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.

Center 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.


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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 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.mateenetworks.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: eval-u-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.
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.

**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.
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.

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

just look for these friendly faces:

Lori  Arlen  Jason  Stephanie  Carl