

EEN Forum 2009 Notes, 6/9/2009 3:00 p.m.

Plenary: Forum Synthesis and Next Steps for the EEN

Debra Rog

Value of Evaluation:

- neutral, brings people to the table
- evaluation can serve as an analyst, educator and scapegoat

Gaps:

- need for broader array of methods and tools
- need to assist folks in setting goals, scales, measures, sensitivity to measuring change
- work in definitions
- emphasis on evaluation for learning
- look at roadmap for role evaluation can play

Different perspectives:

- Utilization: we may not see the use but evaluation can have a use beyond us – the field of evaluation is also a stakeholder

Toolkits:

- educate new evaluators and practitioners
- brings self-critical stance
- exposing novices to range in tools

Evaluation is not a cookbook of recipe – we design changes as we go depending on context

Evaluation is always series of trade-off decisions

Principles and practice that we follow

- how will we maintain validity and balance bias
- tradeoffs all the time
- may need bias to get the stakeholders in

Opportunity for EEN

- field that has lots of challenges
- fertile ground for learning about evaluation, creating innovative tools
- cutting edge for design and measurement

George Grob:

What EEN is doing well:

- Growing movement of program managers and grant managers who want to make best use of evaluations (not quite so true with public and policy makers)
- managers should know about evaluation and embed it in programs

- evaluation is catching on and is very diverse – consistent with notion of context-based evaluation
- theme: adaptive evaluation and management – be adaptive in everything you do, recursively of evaluation
- building evaluation in from the beginning (logic models are the start)
- many changing methods
- ideas of standards of practice on how you use evaluation and apply it = extremely important, can be adapted to any level
- lots of openness about methods and practices instead of doctrinaire

Gaps:

- need to connect to policy makers as well as to the program managers
- need to go out and talk to them not just write to them
- no widely followed progress statistics for evaluators to tell the world where you're at
- catering to what users want as well as what evaluators want – what have you done to draw users in? techniques for engaging users?

Opportunities:

- climate change, economic recovery, green movement, sustainability movement, new administration, etc.

Doug Horton:

Themes – take-home messages

- Great enthusiasm, productive interactions, etc.
- Collective action is occurring here
- Importance of context – local context and global context – Where are we? Where is intervention located? Why is evaluation being done? Who is it being done for?
- Importance of evaluability assessment – may not do an evaluation if it's not helpful
- Range of subject matters/issues in environmental evaluation and range of interventions (education, etc.), policy cycle – 3 points on matrix for locating intervention: what subject, what point on policy cycle and what type of intervention?
- Environmental evaluators are part-timers – demands are great but we're working on part-time basis so there may be disconnect between demand/expectations and resources
- Adaptive evaluation

Rich methods and techniques for evaluation – challenge = linking this knowledge and capacity with actors

- Group at Harvard – Sustainability science program – linking knowledge with action, relevance credibility and legitimacy

Opportunities – growth field, get on board as providers as useful info (needs assessment, meta analysis, provide info to policy makers now and link external capacity to practical problems

- strategic management function – promote learning and change and accountability

- AEA and EEN = resources in building internal evaluation capacity

Discussion:

Steve Potts: might be useful to people getting started to have mentor/mentee relationship – who are the practitioners out there and newer folks could become apprentices – offers to help organize in some way. Would be interesting to break organizational bounds and learn from each other.

Richard Gelb: lots of activity and growing utilization of evaluations in environmental field. May be at a point if a little more structured taxonomy of our approaches (around matrix of pt in decision cycle, intervention, etc., formal to informal,) – need to include full spectrum

Actions to take:

Katherine Dawes:

- actions you could take as individuals, organizations and EEN could take?
- 2006 forum focused on this issue specifically – building website, networking in between forums, etc.

Matt Keene:

- working session on EEN products, to address needs identified by advisory group
- toolbox of tools evaluators/practitioners could use to conduct evaluations, repository of environmental evaluations, communications tools, etc.
- start iterative process and defining what needs to be done
- should we create a taxonomy of environmental evaluations?

Lisa Flowers:

- Boone and Crockett club – would be interesting to bring people making and writing policy on a panel in the next forum and think about how we can integrate evaluation into policy writing

Ed Washburn:

- going up to another level – getting the administrator next year? Another agency's top person? Can we think about how we'll lure them to the next forum?
- What's the alternative? Have to turn the tide around and get evaluation more recognition

Annelise Carlton-Hug:

- need for all of us to share and disseminate what we're learning from our evaluations
- Attend AEA conference, lots of professional development workshops
- TIG? Submit proposals for next year
- Get info from evaluations out in popular press, out to practitioners, not just academic journals

Debra Rog:

- AEA has resource library where you can upload your evaluation, tools, etc. if you have things you want to share – growing
- forums, communication vehicles, new members forums, technology forum

Matt Birnbaum.

- first issue dedicated to environmental evaluators published today
- new directions for evaluation, program planning and evaluation (fall) volume exclusive to environment
- discussion about books have occurred – follow-up with Matt B.
- Website – www.nfwf.org/evaluation - powerpoints will be archived on site

Robert Tkaczyk:

Should this be the only networking forum?

- good start in Canada
- need for more collaboration – federal, provinces, territories, other orgs, etc.
- come up with solid decision-making evaluations to inform decisions at highest level
- EEN has helped us talk about best practices, discuss issues, etc.
- 2009 EEN Canada forum – by invitation only – focus on tools

Terrell Lasane:

- in development at ESD – extending EEN Forum by having series of monthly calls to continue discussions
- have certain people speak about their area or discipline and continue the discussion between annual meetings