

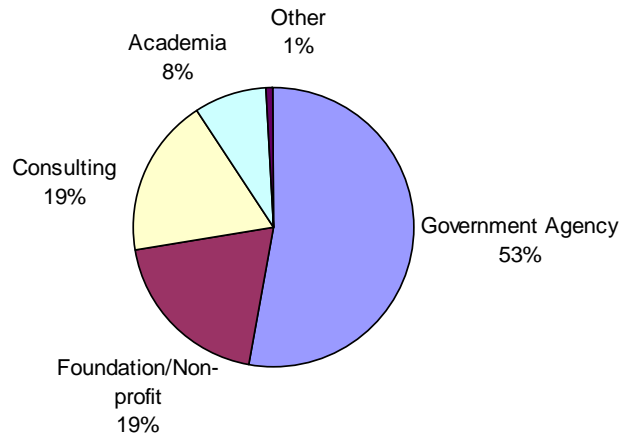
2009 Environmental Evaluators Networking Forum Evaluation Memo

The 4th annual Environmental Evaluators Networking Forum took place June 8th-9th at George Washington University's Marvin Center. More than 230 members of the environmental evaluation community attended the Forum. 100 of these participants completed a brief questionnaire and provided feedback on the event, the results of which have been summarized below.

Forum participants

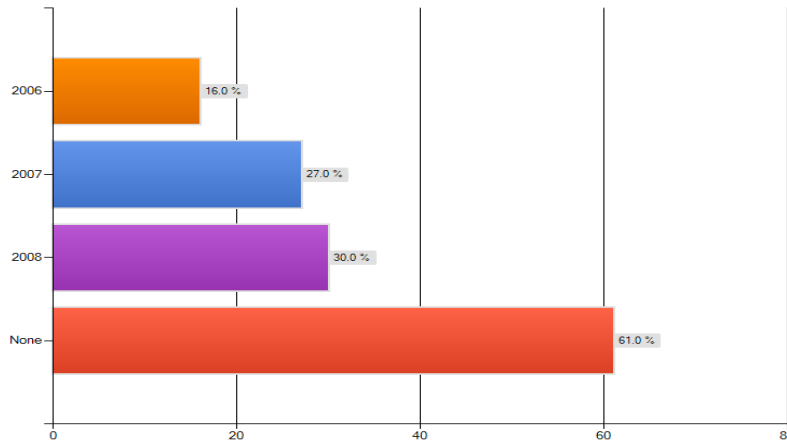
While over half of the Forum's participants were affiliated with a local, state or federal government agency either domestically or abroad, representatives of foundations and non-profit organizations, consulting groups and academia also attended.

Participants' Organizational Affiliation



61% of the 100 respondents were first-time attendees of an EEN Forum. 16% had attended the Forum in 2006, 27% in 2007, and 30% were present at the 2008 Forum.

Attendance at previous EEN Forums



Forum Content and Structure

Of the 98 respondents, 97% found the 2009 Forum somewhat or very valuable. 85% of 97 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had sufficient opportunity to network with others at the Forum while 65% agreed or strongly agreed that they had learned new evaluation methods and approaches. 95% of 98 respondents found the Marvin Center to be a suitable location for the Forum.

Favorite Aspect of the Forum

When asked what they liked most about the Forum, 80 people responded. The most common response (cited by approximately 40% of the respondents) was the information-sharing and networking opportunities provided by the event. 30% mentioned the quality of the presenters and the sessions. Respondents were also pleased with the diversity and expertise of Forum participants and presenters, the Speed Presentations session and the Evaluators' Café, and the information provided about the field and resources of environmental evaluation. Other topics mentioned included the diversity of topics and organizations represented, the international presence at the Forum, hearing about case studies and the honest dialogue and discussion that occurred both formally and informally.

Suggestions to improve the Forum

54 respondents offered suggestions for how to improve future EEN Forums. Approximately one third of these suggestions pertained to increasing interactivity between presenters and the audience during the Forum sessions. Respondents proposed allotting more time for Q&A, incorporating sessions for collective problem-solving and debate, and introducing workshop-style breakout sessions while reducing the number of 'talking-head' plenaries. Respondents also requested a greater focus on practical tools, applied methods, case studies, and presentations of evaluation in use to build participants' professional capacity.

A smaller number of respondents recommended doing more outreach to new stakeholders and further diversifying the Forum's participants by inviting more speakers from outside the conservation arena, including more nonprofit or consulting groups and more presenters from outside the DC region, inviting grassroots organizations and leaders, hosting more policy-makers, and reaching out to students in environmental schools. One respondent suggested a thematic issue of a journal that would provide participants the opportunity to publish their material from the conference proceedings.

Suggestions pertaining to the facilities included more sustainable lunches, ensuring that a clearly marked vegan lunch was available, and ensuring that all rooms are accessible for participants with physical disabilities.

Suggestions for future Forum topics

The 51 suggestions for future Forum topics were diverse. The most common involved sessions dedicated to methodologies and the 'how-to' of EE techniques and tools. The second most common suggestion was for presentations on marketing the value of evaluation to customers and funders and ensuring that evaluations' results are used effectively. Respondents also suggested climate change, evaluation standards, the role of evaluation for the current Administration, dialogue and collaboration between evaluators from different organizations, agencies and disciplines, the professional world of evaluation (careers, skills, organizational

structure), the challenges and complexity of evaluation, dealing with failure, and more case studies of evaluation outcomes in context.

Suggestions for Forum structure

Suggestions from the 38 respondents about the structure of future EEN Forums centered on a desire for more interaction and discussion during the sessions. Respondents also requested fewer concurrent sessions so people would miss fewer of them. One respondent suggested having topical track and organizing the concurrent sessions so as to avoid overlap between sessions on the same topic. Several respondents also suggested having time for poster presentations that would allow evaluators to share case-studies or tools, while others recommended spending less time on plenaries and more on smaller break-out sessions. A few respondents also recommended less sitting-time on the first day of the Forum.

Appendix A

Common themes in respondents' comments were identified and their answers were grouped accordingly. The coding and categorization was done by one individual and is only intended to provide a general summary of participant feedback. In no way do the results represent a scientific analysis of the survey data.

Summary of Results

Liked Most	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Information sharing/ Networking	33	41.3
Speed Presentations/ The Evaluators' Café	15	18.8
Information about the field and evaluation resources	15	18.8
Diversity and expertise of presenters and attendees	19	23.8
Diversity of topics and organizations represented	6	7.5
Quality of the presenters and sessions	24	30.0
Total	80	*

Suggestions to improve the Forum	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Greater focus on practical tools, applied methods, case studies and evaluations in use to build capacity	15	27.8
More interactive sessions/workshops with more time for Q&A, discussion, collective problem-solving and debate	18	33.3
Outreach to new groups (more speakers from fields other than conservation, more nonprofit and consulting groups, national & international participants, grassroots organizations & leaders, policy makers, students)	8	14.8
Improve facilities	7	13.0
Total	54	*

Suggestions for future Forum topics	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Climate change	4	7.8
Evaluation standards	2	3.9
Practical methodologies/How to	14	27.5
Marketing the value of evaluation to customers and funders & ensuring evaluation results are used	6	11.8
Role of evaluation in current administration	3	5.9
Dialogue and collaboration between evaluators from different organizations, agencies, disciplines.	2	3.9
The professional world of evaluation: careers, skills necessary, evaluation office as part of the organizational structure	3	5.9
Challenges, complexity, dealing with failure	3	5.9
Case studies of evaluation in context/ Evaluation outcomes	5	9.8
Total	51	*

Future Forum Structure	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Poster presentations	3	8.3
Fewer concurrent sessions so people can attend more/Topical tracks of sessions so there is less overlap of related sessions	5	13.2
More interaction and discussion	11	28.9
More smaller break-out sessions and fewer plenaries	2	5.3
Total	38	*

* Total percentage does not equal 100 since some responses are not included here, and certain respondents cited more than one item.

Appendix B

The following citations represent sample of received comments, selected to provide examples of respondents' feedback and highlight unique suggestions or comments that were not repeated elsewhere.

Selected comments about what participants liked most:

- The integration of many environmental organizations working toward grounding environmental evaluation
- The ability to share best practices among the public and private sectors
- The chance to exchange information and learn about the work others are undertaking
- Opportunities to interact with diversity of environmental evaluation efforts - different topics, different organizations
- Case studies on evaluations and honest discussion of what worked and what didn't
- Discussions about uses of evaluations
- I'm fairly new to evaluation, so this was a good chance to learn some of the terminology and strategies being used by other agencies and orgs.
- Informal networking is very valuable and I hope we can find the time for more of it.
- Unlike most conferences or forums, this once did employ the most creative ways of getting participants to interact and seek out mentors/future project collaborators. I thought the speed networking and evaluation cafe activities were brilliant and fun!
- I enjoyed the diversity of people attending and found the array of speakers/presenters very valuable to my work.

Selected comments from participants about how to improve the Forum:

- Many of the topics and speakers seemed to be redundant with the previous year's sessions and speakers. Aim for less overlap next year. Perhaps I don't know conservation as well, but it seemed heavily weighted on conservation without an intentional effort to tie this to other evaluation topics.
- GWU offered a good facility, but seating was an uncomfortable distraction during the long sessions on day 1. Perhaps breaking up the sessions into shorter units and encouraging folks to stand up and stretch would help.
- Continue to reach out to as many relevant organizations as possible to make sure we have diverse representation (culturally, politically, demographically) so we avoid groupthink or complacency. To avoid being too elitist, we should make sure that we have some grassroots organizations/leaders involved who might not be able to otherwise afford advice on program evaluation.
- More time to bring specific issues before break out groups to network and brainstorm alternatives to resolve issues
- There needs to be more focus on pollution control programs and less on conservation. Less navel gazing on the state of evaluation use and capacity building and more presentations on good, practical evaluations
- It can be valuable to offer participants the opportunity to publish their material in conference proceedings, a thematic issue of a journal etc.

- Having a day devoted to half day or full day learning workshops (before or after the forum). Having an organized 'going out for dinner' gathering. As the network grows having a youth component; such as opportunities to present academic work with a youth award; an organized gathering for university students just before the forum. The venue was very good but could be improved. The plenary room on the first day was not suited for presentations - the ballroom was much better. The outside venue could have been less harsh - a garden - like background is helpful for networking and for the experience. A learning table for participants to place material of interest. Having a more national and international presence.
- Keep the cafe. Provide a bit more structure for the wrap-up session, perhaps provide leading questions to think about ahead of time.
- (1) Eliminate the "talking head" - some of the plenary sessions were an absolute waste of our time; (2) Get better plenary moderators. The ones you had (one in particular) obviously lacked a clue as to the role of a moderator as he did just everything wrong, e.g., failed to keep on schedule and routinely stole the time that was supposed to be devoted to audience Q&A to launch into his own at times self-aggrandizing monologues.
- Perhaps this was an inappropriate event for me to attend and this is not in your realm, but I and my colleagues would have benefitted from more of a program evaluation focus - tools, methods, and resources for actually evaluating our programs rather than a focus on the big questions. I felt that we came away with more questions than answers.
- Lunches were pretty terrible. Would be much better to have a buffet with more nutritious options & less use of plastic.

Selected suggestions for future Forum topics:

- Attempting to improve and measure environmental quality under the force of increasing mega transformations of the planet (e.g. climate change, ocean acidification, nitrogen loading, etc.)
- Methodologies - particularly how qualitative and quantitative approaches can be combined. How do we properly plan evaluations so that they provide adequate data with transparency and independence?
- Long time horizons as a problem of evaluation
- Transboundary aspect of evaluation (the conference tends to have a very local American focus, which is OK, but it might reflect the tendency of US environmental policy to focus on domestic issues) and definitely more attention for pollution related topics. Most presentation were on nature and wildlife, whereas some of the most pressing issues of (international) environmental policy making is on pollution related issues
- Outcomes from evaluation
- Getting beyond designing evaluations to tabulating and displaying results
- Would love to have more "how to" sessions on both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and also for developing logic models.
- President Obama's Management Agenda and role of Jeffrey Zients, Chief Performance Officer, as to objectives with broad impact on the EEN community PART 2? What is it?
- Evaluations and diplomacy--how to share inconvenient truths without harming relationships/causing offense. (There is a tendency to water-down reports when evaluators anticipate resistance to change within the organization/program being

evaluated). Also, I would like to see some discussion of challenges faced when reviewing organizational structure, not just specific, technical programs.

- Possibly the following: - Setting Government Evaluation Policy at the Federal and State Levels, - Practical Approaches to Developing, Tracking, and Reporting Environmental Performance Measures, - Complexity and Attribution Problems in Environmental Programs and how to deal with them when conducting evaluations - Evaluation Approaches for Environmental Program Types (i.e., regulatory vs conservation programs, or Grants, Technical Assistance, Regulations, Voluntary programs)
- Perhaps some workshops on how to prepare a tailor-made evaluation design, leading in standards for 'evaluation in context'.
- The structure and function of an Evaluation Office. A comparative look at how evaluation is approached/practiced in different agencies. Evaluation of complex policy and planning processes - case studies. Evaluation approaches for organizational change. Evaluation of public involvement and collaboration including the recent Open Government initiative.
- Evaluating equity and fairness in environmental policy and program delivery.
- There should be a three year agenda over which time main methods and issues/applications get covered

Selected comments for improving the structure of future Forums:

- Foster interdisciplinary conversations; share paradigms and perspectives
- Less promotion of what NFWF is doing and of NFWF friends
- I know this is always a challenge, but it is a shame that there are so many concurrent sessions--I ended up missing good stuff.
- Not structure per se, but I do think that the session moderator needed to shorten his intros/comments/questions and leave more time for the panel members and audience to speak.
- Provide longer times for people to present specific tools / methods.
- Need to end the last day with a strong plenary to keep folks around instead of a strategic planning format.
- There were too many people for the few numbers of people who were doing the speed meeting the first day. It was too hard to talk to the speed meeting presenter because of the number of people who went to each station. There needs to be more of them or fewer of us (or, more time to meet with them).
- The breakout sessions were both too crammed with speakers - who often took too long to present their information -and too rushed. In every case without exception, the sessions started late, the speakers spoke for too long with too many slides, and there was insufficient time at the end for Qs&As.
- One networking approach that I've experienced at a Dialogue and Deliberation conference in Canada is having a large poster of table topics as you enter the plenary conference room. Participants pick a table of interest where you begin a discussion on that topic for the first plenary of the conference. Continue to have a good mix of conceptual and practical (i.e., evaluation approaches/tools). Possibly having the Forum in other US locations.
- More interactive workshops/ breakout presentations. Still too much talking "at" versus talking "with" in the breakouts. More learning will happen with more inactiveness;

perhaps increase rubric score for interactiveness. The communications and reporting presentation on day 2 was quite uninformative and should not have happened. It was a big waste of time.

- The agenda for 2009 was fairly well-balanced, but future panels should include politicians/administrators and members of the media who represent the policy-making and policy-screening angles. We should hear what their informational/analytical needs are and how well evaluators are doing in trying to meet those needs.
- The fast networking presentations could be enhanced further by having the presenters also producing posters that support their arguments. The panel discussion should be based on a more limited number of people which have contrasting views. Especially the 1st day panel was a bit of a flop.
- I would like to see breakout sessions that would include presentations of actual evaluations. You might also consider some environmental-based entertainment just to break up the pattern of talking heads. For example, hire some music groups to sing songs with environmental themes or have a couple sessions with movies from the environmental film festival or hire a couple student actors to role play evaluation scenarios or great moments in environmental history