We’ve just completed our 13th annual ATE survey. Ninety-four percent of PIs participated—thank you so much! In the coming months we’ll release the findings. Keep an eye out for the fact sheet, snapshots, and other reports on the efforts of ATE grantees to improve technician education. Let us know what other reports would be useful to you.

Come join our conversations online! Are you on LinkedIn? So are we—just search in Groups for EvaluATE. That’s a good place to pose an evaluation-related question or a job posting. Are you on Facebook? Us, too! On Facebook, we have an EvaluATE page. Like us there to stay current on the latest news and resources as we release them.

We belatedly welcome Jason Burkhardt as our project manager, database guru, and occasional webinar presenter.

More than half of the 129 respondents to our external evaluators’ survey rated EvaluATE’s website, newsletters, and webinars as very good or excellent. Thanks! Learn more at evaluate.org/about_us/evaluation/.

Gathering Data on Women & Girls from Partners

NSF’s strategic plan calls for intensifying its “efforts to expand participation in the STEM workforce by currently underrepresented segments of the population” (nsf.gov/news/strategicplan), a priority echoed in the ATE program solicitation. President Obama’s Educate to Innovate campaign also seeks to “expand STEM education and career opportunities for underrepresented groups, including women and girls” (whitehouse.gov/issues/education/educate-innovate).

Often educators tell me about their program for recruiting more women or girls, but when I ask them what their outcomes are, they don’t know. One important aspect of the CalWomenTech project is collection of enrollment and completion data from project sites each semester. We feed that information back to our project leaders, leadership team, and instructors. This way, they can see within a few months if what they are doing to increase participation of women in their programs is working. That is part of our project’s feedback loop and I hope it will be a regular part of your feedback loop, too. Rather than anecdotal evidence, project leaders use hard data to determine if strategies are on the right track.

We are asked how we got data from the schools we work with. First, we required community colleges who applied to be CalWomenTech sites to provide their baseline data as evidence that they could actually produce it. Second, we required a letter from key high-level administrators, in which they committed to provide gender-segregated enrollment and completion data throughout the life of the project.

When evaluating the impact of efforts to improve the recruitment and retention of female students and other underrepresented groups, use data to determine if your strategies have resulted in demonstrable increases. Also investigate the extent to which instructors and other project personnel are implementing the strategies as recommended in training and how the project has affected students at the individual level. To learn more about the CalWomenTech project, go to www.iwitts.org/projects/calwomentech-project.
When implementing an ATE grant across multiple institutions, it can be difficult to gather the necessary data, particularly in a timely way. We answer this question with the full acknowledgement that it is easier said than done. But here are a few strategies other ATE grantees have successfully used.

First, you must know what data you need from each institution and when you need it. We recommend scheduling the due date far ahead (at least a month) from when you will actually have to report on it, so that you have enough time to clean and aggregate. Ideally, you will identify what data you need and when you need it when you first begin work with your partner institutions.

This agreement can be part of a written memorandum of understanding or embedded in other written agreements you have in place with your partners. None of the remaining strategies will work without clarity on exactly what data is needed.

Once data specifications are in place, think about how you can implement the Golden Rule, as told by Elaine Craft, PI of SCATE: “She who holds the gold makes the rules.”

In our November 2010 webinar, Elaine explained that she has worked out situations where her partner institutions do not receive the following year of funding until the required data have been submitted to her. Her great advice starts at the 1h, 11min mark at vimeo.com/16973416.

This past January, Dan Hull, PI of OP-TEC, was featured in our webinar and he reported on another strategy that has worked well for him. He said he has identified coordinators at each of the seven partner colleges under his grant. The expectation is that the coordinators will collect the necessary data from their own sites. In return, Dan agrees to pay for their travel and admission to the annual HI-TEC conference (to learn more about HI-TEC, see www.highimpact-tec.org). Jump to the 1h, 20min mark to hear his elaboration at vimeo.com/35626604.

Donna Milgram, Executive Director at IWITTS and our cover story author, said she secures letters of commitment from the partner institutions’ presidents and deans to ensure availability, access, and delivery of data. Donna also said that early in the grant period, she asks all partner institutions to send her baseline data. In doing so, she can determine that they indeed have the correct data identified and have the capacity to carry out their tasks.

We also heard from some ATE grantees that even when the data are collected, they are often in poor shape when delivered. One grantee said the data come by fax and have to be hand-entered into one spreadsheet. A more efficient option may be to set up a spreadsheet template that can be passed around to partners. Even if you then must combine multiple spreadsheets, the formula functions in Excel make the task less labor-intensive. Alternatively, you could set up a data entry form in a free web survey program. The link to the survey can then be shared with partners, allowing for easy data entry on their end. Each survey host exports data in a different fashion—check out the options available from services like SurveyMonkey, HostedSurvey and others.

In short, using incentives and electronic data collection tools can make the work of gathering data from partners much easier.
The number of US war veterans is skyrocketing. Following this trend, there is an increasing focus on how to meet the special needs of this group, as well as tap into their technical knowledge and skills for workforce development initiatives. Even the latest ATE solicitation includes a new focus on veterans. If you are the PI or evaluator for an ATE project that involves a substantial number of veterans, here are some things you should know:

- While survey response rates among the general population aren't great, they are dismal among veterans. If you don't include a significant incentive, you are not likely to get a sufficient number of surveys back from veterans. Research on survey practices in the general population shows that incentives work best when they are provided prior to participation, not as a promised reward in exchange for a response.

- Surveys should be anonymous. Veterans are typically very concerned that information about them could get into their records. Assurances of confidentiality may not be sufficient to allay these concerns.

- Another way to bolster survey responses would be to have the request for participation come from a respected military service member who conveys that the survey is important and worthy of the veterans’ time.

Military culture is not one that involves group dialogue. Therefore, focus groups would not be a good method for collecting information from veterans.

For information about the common characteristics among veteran students and how colleges can enhance their chances for success, see the handouts at www.wmich.edu/evaletr/2012/02/evalcafe-event-student-veterans/
How Well are We Serving our Female Students in STEM?
May 16 | 1-2:30 PM ET

You’d like to have more women enrolled in your technology programs, but you aren’t sure how many you have now and what you should measure.

This webinar will provide you with the evaluation tools you will need to measure enrollment and retention of women in your programs. You’ll get the answers to questions such as, “Do I measure retention of women only or do I compare it to male retention?” and “Should I distinguish between advanced and introductory courses?”

Regardless of whether you are in the planning phase or have already started implementation of your project, you’ll know how to better measure your program’s progress in recruiting and retaining female students. As a bonus, all attendees will receive an evaluation template used in the Cal-WomenTech Project.

Presenters: Donna Milgram, PI for the Cal-WomenTech Project; Lori Wingate, PI for EvaluATE

Build a Better ATE Proposal: Evaluation and Logic Models
July 18 | 1-2:30 PM ET

A grant proposal that includes a strong evaluation plan linked to a sound project logic model will be reviewed more favorably than one that does not.

Building evaluation into your proposal at the front end can help you avoid common proposal pitfalls, such as writing goals that are either too lofty or too simplistic or failing to demonstrate a logical relationship between your activities and your intended outcomes. In this webinar, we’ll share two tools specifically developed for ATE proposers: a detailed checklist for developing evaluation plans for ATE proposals and a template for creating simple, yet powerful project logic models.

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