

Environmental Evaluators Networking Forum June 14-15, Washington, DC

*Brief Summary of Participant Registration
Survey Findings & Revisiting Opinions Voiced
by Last Year's Participants*

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Methodology

1. Online survey design administered over past several weeks.
 - Web-based questionnaire for registration very similar to what was used last year
 - 8 sets of closed and/or mixed-ended questions
 - 2 open-ended questions
2. 117 total respondents (i.e., forum registrants as of June 11).
3. Method of analysis:
 - Closed-ended questions = descriptive statistics (principally frequencies)
 - Open-ended questions = content analysis
4. Also, nominal group methodology was applied and interpreted in data collection and analysis from 96 participants involved with the strategic planning sessions held during last year's forum.



Overview of Discussion

Key Themes

- Diversity among Participants
- Variations in Participants' Connection to Evaluation
- Commonalities of Views in Issues of Concern
- Initial Themes Emerging for Priorities



Diversity Among Participants

Snapshot based on Three Variables:

1. Geographic Area
2. Organizational Affiliation
3. Educational Training



Diversity of Respondents: Organizational Type

	2006 %	2007%	% Change
Academic	11.6	10.3	1.3
Federal	44.2	46.2	2.0
Foundation	19.8	12.0	-7.8
Non-Profit	3.5	10.3	6.8
Private Sector	19.8	18.18	-1.0
Regional/local/Tribal	1.2	2.6	1.4
Total Respondents	86	117	

Diversity of Respondents: Geographic Area

	2006 Percent	2007 Percent	Percent Change
DC Metro Area	61.6	65.0	+3.4
Northeast US	11.6	9.4	-2.2
Southeast US	7.0	6.8	-0.2
Midwest US	5.8	7.7	+1.9
Mountain West US	1.2	2.6	+2.4
Pacific US	9.3	4.3	-5.0
International	3.5	4.3	+0.8
Total Respondents	86	117	+31 participants

Diversity of Respondents: Education Level

	2006 %	2007 %	% Change
Undergrad Degree	12.8	10.6	-2.2
Masters Degree	50.0	52.2	2.2
Ph.D	32.1	32.7	0.6
JD	5.1	4.4	-0.7
Total N	78	113	

At Master's Level: People were more likely to be in a professional field:

- 42% had a professional degree in an environmental policy-related program
- 33% were in a general administration/planning program

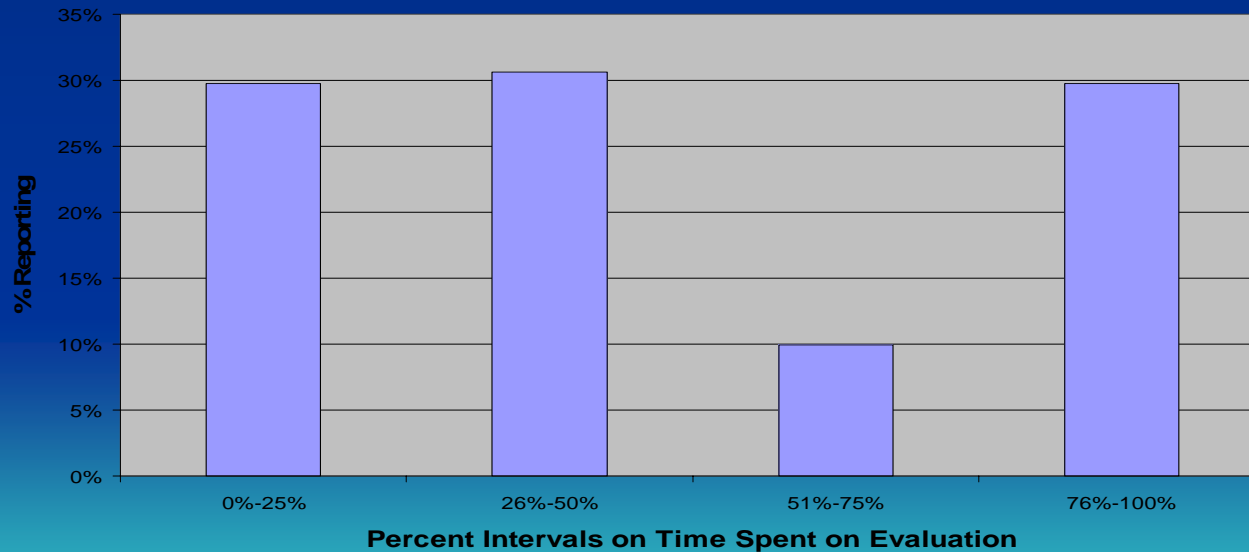
At Doctoral Level: Most studied in a traditional science field:

- 34%% in a life science discipline.
- 29% in a traditional social science discipline.
- 21% in a management-related program, and 16% in some type of environmental studies program.

Participants' Connection to Evaluation

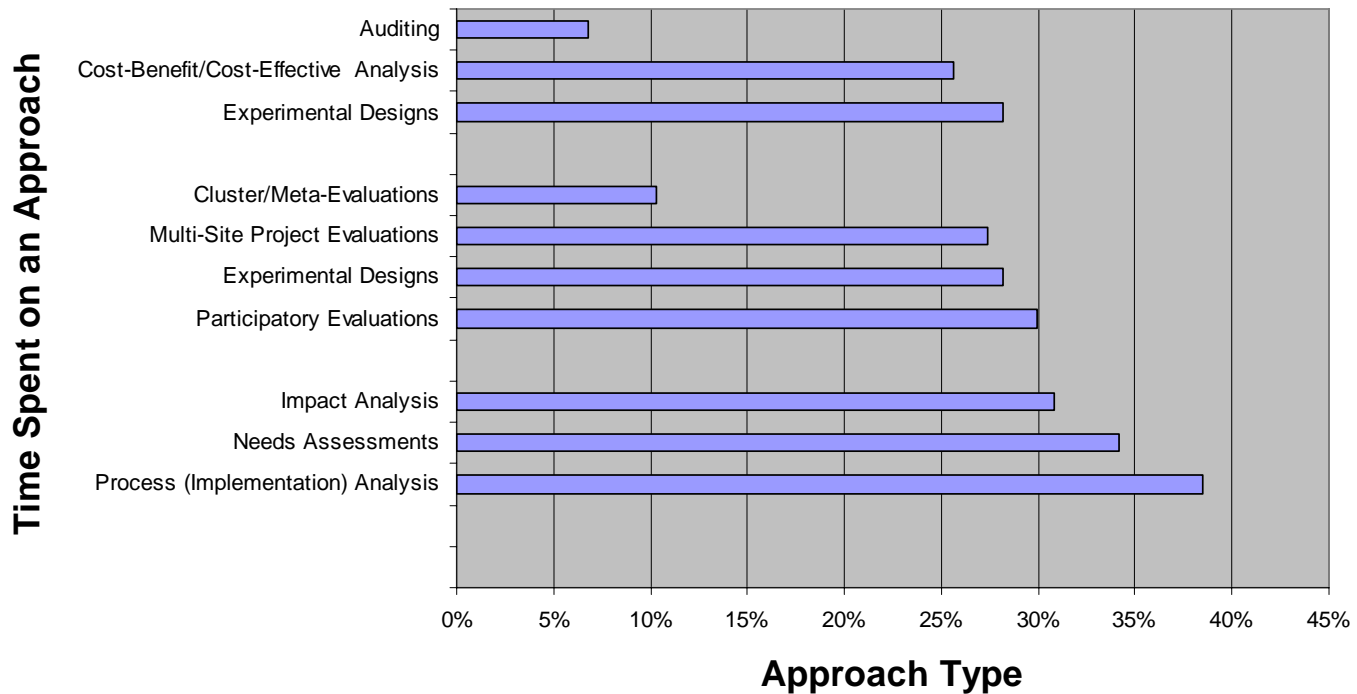
*Respondents either spent a minority of their time
or almost all of their time with evaluation....*

Pct Time Spent on Evaluation (N=111)



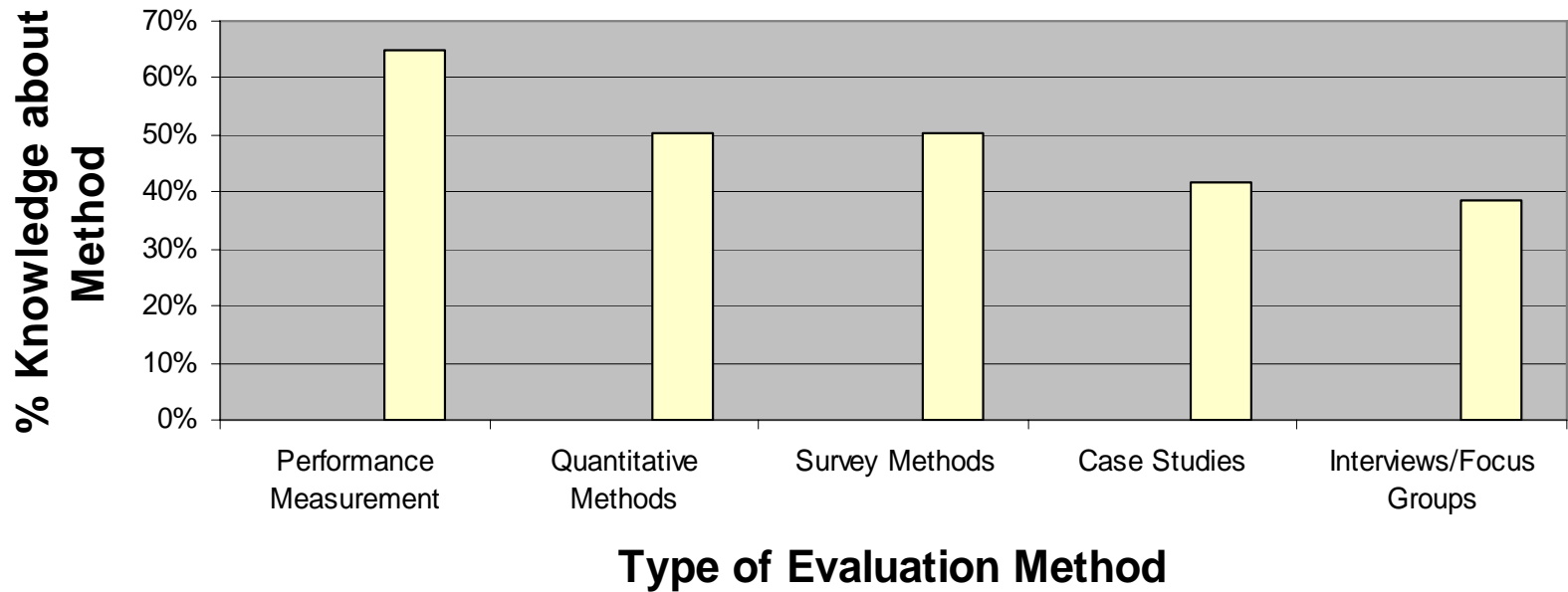
Familiarity in Evaluation....

Experience with Different Evaluation Approaches



... Relates to Prior Training & Current Demand

Knowledge of Evaluation Methods



Primary Evaluation Issues (Technical and/or Institutional) of Concern:

1. **Evaluation designs and methods** reported by in half of the responses (N=86)
 - a. This was true as well among participants at last year's forum.
 - b. But this time the concerns varied slightly, possibly due to different individuals coding the responses.
 - c. The major concerns this year involved developing indicators to assess both socioeconomic changes as well as environmental responses.
2. **Evaluative Capacity building** was reported by one in three respondents:
 - a. Getting top-management buy-in, including appropriate budgets for monitoring and evaluation.
 - b. Improving the processes for utilizing knowledge generated by evaluations in policy making.
3. A little more than one in six expressed concern about accounting for the human dimension in conservation/environmental initiatives.
 - a. Six respondents mentioned the need for improved capacity in estimating changes in human behaviors (frequently in addressing some limiting factor).
 - b. And four people mentioned need for improved evaluation tools in assessing the quality of collaborative efforts.



Initial Themes Emerging for Short-Term Priorities

We asked:

- **“What are the 1-2 highest technical and/or institutional priorities that environmental evaluators need to address over the next couple of years?”**

You responded:

1. Improving evaluative capacity building across the network (52%)
 - a. Getting more widespread utilization of evaluation results in policy decisions, such as those coming from PART reviews.
 - b. Better integrating evaluation results into program and organizational development (internal evaluation)
 - c. Getting greater buy-in from upper management for evaluation and monitoring, especially in dealing with externally imposed mandates.
2. Evaluation design and methods again should be the major priority for the Network as was true in last year’s survey (35%):
 - a. Addressing confounding variables and forces outside of the control of many programs (e.g., climatic patterns)
 - b. Improved application of both quantitative and qualitative variables.
 - c. Constructing credible indicators for assessing both socioeconomic and ecological patterns.
3. Almost 1 in 5 addressed issues related to assessing human dimensions in practice, most specifically measuring impacts and efficiency of policy decisions.

Current Capacity and Future Priorities as Voiced by Last Year's Respondents

Issues of concern:

- Increased pressure for greater demonstration of program efficiencies given continued population growth consuming limited natural resources combined with an expanding federal deficit.
- Strategies for identifying net impacts given unique complexities of evaluation of conservation efforts vis-à-vis practices used in other areas involving public and philanthropic spending.

Current strengths::

- Commitment and high level of passion for improving the state of environmental evaluation;
- Commitment to seeking open standards and sharing of lessons learned.

Current weaknesses:

- Lack of technical capacity, compromising the rigor of research designs, methods of analysis and communication of knowledge to various stakeholders.
- Lack of institutional capacity, including inadequate MIS systems and fragmentation of cross-organizational efforts

Opportunities:

- Increasing demand for credible evaluation results by policy makers in public agencies and private foundations.
- Growing savvy of consumers for evaluation in learning about impacts of conservation, especially given advances in other areas of public and non-profit sectors (e.g., social services)

Threats:

- Political pressures for quick fixes, leading to poor performance measures for advising policy makers.
- Moving of evaluation to focusing too exclusively on accountability, compromising efforts at building processes for organizational learning.



Five-Year Goals for the Network...

1. Continued testing and improving the technical rigor and consistency of evaluation approaches.
2. Developing better information systems for collecting and sharing of information, particularly across organizations.
3. Nurturing and supporting emerging leadership within the network that can guide improved evaluative capacity in the larger conservation community.
4. Better integration of outcome-based evaluation strategies that can balance the needs of both funders and those doing implementation in the field.



...And Corresponding Action Items

1. Foster improved communication of best evaluation practices through peer-review journals, newsletters, Internet, the formalization of the forum on an annual basis, and the development of an Internet-based clearinghouse.
2. Gradually expand participation of the forum to include other partners, including other foundations and state and regional agencies although with a primary focus for now remaining on the federal sector.
3. Identify strategies for better funding mechanisms that encourage continued innovation and maturation of evaluation approaches in this field.

