

CENTER news

Many of you were asked to participate in a needs assessment study and evaluation survey conducted on our behalf this year.

- The needs assessment revealed a strong interest in EvaluATE providing access to examples of several real evaluation plans, instruments, and reports.
- More than 80% of the respondents to our external evaluators' survey indicated they were satisfied with the quality of EvaluATE's resources and 90% are satisfied with the utility.
- More than half of you reported specific learning and application attributable to EvaluATE's work.

Thank you for the positive feedback! The full evaluation report is available at evalu-ate.org/about_us/evaluation/

We received 39 applications for evaluator support funding to attend the annual PI conference! We were able to fund 28 of those applicants. We regret we are not able to fund everyone. We prioritized funding for evaluators with limited experience attending the conference. We look forward to seeing new and familiar faces and furthering the dialogue about ATE evaluation.

Conduit editor: Stephanie Evergreen

The True Genius of Building Evaluation Capacity

According to Sir Winston Churchill, "True genius resides in the capacity for evaluation of uncertain, hazardous, and conflicting information." Certainly, building the capacity for evaluation is the primary mission of EvaluATE. More importantly, in a world of shrinking budgets and increasing accountability, principal investigators are obligated to show the smart utilization of resources, evidence of service delivery, and some tangible indication that the projected outcomes and impacts that got their projects funded in the first place are achievable. Evaluation can make or break a project, instill confidence or doubt in the abilities of grantees, and impact funding for future projects.

Evaluators also have a big stake in building evaluation capacity. From an evaluator's perspective, building capacity is not as much about learning and applying sound evaluation principles, tools, and techniques to real-world situations, as it is about coaching the project team to do the same. Coaching others through the evaluation process enables project teams to improve and sustain their programs long after the contract with the evaluator has ended and the grant dollars have been spent. Consider something as simple as collecting data. If the right people are not involved in the planning process, data collection itself can be nearly impossible.

Whenever possible, building a data collection plan with the project team means working through a number of important issues up front, before the work of the project begins. A great place to start a data collection plan is to build a logic model. It is important to remember that while a logic model is a great tool to identify resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts, it is not a data collection plan. A good data collection plan will drill down much further to show the evaluative purpose of each piece of data, the specific measures or data to be collected, how that data will be collected, who provides the data, when the data is collected, and who is responsible for collecting the data. When developed in partnership with the project team, the data collection plan becomes a powerful tool for coaching, accountability, and success. Helping the project team put these ideas into practice builds evaluation capacity that leads to continuous improvement and project sustainment, while building trust between the evaluator and the project team. Genius.

For more on data collection plans, see Phillips & Phillips' 2007 book, *The Value of Learning: How Organizations Capture Value and ROI and Translate Them Into Support, Improvement, and Funds*. For more on logic models, check out the *W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook: Philosophy and Expectations* at www.wkcf.org.



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EVALUATION terminology

Critical Friend

Is a colloquial term often used to describe an evaluator's relationship to grantee staff. It's often stated in contrast to the term *friendly critic*—someone you can count on to tell you what you want to hear, not necessarily what will challenge you to improve.

With an evaluator as a critical friend, a PI can freely bounce ideas and openly talk about the grant circumstances, knowing the conversation is held in a safe and respectful atmosphere.

A critical friend stance is in contrast to an evaluator who adopts an adversarial position. The evaluator should not be out to prove the grant wrong. Instead, a critical friend orientation refers to an evaluator who wishes to help the grant reach its highest potential. In doing so, the evaluator may point out areas for improvement. This is done the spirit of problem solving with the intention to help enhance grant work and delivered in a timely manner such that changes can still be made. Evaluators who are critical friends will be honest with grant staff about both victories and shortcomings.

Trust between the evaluator and the project staff is the hallmark of a critical friendship.

REAL QUESTIONS

REAL ANSWERS

Of course, specific uses of the evaluation report will vary by project. However, we've learned several ways to use the report that support the real reason evaluation is conducted in the first place—to learn about the grant's progress and make changes toward improvement.

The full evaluation report should almost always be shared with the entire grant team to be read in full. Then, some type of reflection meeting should take place, to allow the grant team to think through the implications of the findings. We recently had a two-hour meeting with our evaluators during which they shared what they thought were the top findings and then facilitated a discussion about practical changes to make as a result of their findings.

The full evaluation report should almost always be submitted to a grant's advisory board for review and input. In our November 2010 webinar, Elaine Craft said her evaluation report is "threaded through the entire meeting... [the NVC] want to hear about the evaluation as we talk about various aspects of the project. And in their report they frequently cite and refer to our evaluation one way or another in forming their opinions." Elaine also mentioned one grant where the NVC met the evaluators in a closed-door session prior to meeting with grant staff. We invite our evaluators to every NVC meeting to share their efforts and results. An advisory group may also provide input on the quality and direction of an evaluation.

Partner organizations, participants, host institutions, or other stakeholders may also need to review and give feedback on the full evaluation report or just the executive

What's a PI to do with an evaluation report?

Share, reflect, and learn.

summary, noting key issues for further consideration. Think about inviting them to a reflection discussion.

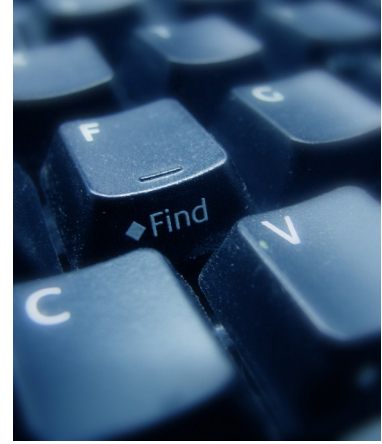
A PI may also choose to post the full evaluation report online. While some may view the evaluation report as privileged information, we encourage transparency. Sharing of this nature can help the broader ATE community learn what works and what does not. Our external evaluation report is posted on our website, under About Us. MATEC also posts their evaluation report in the About Networks section of their site, www.matecnetworks.org. Under About Us on GeoTech's website you'll find their external evaluation report, as well: www.geotechcenter.org. Is yours online? Let us know!

What about sending the full report to the program officer? A PI should always check his or her program officer's preference. We have heard some program officers state that they would like to see summarized findings and actions taken as a result of those findings as a part of the PI's annual report. We've heard them say that they don't necessarily need to see the full report or the evaluation instruments, for example. Gerhard Salinger detailed his preferences for evaluation information in the Winter 2011 issue of *Conduit*: evalu-ate.org/about_us/conduit_newsletter/. In our July 2011 webinar, Elizabeth Teles (Teles Consulting, LLC and former co-lead of the ATE program) said she thinks program officers are looking for summaries, something around 4-5 pages perhaps, but no 100-page reports.

Again, evaluation report dissemination is at the discretion of the PI.

FEATURED RESOURCE

NVC Handbook

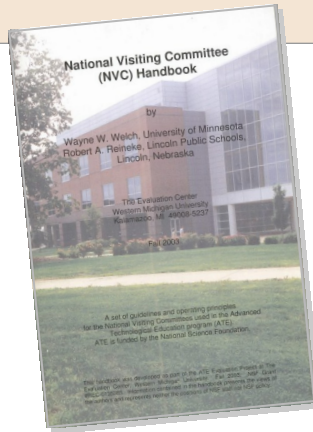


This handbook, by Wayne Welch and Robert Reineke, was developed to guide the engagement of a National Visiting Committee in the work of ATE centers.

In Part I, the handbook outlines considerations for the organization of an NVC, such as member balance, size, and financial support.

Part II discusses the practical steps of planning an NVC meeting, including establishing meeting objectives and choosing a location. Suggested activities are also included in this part.

In Part III, operating principles for conducting the actual meeting are addressed. The responsibilities of



both the NVC chair and the grant staff are also described. A committee report outline is included.

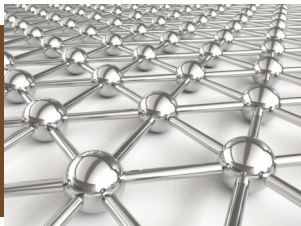
Part IV of the handbook details steps to be taken after the meeting, for the chair, other committee members, and grant leadership. It

even suggests methods for evaluating the meeting's usefulness.

Arlen Gullickson, EvaluATE's co-PI, recently wrote a companion document on how to make the most of an NVC. You can find this piece and the *NVC Handbook* by a keyword search on "NVC" in our digital library at evalu-ate.org/resources/.

We're happy to send a hard copy of the handbook. Just email your mailing address to stephanie.evergreen@wmich.edu

Consider sending the handbook to your NVC members, your evaluator, or other ATE PI colleagues.



Mainstreaming Evaluation

Amy Gullickson shares more lessons learned from her dissertation on evaluation use at four ATE centers.

In the last *Conduit* I described three streams of evaluation information: (1) strategy and design, (2) continuous improvement, and (3) impact. In my dissertation research, I discovered that grant staff created and maintained relationships with four types of stakeholders to get specific evaluative feedback for all three streams: Downstream consumers, outside observers, partners, and immediate consumers.

Downstream consumers are individuals who work in the industry a center serves within its geographical scope. A good sample would include representatives from companies in a range of sizes that currently or prospectively employ ATE program graduates.

Outside observers pay attention to the industry served by the center, without actually working in the industry. One of the four centers from my study worked with state-level job forecasters and futurists to get an outside perspective on the industry and future skill needs of technicians.

Partners range from faculty at other community colleges and universities engaged in your area of technology education to local museums to national industry and professional organizations.

All four centers met regularly with advisory groups comprised of representatives from these stakeholder groups to discuss overall strategy and design quality programs that fit with industry and educational needs.

These groups also provided impact information to the ATE centers.

Immediate consumers are people who take workshops or classes provided by the center, use its curriculum, or participate in its events. These folks are a great source of information to help design professional development, continuously improve programs, and demonstrate impact.

Some key questions can help identify good candidates for stakeholder relationships: Who or what do we want our ATE grant to impact? Who can inform us about (i) what the industry needs now and 5, 10, 20 years into the future; (ii) how we can improve our current programs; and (iii) what impact our work is having on industry or education.

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Upcoming Events

Annual ATE PI Conference

October 26-28

We hope to see you at one of our events at this year's conference:

Wednesday

Getting Started Workshop
 or
 ATE Evaluation Challenges and Solutions:
 A Peer-to-Peer Dialogue Workshop
 and
 Stop by our booth (209/210) at the Centers
 showcase!

Friday

Breakfast Roundtable

We'll also be participating in your sessions and visiting your showcases. We're happy to talk about ATE evaluation anytime—

e-valuation: Assessing Webinars, Social Media, and Website Usage

November 16 | 1-2:30 PM ET

ATE grantees are using the Web for outreach, instruction, professional development, dissemination, and more. As the Web becomes more central to the activities and deliverables of ATE grants, evaluation strategies need to keep pace. In this webinar featuring Karl Kapp, ATE evaluator and noted expert on e-learning, we'll share recent research on webinar, social media, and website evaluation practices.

www.evalu-ate.org

Register at
www.evalu-ate.org/events
 Hosted by our friends at MATEC

*just look for
 these friendly
 faces:*



Lori



Arlen



Jason



Stephanie



Carl