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EVALUATION terminology

Indicator

A measureable, observable piece of information that tells you about the quality or status of something, an indicator is used to determine success in an evaluation. An indicator for student interest in green technology might be the number attending a career fair. Used in conjunction with “criteria.”

Performance Standards

Relatedly, performance standards are typically expressed in levels, as ratings or grades, on any given indicator. Used interchangeably with “cut score,” a standard for career fair attendance might be that a 10 percent increase over last year’s numbers signals a “B” grade for the project.

Evaluat|e is operated by the Western Michigan University Evaluation Center, a leader in developing the evaluation discipline and a long-time contributor to the improvement of National Science Foundation evaluations.

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REAL QUESTIONS

REAL ANSWERS

How can we track students after they’ve graduated?

It’s difficult, so start early.

Tracking students beyond graduation is a common problem. At Evaluat|e, we have heard this question repeatedly, including from Sarah Butzen and Steve Fadden at the 2009 ATE PI conference.

Before technological advances, researchers tracked students by sending them a postcard once a year, either on a birthday or, more conveniently, at the start of a new semester to wish them luck in their studies. Some researchers attached a tear-off, self-addressed postcard with a few survey questions on it. This could be completed quickly by the respondents and dropped in a mailbox. Other researchers have used the postcard mailing as a way to confirm contact information for the students. Once a known sampling frame is defined through the postcards, the researchers would then send a questionnaire in a second mailing.

Hard copy mailings still take place, but they have been supplanted with less costly and more accessible approaches that make use of the digital world inhabited by students.

Electronic surveys are a popular option. Many online administration tools, such as SurveyMonkey or HostedSurvey, are free for a basic survey. After you input your questions, the tool produces a URL that you can send as a hotlink in an e-mail to your graduates. You also can post the link on your project or center’s Facebook page.

Yes, a Facebook page. This social media outlet is where young people are currently spending their time. Develop a page, so that they can become Facebook fans. You’ll be able to use the page to enhance the communication on your project far beyond the administration of a survey. However, to

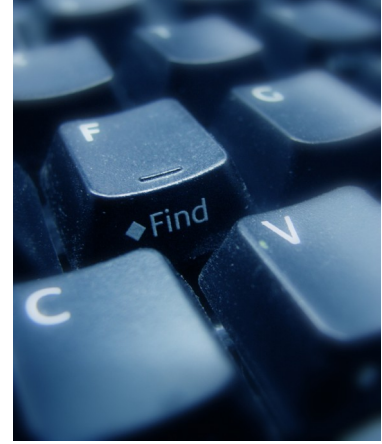
maximize your digital connection to your students, you should start early. Point out your Facebook page and encourage your students to write on its wall as a part of their regular class activities. It will be much easier to locate and survey your graduates if you have connected with them as students.

E-mailing questionnaires directly is also feasible, so long as you have correct e-mail addresses. Most students quit using their .edu address shortly after graduation (if they ever used it at all). It is wise to make an effort to gather the personal e-mail addresses from your students while they are still in your classes. Again, starting early is key.

Unobtrusive methods also can be used to gather limited data on graduates, such as subsequent degrees attained. One resource for doing so is the National Student Clearinghouse. This organization gathers data on degree-seeking students from participating community colleges and universities (a list can be located on their Web site, www.studentclearinghouse.com). For a small fee, the Clearinghouse will search for your students or even the students you recruited but who didn’t enroll. Of course, there are some limitations to this service. Students who don’t seek degrees, or who head straight to employment, won’t show up in the Clearinghouse’s records. Still, it may be useful for some approximations. In our recent webinar, Pete Saflund shared some other unobtrusive methods. Find the webinar by searching “data” in our resource library.

Given the difficulty of tracking this population, a combination of these methods can help you obtain answers.

Featured Resource Logic Model Template



We've recently added a Logic Model Template for ATE Projects and Centers to our resource library. Preformatted with editable text boxes, this one-page PowerPoint document is designed so that you can quickly and easily modify it to suit your own needs. It presents basic questions to guide you in developing your logic model and includes ATE-relevant examples (which can be deleted from your final document). Not intended to be an exhaustive guide on logic model development, we include references for additional information (free and online).

Usually organized to convey a project's inputs, activities, outputs,

and outcomes (short-, mid-, and long-term), logic models quickly communicate what a project does and is expected to accomplish. They are useful for project development and evaluation and can be used to facilitate communication between evaluators and project staff, as well as to succinctly convey your project's activities and outcomes to external audiences.

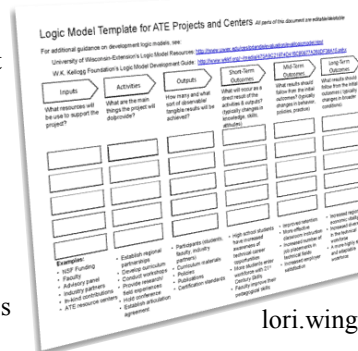
If you are developing a preliminary proposal for an ATE grant, due

April 22, now is the time to start working on your logic model. To include your model in your

proposal, simply "Select All" and copy-and-paste into your project description.

Download the template and try it out. If you have suggestions about how to make it more useful, send your comments to

lori.wingate@wmich.edu.



To download, go to resources.evalu-ate.org and keyword search on "logic model template."

About ATE Evaluators

Evaluat|e Associate Peggie Weeks shares the findings of her investigation into the backgrounds & characteristics of ATE evaluators.

Sure, we're supposed to support ATE grantees in conducting their evaluations. Sure, most grantees have evaluators. Sure, we want to target our services to meet their needs. But who are these people??

Over the past several months, Evaluat|e has been gathering information about ATE evaluators so that we may better understand who makes up this group. You might have experienced our data-gathering mission firsthand at the 2009 ATE PI conference or in an e-mail.

To date, we have obtained the names and contact information for 119 ATE evaluators, who are evaluating about 75 percent of the 220 active ATE projects and centers. We have learned that 57 percent of all

grants are evaluated by evaluators who are serving one or two grants. Conversely, evaluators who evaluate one or two grants make up 92 percent of those on our list. Three percent of the evaluators on our list are evaluating 4 or more ATE grants (and 1 is evaluating 12 grants!).

We have also learned that, of the identified evaluators, about one-third are folks for whom evaluation is their primary career.

Approximately one-fourth are either located at or have experience working with community colleges. Another one-fourth are affiliated with colleges of education at universities. Eighteen percent of the identified evaluators are STEM subject-matter experts, and 7 percent have industry

backgrounds or experience. Roughly 10 percent are or have been principal investigators or project directors on ATE grants.

All of this tells us that the people who evaluate most of the ATE grants are diverse in terms of background and experience. Some know evaluation like the back of their hands, and others are more deeply engaged in content area knowledge. And some are in-between.

Evaluat|e will continue to gather information about ATE evaluators in the coming months. Our hope is that we can build on our knowledge of who ATE evaluators are so we can be a better catalyst for a rich and active evaluation community of practice.



«First Name» «Last Name»
«Project/Center Name»
«Organization Name»
«Street Address»
«City», «State» «Zip Code»

Upcoming Webinars

Webinar: Maximizing Evaluation Impact **Wednesday, May 19, 1-2:30 PM ET**

Thoughtful, intentional planning for use of evaluation findings can help you get more bang for your buck.

In this webinar, Evaluat|e will share strategies to help you increase the impact of your evaluation findings such that they can be better used for program improvement. You'll leave the webinar with a better understanding of how to make the evaluation more accessible and easier to understand. We'll talk about:

1. Content (make it relevant, not regurgitating what people already know)
2. Actions (take proactive steps for facilitating use)
3. Packaging (use graphic design principles to make your reports more inviting and comprehensible)

Register for either event at www.evaluate.org/events

Webinar: Proposals & Evaluation **Wednesday, July 21, 1-2:30 PM ET**

The increased push for evaluation from funders (both inside and outside of NSF) has left some potential proposers wondering what to say. What do they mean when they mention "outcomes?" How should the evaluation section of the proposal be structured?

In this webinar, seasoned ATE folks will help navigate and interpret the drive for more evident evaluation. We will discuss how thinking like an evaluator while developing the proposal can lead to a stronger submission. After the webinar, you'll be able to

1. Identify the key components to include in the evaluation section of your ATE proposal
2. Strengthen other parts of the proposal by thinking like an evaluator

Presented by the Evaluat|e team
Hosted by our friends at MATEC