ITEST Learning Resource Center at EDC

Evaluation Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers (ITEST) is a program of the National Science Foundation, targeted at introducing middle and high school students to STEM careers and engaging students and teachers in exciting, hands-on STEM experiences in schools and in out-of-school time programs. Since 2003, and with a $100 million dollar investment, the ITEST program has funded over 100 projects in 37 states, involving more than 130,000 6-12 grade students, 4,300 teachers and 1,700 parents and caregivers in innovative activities that inspire young people to aspire to STEM careers.

At the start of the ITEST program, NSF funded the ITEST Learning Resource Center at EDC to provide technical assistance and develop a community of practice among the projects. In addition to technical assistance on content-area and implementation topics, the ITEST LRC provides evaluation technical assistance to the projects.

Evaluation is required of each ITEST project and most hire external evaluators to conduct formative and summative evaluations of their three-year projects. However, the ITEST LRC quickly realized that the level of evaluation capacity among the projects was uneven and that they could benefit from targeted evaluation technical assistance. Projects needed assistance with everything from choosing the right evaluator and managing the evaluation process to learning to navigate NSF's evaluation requirements and understanding how to make use of evaluation findings. In addition, we realized there was a need for a community of practice specifically for evaluators.

Specific evaluation technical assistance includes:

- Just-in-time individual project evaluation technical assistance, answering questions about evaluation management, expectations, and what we call "evaluation marriage counseling";
- A yearly "evaluation peer exchange," which is a moderated electronic list-serv where evaluators and project PIs can talk amongst themselves, asking questions, sharing information and troubleshooting common issues in evaluation;
- Conference call and webcast "live" technical assistance events, targeting any and all evaluators, PIs and program staff in the ITEST community. Topics have included cultural competence in evaluation, using evaluation findings, measurement issues in ITEST projects, evaluators and PIs getting along, etc.;
- Opportunities to present evaluation findings and discuss evaluation issues and challenges at the annual ITEST PI meeting;
- An annual conference call to help projects understand the NSF reporting requirements and how evaluation findings can support their annual reports;
- The development of an online, searchable evaluation instrument data base; instruments from projects are included and there is a community understand regarding fair use;
- Coordination of conference presentations (at AEA, AERA, SITE, NSTA) and publication opportunities.

For more information, please contact:

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