

Metaevaluation: Purpose, Prescription, & Practice

Arlen Gullickson, Principal Investigator
Lori Wingate, Senior Research Associate



The Evaluation Center

Evaluate*e*
EVALUATION RESOURCE CENTER *for*
advanced technological education



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant Nos. 0802245 and 0702981. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

“For all the attention, interest, and advocacy, actual examples of metaevaluation are sparse.”

Gary Henry & Melvin Mark (2003)

Presentation Overview

- Metaevaluation Purpose
- Metaevaluation Prescriptions
- Metaevaluation Practice
 - In peer-reviewed literature
 - In our experience
 - What's unique about metaevaluation vis-à-vis The Program Evaluation Standards

Purpose

- Scriven (1969):
 - “the methodological assessment of the role of evaluation”
 - “the evaluation of specific evaluative performances”

Purpose

- Stufflebeam (2001):
 - For evaluators, to...
 - assure the quality of their evaluations
 - improve individual studies and evaluation approaches
 - earn and maintain credibility among clients and other evaluators
 - For consumers, to...
 - avoid accepting invalid evaluative conclusions
 - use evaluation information with confidence
 - For evaluation managers, to...
 - assure the quality of their institution's evaluation services

Purpose

- American Evaluation Association (Worthen, 1999):
 - “to teach ways to better our individual and collective evaluation practice”

Prescription

- Scriven (2007):
 - Critique the evaluation's design against criteria for good evaluation design
 - Apply the Program Evaluation Standards to the evaluation
 - Compare the evaluation against the requirements set forth in the Key Evaluation Checklist
 - Replicate evaluation using same methodology and compare results
 - Evaluate same evaluand using different methodology and compare results

Prescription

- Stufflebeam (2001)

1. Consult with the metaevaluation's stakeholders.
2. Define the metaevaluation questions.
3. Agree on standards, principles, and/or criteria to judge the evaluation.
4. Develop the memorandum of agreement or contract to govern the metaevaluation.
5. Collect and review pertinent available information.
6. Collect new information as needed.
7. Analyze the information.
8. Judge the evaluation's adherence to appropriate standards, principles, and/or criteria.
9. Report the findings.
10. Assist clients/stakeholders to apply the findings.

Prescription

- Joint Committee Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994):
 - Accuracy Standard 12 – Metaevaluation
 - “The evaluation itself should be formatively and summatively evaluated against these and other pertinent standards, so that its conduct is appropriately guided and, on completion, stakeholders can closely examine its strengths and weaknesses.”

Practice

- Evidence in the peer-reviewed literature:
 - 19 articles on real-world metaevaluations
 - 11 published since 2000
 - 7 published in 2003 (the year of Henry and Mark's comment) or later.
- Probably many more examples in the "gray literature"

Our Experience

- 5 ATE metaevaluations over 9 years
 - focused on
 - site visits and issues papers
 - survey (2)
 - overall evaluation (2)
 - Conducted by 5 independent, external evaluators

ATE Metaevaluation Questions & Criteria

Focus	Questions	Criteria
(A) Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None specified	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program Evaluation Standards (Joint Committee, 1994)• Dillman's (2000) Principles for Constructing Web Surveys
(B) Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None specified	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None specified
(C) Overall evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None specified	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program Evaluation Standards (Joint Committee, 1994)
(D) Overall evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None specified	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program Evaluation Standards (Joint Committee, 1994)

ATE Metaevaluation Questions & Criteria

Focus	Questions	Criteria
(E) Site visits & issue papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the protocol/fieldwork been conducted in accordance with the contract? • Were the 13 sites chosen with an appropriate rationale? • Are team members individually competent and effective as a team? • Were the hosts properly prepared to optimize use of site visit time? • Has an effort been made to have the visit and report useful to the projects visited? • Have site visitors been well prepared to carry out their responsibilities? • Is the protocol sufficiently oriented to actual activities, field operations, classrooms, and students? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None specified

ATE Metaevaluation Questions & Criteria

Focus	Questions	Criteria
(E) Site visits & issue papers (cont'd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the evaluation attendant to the state of the art in the relevant technical field? • Are the reports useful, comprehensible, and issue oriented? • From team to team is there sufficient communication for coordination but not so much that it reduces the independence of the individual report? • Is the site work cost effective? Does NSF get its money's worth from this part of the evaluation? • Has an appropriate effort been made to validate the description and merit of the local projects? • Can it be concluded that the brief visit provides sufficient data on the work at the site over the several years of their contract? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None specified

ATE Metaevaluation Data Sources & Methods

Focus	Data Sources	Methods
(A) Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey instrument • Multiple survey reports • Site visit reports • ATE Web site • Work schedules • Data handling/verification procedures • Data files • E-mail messages • Project staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews
(B) Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey instrument • Survey reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review
(C) Overall evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports • Project staff • Program officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews

ATE Metaevaluation Data Sources & Methods

Focus	Data Sources	Methods
(D) Overall evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None specified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None specified
(E) Site visits & issue papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project correspondence • Site visit protocols • Site visit reports • Issue papers • Project staff • Program officers • ATE grantees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review • Interviews • Site visits • Participant observation

The Program Evaluation Standards

- **Utility**
 - Evaluations should serve the information needs of intended users.
- **Feasibility**
 - Evaluations should be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal.
- **Propriety**
 - Evaluation should be conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results.
- **Accuracy**
 - Evaluations should reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine worth or merit of the program being evaluated.

Unique Features of Metaevaluation

Re: Utility

- Values Identification (U4)
 - In the interest of advancing evaluation as a discipline, metaevaluators should invoke commonly accepted criteria for evaluating evaluations, such as The Program Evaluation Standards
 - Metaevaluation is less likely than primary evaluation to be a team effort and therefore more dependent on the metaevaluator as the source of values

Unique Features of Metaevaluation

Re: Feasibility

- Political Viability (F1)
 - Less experienced evaluators may be reticent to guide or correct “expert” metaevaluators
 - Internal metaevaluators may be reluctant to challenge superiors
 - Metaevaluation could raise questions about primary evaluator’s competence
 - Evaluators are not accustomed to be evaluated
- Cost Effectiveness (F2)
 - Metaevaluation may seem redundant and not worth the expense
- Practical Procedures (F3)
 - Extra burden on evaluation respondents/participants to also provide information for the metaevaluation

Unique Features of Metaevaluation

Re: Propriety

- Disclosure of Findings (P6)
 - It's especially important for evaluators whose work has been evaluated to share metaevaluation results to demonstrate we "practice what we preach"
- Conflict of Interest (P7)
 - The evaluation community is fairly small, and evaluators must take care to engage "critical friends" instead of "friendly critics"

Unique Features of Metaevaluation

Re: Accuracy

- Defensible Information Sources (A4)
 - Evaluation products (reports) are the primary focus of a metaevaluation; process is secondary (reverse is usually true of program evaluation).
- Metaevaluation (A12)
 - Metaevaluation usually not subject to metaevaluation—diminishing returns.

Informal Metaevaluation

- Evaluations often subject to review and feedback by
 - Project advisory panels
 - Clients
- Potential clients and competitors may also be paying attention

Contact Information

Arlen Gullickson

arlen.gullickson@wmich.edu

Lori Wingate

lori.wingate@wmich.edu