

## TECHNICAL assistance

Is there a piece of your evaluation that isn't quite serving your needs? Are you in search of the best method for collecting data on your project's impact?

Evaluat|e personnel are available to work with ATE PIs, evaluators, and proposers on evaluation-related topics, such as:

Reviewing and providing input on your evaluation plan

Helping you contract with an evaluator

Guiding you to resources and data collection instruments

Designing methods to track the impact of your work

Reporting results to NSF and other audiences with clarity

Call or send us an e-mail. We will respond to your question within 2 business days.

### Contact Us

Phone: (269) 387-5913

E-mail:

lori.wingate@wmich.edu

or

stephanie.evergreen@wmich.edu

## What Do You Need?

**Needs assessment is the bedrock of program planning and evaluation. In our first year of operation as an evaluation resource center for the ATE program, Evaluat|e is conducting a multifaceted needs assessment to learn what grantees want and need in evaluation assistance.**

First and foremost, it is important that YOU tell us what kinds of assistance you want and need. A new feature on our Web site allows you to quickly tell us what you're looking for and how we can help. We look forward to building a comprehensive set of ATE-specific evaluation resources that you can use as you carry out your important work to achieve the goals of the ATE program.

In addition to learning from our conversations with you, we are engaging several evaluators with varied backgrounds to examine ATE evaluation practices to identify exemplary and promising activities that could be adopted by other grantees, as well as areas in need of improvement.

Frances Lawrenz and Daniel Stufflebeam, both noted evaluation scholars and practitioners, are each conducting in-depth studies of evaluation practices at three ATE sites (six total). They are conducting their studies independently, but their initial reports already show similar findings.

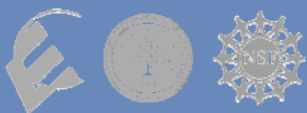
Lori Wingate is coordinating a study of evaluations of ten ATE projects and centers. For this study, ten individuals with experience in evaluating ATE grants, ten doctoral students in evaluation, and ten of the evaluation discipline's leading scholars are reviewing evaluation reports. Each ATE project or center that is cooperating with this effort will receive confidential feedback on its evaluation activities. A composite report will highlight findings across all of the evaluations.

The frame of reference for each of these studies is the Program Evaluation Standards—a set of 30 standards for educational evaluations based on the premise that evaluations should be useful, practical, ethical, and accurate (also see the article on benchmarking in this issue). To ensure we use these studies' findings appropriately to develop useful products and services, we will ask ATE PIs for their perspectives on the results.

Collectively, the findings from these efforts will drive Evaluat|e's resource development and technical assistance efforts. Our aim is to develop materials and workshops that will help ATE grantees obtain useful and credible evaluations. The needs assessment results will also serve as a baseline for judging our effectiveness in the long term.



Lori A. Wingate  
Evaluat|e Senior Research Associate



## In this issue

2 Technical Assistance

2 Real Questions, Real Answers

3 Featured Resource

3 Benchmarking for Educators

4 Upcoming Workshop & HI-TEC



## CENTER description

Evaluat|e's mission is to help ATE grantees obtain high-quality evaluations that advance the goals of projects, centers, and the overall ATE program.

What we do:

- assess the evaluation needs and capacities of ATE grantees
- collect and develop evaluation resources that address ATE evaluation needs
- 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 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 do I find an evaluator for our ATE project?

### Selecting an Evaluator

Though it might seem like an obligation of the grant, selecting the right evaluator can have benefits much greater than grant compliance. Consider comments from these PIs about the usefulness of their evaluators:

- Developed a project logic model to assist with strategic planning
- Used evaluation to make decisions concerning grant activities
- Informed us on how to recruit students and shed light on things we could do to improve the program.
- Used to improve the quality of our workshops, to address the timing of the workshops, and to track participants.

If you want the most bang for your evaluation buck, take the time to find one who is qualified and can serve your grant's needs.

Several avenues for learning about good evaluators are possible. Reach out to colleagues for recommendations. Call or visit the Web sites of nearby university programs to see if they provide instruction in evaluation or have faculty members with evaluation expertise. We recommend evaluator directories, accessed at [www.evalu-ate.org/hiring\\_an\\_evaluator](http://www.evalu-ate.org/hiring_an_evaluator). You also could contact other ATE projects and centers and ask for names and recommendations.

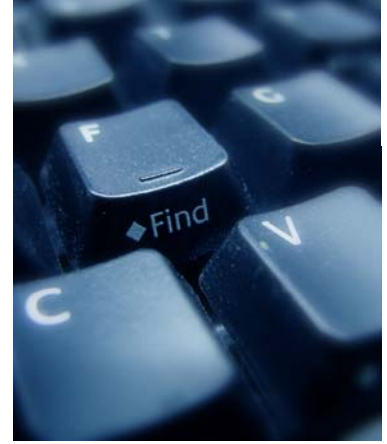
Remember that selection of an evaluator is not a one-way street. That is, you should provide the evaluator with clear expecta-

tions for the evaluation and his or her work. Our Web site provides resources that can help frame your discussion with potential evaluators, as well as the one you choose to hire. The Evaluation Contracts Checklist, for example, highlights issues like prerelease review of reports, deliverables, and time lines. Touching on each checkpoint will help both parties gain clarity on expectations. Consider including the completed checklist as part of the contract with the evaluator and then refer to it as you work together to ensure you get what you need and want out of the evaluation.

Annual survey findings strongly suggest that most projects budget and conduct less evaluation than they could. The *NSF User Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation* suggests budgeting 5 to 10 percent on evaluation. The median expenditure on ATE grants in 2007 was roughly 5 percent and a majority (approximately 57%) spent 5 percent or less on evaluation. These small budgets mean that PIs must be especially careful to delimit the scope and depth of work conducted by evaluators, especially if internal evaluation mechanisms are used as well. It also points to the importance of getting multiple bids for evaluation work.

As this suggests, there are many facets to selecting and orienting the evaluator properly. Also, the path presented here attests to the fact that there are no clear-cut rules for choosing an evaluator. Nevertheless, your choice may make a big difference to how your project runs and the extent to which it is of value and valued by the field.

## Featured Resource [www.evaluate.org](http://www.evaluate.org)



Evaluate is live! Our Web site, [www.evaluate.org](http://www.evaluate.org), is an expanding resource for ATE project and center evaluation assistance.

Contacting us for help on your evaluation task is easy. Our new submission form allows you to send us questions or comments online. Just click on the “Technical Assistance” channel for information on the multiple ways to ask us a question.

Are you looking for a sample contract to use with your evaluator? The “Resources” section of our site contains an ever-growing compilation of ATE-specific evaluation assistance. We have

general information on all stages of an evaluation, from identifying an evaluator to conducting a review of an evaluation. Suggest resources you need by contacting us.

Archived newsletters can be accessed through our “About Us” channel. This is also the place to locate information about our National Visiting Committee and the external evaluation of Evaluate. Take a moment to explore these areas—it might give you ideas for your own project.

The “Events” channel provides information about our upcoming workshops and activities. Past events also are listed, with links to

the materials we created for the event.

Arlen Gullickson, Evaluate PI, has a blog in the “Forum” channel.

Finally, the “Annual Survey” channel provides reports on data from surveys, including Fact Sheets and Briefing Papers, so you can see what we do with all of that information you compile.

When new material is added to the site, we will post notices on our home page. As our metaevaluation efforts wrap up in the fall (see cover story), we will know more about how to help you enhance your evaluations.



## Benchmarking for Educators

Guest author Lindsay A. Noakes shares her work on student assessment and the practice of benchmarking.

*Assessment for learning* is a process with which most educators are now familiar. It involves a careful examination of student learning and assessments and then making adaptations to the teaching process to account for gaps in learning.

Benchmarking in the realm of business and industry is a process for self-reflection and personal growth. The American Productivity and Quality Center’s widely accepted definition of benchmarking is “the process of improving performance by continuously identifying, understanding, and adapting outstanding practices and processes found inside and outside the organization.”

Teachers and colleges are now using the process of benchmarking as a

way to practice assessment for learning at an institutional level. Educators can:

- examine their own practices carefully
- look to exemplars for ideas on best practices
- implement new practices selectively
- assess changes in student outcomes

To promote the process more broadly in school environments, the National Science Foundation funded a national Conference on Benchmarking Student Evaluation Practices. The goals were to increase awareness of *The Student Evaluation Standards* and engage teachers

in benchmarking to improve current assessment practices around the country.

As a part of the NSF and Joint Committee effort, a team at Western Michigan University has implemented benchmarking with preservice teachers who found it useful in examining and reflecting on their practices and who plan to continue the process for improving their teaching. To learn about this study, contact the author at [lindsay.noakes@wmich.edu](mailto:lindsay.noakes@wmich.edu).

For more on benchmarking to improve student evaluation, visit the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation at [wmich.edu/evalctr/jc/briefing/ses](http://wmich.edu/evalctr/jc/briefing/ses).

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**Upcoming Events: Proposers' Webinar and HI-TEC**

*What:* Webinar

*For:* ATE proposers & potential proposers

*When:* July 10 & 11, 11am-1pm (Eastern)

Join us for a free webinar to learn how to better structure and write a proposal for an ATE project or center.

The first two hour session, on July 10, will focus on the mechanics of a proposal to NSF, such as finding and using local resources to do a workforce needs analysis, reviewing important documentation within the ATE program, and finding a good evaluator.

***Register NOW  
for support in  
your proposal  
development!***

In the second two-hour session on July 11, participants will learn how to create a coherent proposal, from developing measureable goals and objectives to designing a purposeful evaluation plan. Scheduled to take place after the return of preliminary proposals, the webinar also will include directed question-and-answer time.

The presenter, Peter Saflund, is a seasoned ATE evaluator and former ATE PI, with experience researching technology workforce needs and trends for educators and industry. His career spans 35 years as technician, engineer, community college teacher, dean, researcher, speaker, instructional designer, and technology expert.

To register for the webinar, please send an e-mail to Patti Negrevski at [patricia.negrevski@wmich.edu](mailto:patricia.negrevski@wmich.edu) with your name, organization, and contact information.

**HI-TEC**

A modified version of this webinar will be presented in a 90-minute session at the HI-TEC Conference in Scottsdale, Arizona. Join us on July 21 from 3:30-5pm. Peter Saflund and Evaluation staff will discuss how to create clear and measurable project goals and how to design evaluations that can provide evidence of goal attainment. Check [www.highimpact-tec.org](http://www.highimpact-tec.org) for the information about how to register for this conference.