2007 ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATORS NETWORKING FORUM

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD: ADDRESSING METHODOLOGICAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES IN ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION IN AN ERA OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

what

The purpose of the Environmental Evaluators Network is to advance the field of environmental evaluation through more systematic and collective learning. The annual EEN forum provides an opportunity for evaluators and users of evaluation from the diversity of environmental organizations and disciplines to exchange knowledge and experiences related to the practice, theory and policy of environmental evaluation as well as collaboratively to identify and develop products that further the field. Ultimately, the aim of the EEN and the events and products that it supports is to improve the environmental community's capacity to demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency, particularly in terms of environmental outcomes.

history

The second EEN forum was co-hosted by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) in Washington, DC on June 14 and 15, 2007. Approximately 100 domestic and international participants were in attendance from a variety of government agencies, academia, consulting organizations, foundations, and non-profits.

themes

Major themes emphasized in the presentations were:

1. ***Evidence-based decision-making:***
   - Effective evaluation designs
   - The role of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods
   - Using evidence to support decision-makers in choosing appropriate policy mixes
   - Net impacts
2. ***Gaps in the field of environmental evaluation:***
   - Building institutional capacity in evaluation
   - Standards and expertise required for the emerging profession
   - Linking evaluation theory, evaluation practice, and environmental decision-making

presentations

1. ***Moving towards evidence-based decision-making:***
   - ***Monitoring for Conservation Planning and Management*** - Elizabeth Kennedy, Conservation International. This presentation described key information needs for decisions in conservation planning and management and gave an overview of how these needs can be met with status and effectiveness monitoring. The two approaches are especially useful when nested, as this enables evaluators to link interventions with status changes in conservation targets.
   - ***Multi-Agency Environmental Conflict Resolution Evaluation Study*** - Dale Keyes, U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, Morris K. Udall Foundation. The U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution assists parties in building consensus or resolving conflicts on environmental, natural resource, and public lands issues. The presentation shows how the Instituted utilized the Multi-Agency ECR Evaluation Study (MAES II) to assess the effectiveness of its collaborative processes.
   - ***Evaluations for Evidence-Based Environmental Programs and Policies from a European (and Finnish) Perspective*** - Per Mickwitz, Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE). Evidence-based policy originates in the intent to create policy informed by knowledge of what types of efforts work and with what means. An important lesson from European applications of this concept is that a fixed "hierarchy of knowledge" approach to evidence is too narrow, because the relevance of different types of evidence depends on its intended use.
   - ***Planning for Third Party Evaluation*** - Laura Pyzik, U.S. EPA, and Neal Feeken, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. This roundtable discussion addressed the inherent dichotomy between regulatory and voluntary programs, particularly with regards to validation of the data required to support an evaluation. Participants discussed when and where third party verification can be a useful evaluation tool.
   - ***Evaluating Environmental Conflict Resolution Using the Systematic Evaluation of Environmental and Economic Results (SEEER)*** - William Hall, Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center, U.S. EPA. This presentation demonstrates the use of the Systematic Evaluation of Environmental and Economic Results (SEEER) methodology in evaluating Environmental Conflict Resolution cases. SEEER has effectively estimated the results of ECR processes, despite their complexity, and the ECR processes evaluated to date have resulted in positive environmental outcomes.
   - ***Meeting Evidence Challenges Under PART: An Agency Perspective*** - Michael Mason, Office of Water, U.S. EPA. The presentation provides an overview of the challenges faced by EPA's Office of Water in gathering and submitting evidence for 21 PART reviews over the past five years. It is recommended that Agencies make better efforts to document implementation decisions and processes, and that OMB re-assess the PART guidance's evidence criteria to reflect "real-world" legal and resource limitations.

OVER

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presentations cont.

- ***PART Evidence: An OMB Perspective*** - Brian Kleinman, Office of Management and Budget, U.S. EPA. From an OMB perspective, the ideal PART evidence submitted in support of a program would answer all question elements and be concise, realistic, credible/high-quality, and timely.
- ***Static Models, Dynamic Processes and the Tongass Land Management Plan*** - Guy Robertson, U.S. Forest Service. The presentation uses a real-world example of the Tongass Land Management Plan, a high profile and contentious forest planning exercise, to explore the relationship between ex ante deterministic estimation techniques and actual results. The presentation concludes with a discussion of the challenges facing adaptive management as an alternative model.
- ***Point-Counterpoint: Practitioner Adaptive Management vs. External Scientific Assessment*** - A No-Holds Barred Debate - John Seidensticker, Species Conservation Center, Smithsonian's National Zoological Park. The presenter takes the position that the only way to improve conservation practices and outcomes is through full-blown, external review processes. The debate on this issue is summarized through the use of six point-counterpoint examples.
- ***The Status of Evaluation in the Federal Government: The Shape of Things to Come?*** - Kathryn E. Newcomer, Ph.D., The George Washington University. The presentation describes the current environment for program evaluation and the drivers of evaluation, including the PART. Issues raised include the PART's lofty expectations for "experimental" research, the substantial resources required to complete outcome and impact evaluations, and the possibility that accountability demands are overshadowing real programmatic learning.
- ***Introduction to the Work of the Centre for Evidence-Based Conservation (CEBC)*** - Andrew Pullin, CEBC, University of Wales Bangor, UK. The Center for Evidence Based Conservation's goal is to support decision-making in conservation and environmental management through the production and dissemination of systematic reviews on the effectiveness of management and policy interventions.
- ***Evidence and Attribution*** - Andy Rowe, Vice President, GHK Consulting, Ltd. The presentation discusses a recent review of evaluation methodologies, focusing on evidence and attribution issues. Experimental designs are usually not feasible, therefore it is important to replace the emphasis on methods with a focus on evidence standards and requirements.
- ***What is Evidence*** - Paul J. Ferraro, Department of Economics, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies. Evidence is defined as something that changes the probability that a proposition is true, and if it is to be used for attribution, evidence must be gathered using the scientific method. It is not self-evident that individuals involved with environmental policy have an incentive to generate high quality evidence.

2. ***Closing the gaps for the field of environmental evaluation:***
   - ***Evaluating Environmental Education: Challenges and Opportunities*** - Annelise Carleton-Hug, Trillium Associates. The presentation addressed the challenges facing environmental program evaluators, including the complexities involved in measuring affective, cognitive and behavioral change. Current practice in environmental education evaluation involves developing a theory of change with stakeholders, and utilizing a wide variety of data evidence to inform decision making.
   - ***RARE: Inspiring Conservation*** - Brett Jenks, Rare. Brett shared his experience as CEO of Rare developing and implementing systems for designing and evaluating efforts to build global constituencies for conservation. Rare utilizes a theory of change approach to evaluate three measures of success: capacity, constituency, and conservation.
   - ***The Role of the University in Building Capacity for Environmental Evaluation: Needs and Opportunities*** - Gail Achterman, Institute for Natural Resources, Oregon State University. The presentation addressed how universities can utilize their research, teaching, and outreach roles to contribute to environmental evaluation capacity building. The ultimate outcome of this increased capacity is high quality program evaluations that improve environmental results and assure accountability.
   - ***Bridging the Gaps: Perspectives from a Local Government*** - Michael Jacobson, Office of County Executive Ron Sims, King County Washington. The presentation compares and contrasts local and federal evaluation capacity, and then discusses in detail King County's approach to integrating evaluation into their performance management system. The discussion cites examples of completed outcome evaluations of King County programs and reviewed cultural, methodological, and bureaucratic challenges that must be addressed in order to improve evaluations.
   - ***Counting What Counts: Bridging the Gaps among Stakeholder Perspectives*** - Jennifer Nash, Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Stakeholders face different goals, needs, and challenges with respect to environmental program evaluation, which often lead to different implications for evaluation practice. This presentation uses EPA's flagship voluntary program (the National Environmental Performance Track) to show that stakeholders share some perspectives on evaluation and suggest ways to bridge existing gaps in understanding.
   - ***The Dodge Assessment Initiative*** - Michelle Knapik, The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. The presentation introduces the central principles and concepts of the Dodge Foundation Assessment Initiative, especially the concept that Dodge is committed to developing a culture of assessment aimed at improving performance rather than merely auditing it. This involves measuring what matters, planning backwards, the use of rubrics in program and project design, and the evolution of a culture of assessment.
   - ***Some Thoughts on Capacity Building*** - V. Neimanis, Audit and Evaluation Branch, Environment Canada. The presentation introduces a draft logic model of the Environmental Evaluator's Network and identifies opportunities for the Network to support capacity development in the field of environmental evaluation.