



This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 0802245. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

John Sener

October 2011

The 2011 ATE program solicitation mentions the word “impact” 28 times and “effectiveness” 6 times, so clearly they’re important considerations for any ATE grant and its evaluation. The tips below identify many of the challenges in defining measures of impact and effectiveness and suggest strategies for meeting those challenges.

SOME TIPS FOR DEFINING IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS MEASURES:

- 1. Stats and stories: You need both the quantitative and the qualitative.** The ATE impact websites and books are full of great examples (see Resources below).
- 2. You need both the big picture and the shining example(s).** The big picture makes it possible to tell the story of the project’s success succinctly. “Nuggets” (see related handout) make the big picture and the details resonate with key stakeholders.
- 3. Your stakeholders and their expectations define impact and effectiveness, so find out what’s important to each of them and be responsive to that.** Key stakeholders include PIs, NSF program directors, advisors, and project partners. Meetings, project-related documents, interviews, and informal conversations are among the key ways to get this information.
- 4. Establish common agreement and understanding on terms and language** among the PIs, evaluator, project staff, and other key stakeholders about what “outcomes,” “impact,” “objectives,” “effectiveness,” etc. mean.
- 5. Seek alignment.** Expectations should align with project objectives, evaluation measures, and evaluation methods. One way to achieve such alignment to create key evaluation questions that reflect expectations as implied by project objectives (see associated handout for example). Evaluation measures should answer the question, ‘How do project results relate to expectations?’
- 6. Balance the need to measure meaningful impacts with the practical constraints of time and money.** Prioritize, focus on priorities, and include measures that capture process, unanticipated benefits, obstacles, and responses.
- 7. Timeframe is crucially important for measuring both impact and effectiveness.** Some outcomes take time to develop, and sometimes expectation management is needed. Formative and progress evaluation can set the table for measuring long-term impacts later.

RESOURCES

ATE Program Solicitation 2011: <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2011/nsf11692/nsf11692.htm>

ATE Projects Impact: <http://www.ateprojectimpact.org/>

ATE Centers Impact: <http://atecenters.org>

John Sener is founder/CKO of Sener Knowledge, LLC. He may be reached at jsener@senerknowledge.com (Skype: john.sener).