**2011 EEN Forum Notes**

**Session Name: Keynote Addresses**

**Speakers:** Michael L. Goo – EPA

Shelley Metzenbaum – US Office of Management and Budget

Melvin Mark – Penn State University

**Session Date/Time:** 6/23/2010 9 AM

**Notetaker**: Laura Rothlisberger

**Main Themes**:

* Defining complexity.
* Complex problems currently being faced in the environment and in government.
* Important role evaluation plays in working effectively with these problems.

**Detailed Notes**:

**Speaker 1: Michael L. Goo, Associate Administrator EPA Office of Policy**

* He will ask questions and provoke thought
* Are complexity and simplicity connected?
* It is hard to evaluate complexity, especially environmental complexity.
* Bill Ruckelshaus described the difference between the problems of the 1960s and today. Problems today:
  + Ocean acidification
  + Climate change, etc.

These problems may not be as apparent as the environmental challenges of the 1960s, but they are urgent.

* Charge to the EEN: Identify how evaluation can help an environmental advocate, policymaker, and regulator deliver the world we envision.
* Reality is complex, interconnected and fleeting. Reality must be studied to understand that complexity.

**Speaker 2: Shelley Metzenbaum, OMB Associate Director for Performance and Personnel**

* Her two goals:
  + Congratulate and thank members of the Environmental Evaluators Network.
  + Enlist participants to integrate students, research, and analysis in the way we do business. Focus on researching the interventions used to solve problems. Determine if they are the right interventions. Problem-solving network is strengthened at the forum.
* Performance management can be used to improve government.
* Update on how OMB is approaching evaluation:
  + Set clear goals. Heads of agencies had to state 2-year goals. It is now law that agencies have priority goals.
  + Determine if the goal is accomplished. People must first determine the measure and find evidence to set the goals. It is necessary to develop an action plan. There are quarterly reviews of priority goals and these are data-driven reviews. Must determine where progress is being made. Also want to share the data.
  + Two key aspects: Emphasis on outcomes and not on number of widgets made. Continual focus on the goals; must use goals to set priorities and develop programs.
* Two examples of current goals in federal government:
  + EPA goal: Enforcement Office set a water quality enforcement goal. Began looking at water quality data in a new way. They used the data to identify a problem and then focus on bringing about change. Real-time data used.
  + Department of Agriculture also set a water quality enforcement goal. USDA has 4 bureaus and 21 programs involved with water quality. Brought all these groups together and identified high-priority watersheds. Looked at evidence to find out what best practices were being used and then tried to implement in all of USDA.
* Using a goal-based, data-drive approach to government will:
  + Identify if progress is not being made and determine the reason why not.
  + If progress is being made, that should be accelerated.
  + Help to achieve better outcomes at a lower cost and increase public trust.

**Speaker 3: Melvin Mark, Former President American Evaluation Association, Professor and Head of Psychology at Penn State University**

* Challenging questions around program theme.
  + What does complexity mean?
  + What does chaos mean?
* Is the theme about complexity with respect to:
  + Environmental phenomenon?
  + Multiple components of broad agency policy?
  + Challenges of evaluation?
* Before focusing on complexity, focus on the evaluation purpose. Then worry about things related to complexity.
* In summative evaluations where the concern is if something worked our not there is not as much an issue of complexity. The question of why something worked is much more complex.
* In formative evaluations complexity makes more of a difference.
* Issues of scale should be added to issues of complexity. How big do the effects have to be? Does the program begin with a plan for dissemination or is it part of a portfolio?
* Complexity cannot be an excuse to keep us from evaluation. Evaluators don’t deal with simple, tractable problems.
* Think about evaluation work as an intervention in the world. Consider the intended uses of the evaluation and the emergent possible consequences that come from that.
* Evaluation has always been difficult, but when dealing with complexity it is even more difficult.
* Evaluation contributions are potentially hugely important to solve the problems mentioned by Michael Goo during his keynote remarks.