

CENTER description

Evaluat|e's mission is to proactively support and respond to the needs of ATE grantees to produce high-quality evaluations that ultimately advance the goals of ATE projects and centers and the overall ATE program.

What we do:

assess the evaluation needs and capacities of ATE grantees

collect and develop evaluation resources to support ATE projects and centers directly

engage in and support research on evaluation-related ATE issues

build evaluation capacity among ATE grantees and evaluators by providing technical assistance and training

Evaluat|e is funded by the National Science Foundation's Advanced Technological Education program under grant #0802245.

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

Evaluat|e's External Evaluation

Evaluat|e practices what it preaches by using an external evaluator, in the same way external evaluators have been suggested for all ATE projects and centers.

The evaluation is guided by two sets of materials: the Guiding Principles for Evaluators promulgated by the American Evaluation Association and the Program Evaluation Standards (PES) published by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation.

The primary audiences for the evaluation are Evaluat|e's principal investigator and staff and those who oversee them—NSF program officers and the National Visiting Committee (NVC).

The role of the external evaluator in this instance is to:

- serve as an outside party who can provide a different perspective than that held by those charged with the day-to-day operations
- ensure that the information needs of key stakeholders are served
- serve an auditing function to ensure that what is delivered is congruent with what was promised
- evaluate specific initiatives such as training sessions and webinars that the resource center may conduct

The evaluator should not be the sole determiner of the evaluation questions that are addressed. Key stakeholders, in this case the Center personnel, the NSF program directors, and the Evaluat|e NVC, have important questions that need to guide the evaluation. Because they will use the information that the evaluation provides, it must be meaningful to them. This strategy is part of Standard U1 of the PES— persons involved in or affected by the evaluation should be identified, so that their needs can be addressed. Additional evaluation questions address:

- how Evaluat|e compares with other evaluation resource centers that serve different audiences
- how Evaluat|e operates as a business (i.e. organization, management, and marketing)
- whether clients are satisfied with the resources and services that are provided

The evaluation is meant to be a high quality model that can be used by other ATE project and center evaluators. Developments will be shared on Evaluat|e's Web site.



Evaluat|e Evaluator, Stephen Jurs



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TECHNICAL assistance

Is there a piece of your evaluation work that isn't quite serving your needs? Are you in search of the best method for collecting data on your project's impact? Call or e-mail one of our friendly faces for feedback and ideas. Our goal is to have a response to your question within 48 business hours.

Evaluation personnel are available to work with ATE PIs and evaluators on evaluation-related issues as they emerge. Questions raised through these interactions will inform our resource development efforts.

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REAL QUESTIONS

REAL ANSWERS

Our ATE Center has both an internal and external evaluator. Who should do what?

Internal and External Evaluator Roles

Short answer: There are no hard and fast rules (or roles). It depends.

Long answer: The two evaluators and the PI initially should consider the following to determine how evaluation responsibilities will be distributed: evaluator availability, skill sets, budget, and need for an external perspective.

Decisions also should take into account the specific project or center activities that are to be evaluated. For example, an internal evaluator might be better positioned to look at budget and cost issues. Logic model development also might come with more ease to an internal evaluator who has a better knowledge of the work. An external evaluator could be the best choice for evaluation tasks where independence is important. Gathering data about staff perceptions of their work quality or that of their peers would be more appropriate for an external evaluator, whereas an internal evaluator would experience a conflict of interest.

A common assumption is that internal evaluators focus on formative evaluation, meaning that which is for program improvement, and that external evaluators are brought in to examine results and impacts for accountability purposes, also known as summative evaluation. This distinction is

not necessarily the best arrangement for every project. However, if responsibilities are divided in this way, both evaluations would benefit significantly from internal and external collaboration during planning phases, so that data collection is synched. For example, if the external evaluator will want to know about student placement in industry-related fields, the internal evaluator can ensure that systems are in place to track students beyond graduation (a task that would likely inform questions held by the internal evaluator, as well).

From the PI's perspective, another consideration might be the amount budgeted for evaluation. Internal evaluators often are less expensive than external. To mitigate travel costs, the internal evaluator could be used as the coordinator and "monitor" for local data gathering, such as student assessment situations, with collected data packaged and stored for submission to the external evaluator. Such use could improve feasibility while retaining a higher degree of independence associated with the external evaluator.

Send us your suggestions for working with internal and external evaluators. We'll share responses on our Web site and in future issues of *Conduit*.

More information can be found from these sources:

Patton, M. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation* (4th ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Conley-Tyler, M. (2005). A fundamental choice: Internal or external evaluation? *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 4(1&2), 3-11.

The 2002 User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation

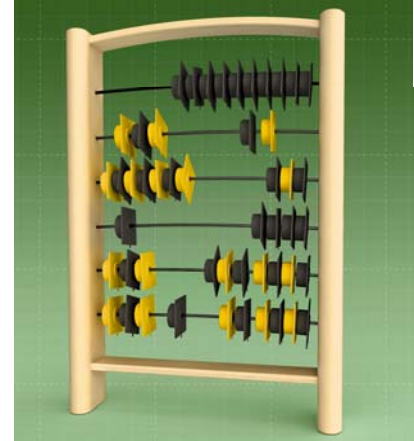
Have you read the *2002 User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation*? NSF's solicitation for ATE projects and centers suggests it as one of several sources for evaluation reference. Download it from the Resources section of our Web site: www.evalu-ate.org/resources.

Our review of the *Handbook*, written by Joy Frechtling and others, concluded that it would be most helpful to ATE project and center PIs as an introduction to evaluation and the options PIs and evaluators have for data collection.

The first chapter is particularly helpful in explaining the purpose of evaluation and how it fits into the

planning of NSF-funded work. Logic models, helpful for conceptualizing and conducting evaluations, are presented in detail. Frechtling et al. also recommend 5-10 percent of a budget be allocated for evaluation, which is a common question for many PIs. The last section, by guest authors, rightly emphasizes the need to be sensitive to cultural differences throughout the evaluation process.

Quickly, though, the handbook fills with descriptions of evaluation tasks that could overwhelm those unfamiliar with the field. We see a place for our evaluation technical assistance services.



While the *Handbook* is a good introduction to evaluation, it can't provide the guidance specific to ATE projects and centers that is needed. For example, while it discusses the use of consent forms prior to beginning data collection, we think ATE projects and centers would be better served with consent form templates to modify.

Of course, such resources couldn't have been provided in Frechtling's limited space. Fortunately, Evaluation|e is funded for precisely those tasks. Call us for directed assistance with your specific evaluation questions.



Reflections on the PI Conference

Evaluation|e staff reflect on their presentations and the feedback they heard from attendees.

"The more the better." That's what an ATE PI said at Evaluation|e's breakfast roundtable session at the PI conference when asked *how much* PIs needed to know about evaluation. The roundtable was an excellent format for us to learn about the evaluation challenges faced by ATE grantees and the assistance that would be helpful.

Participants in this session included evaluators and PIs who were concerned with evaluation quality and utility. We discovered a pressing need for resources that will help PIs be more informed, such as guidance on how to find competent evaluators, what to include in a contract, what to do when an evaluator is not meeting needs/expectations, and how to work with evaluators to en-

sure the work is timely and useful for program improvement.

The need for assistance was underscored when chatting with a project PI who admitted that he "didn't know what NSF meant by 'evaluation'" when he first received his ATE grant. As we develop resources, our priority is to provide PIs with the information they need to be well-informed evaluation clients and consumers.

We also facilitated a session on professional development evaluation, in which we shared findings from the 2008 survey of ATE grantees, including how those activities have been evaluated. We juxtaposed those findings against NSF's expectations for professional development

in the ATE program solicitation.

We developed several handouts for this session:

- the summary of survey findings on professional development
- an overview of criteria and methods for professional development evaluation
- a summary of the National Staff Development Council's standards for professional development
- a synopsis of Tom Guskey's "Five Levels of Professional Development Evaluation"

Our ATE conference handouts are available at www.evalu-ate.org



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

Upcoming Events: Annual Survey

Watch your inboxes! The 2009 survey of ATE projects and centers will be headed your way by mid-February.

NSF requests that all PIs participate in the annual survey after they have been funded for one year. The survey is designed to elicit detailed information about the ATE program's activities and accomplishments. NSF

Reports on previous surveys are available from our Web site, www.eval-ate.org.

program directors use the information in their reports to Congress about the program and to justify its continuation. Because of the program directors' support and encouragement, last year we obtained a 99 percent response rate.

We kindly ask for your time to complete the survey when it is e-mailed to you in February. Each PI who responds contributes a significant amount of information about ATE and helps us ensure an accurate and full portrayal of the important work being done to promote and improve ad-

vanced technological education.

The 2009 survey questions are virtually identical to those from 2007 and 2008. However, we plan to revise the survey for 2010 and seek your input on how to modify and improve it. As you complete the survey this year, consider what types of questions would serve your information needs better and let us know. Don't worry, there are no plans to lengthen the survey! In fact, we intend to shorten it significantly.

We also welcome the opportunity to talk about conducting online surveys. Our survey system was custom-developed for us, but there are free online survey systems that are easy to use and suitable for simpler surveys. There are trade-offs when considering electronic surveys, but they have some distinct advantages, such as low-cost and instant data entry. Give us a call to discuss details.

The Evaluation Center has been conducting the annual ATE survey since 2000. We are continuing this work as part of our new role as an evaluation resource center.