Webinar Handout

High-Impact, Low-Cost Evaluation for Small Projects

by Jason Burkhardt, Elaine Craft, Dennis Faber, Emma Perk, and Lori Wingate | February 18, 2015

Webinar slides and recording are available at evalu-ate.org/webinars/2015_feb.

ATE Small Grants

ATE small grants are for institutions new to the ATE program. The program solicitation recommends that small grant applicants use resources developed by ATE projects and centers and consult with ATE PIs—visit the www.atecentral.net to connect with the ATE resources and expertise. To learn more about the small grants program track, see Mentor-Connect's webinar recording at bit.ly/ate-small.

Getting Help from Mentor-Connect

Mentor-Connect works to develop and support potential, current, and former ATE program grantees. Mentor-Connect's online resources, webinars, and help desk are available to everyone. They offer one-on-one mentoring to small cohorts of ATE small grant applicants each year. To learn more, including how to apply to be a mentor, visit mentor-connect.org.

Cost-Saving Strategies for Small Project Evaluations

Focus the evaluation—logic models help

Match the scope of the evaluation to the scope of the project. This is the most important thing you can do to ensure your evaluation resources are used efficiently. First, make sure there is clarity about the *need* the project is addressing, its main *activities*, its *impactees*, and intended *outcomes*. Use a logic model to show how these aspects of the project related to each other (check out EvaluATE's logic model template at bit.ly/1CgMElr). Once the project's logic is confirmed, then you can develop the specific evaluation questions, indicators, and data sources/methods. Putting these key evaluation plan components into a matrix will help ensure that the plan is complete and focused on the right things. Setting targets for each indicator will help with interpreting the evaluation findings.

Track engagement

Develop a tracking system to capture project reach and participation. Use a spreadsheet or database to keep a log of who engages with the project, including their demographics, contact information, type of involvement in the project, and dates of participation.

Create a project fact sheet or resume

Maintain a record of key project activities and accomplishments. Create a project resume or fact sheet that provides factual information such as funding, staff, products, and human resources (including staff, partners, consultants, and contributors)—see an example at evalu-ate.org/about/resume). It puts much of the information you'll need for your NSF annual report at your fingertips, and serves as a public account of how the grant's funds are being used.

Use secondary data

Utilize institutional research data to the fullest extent possible. Institutional research offices track a lot of data about students, which includes their demographics and enrollment information, which you may be able to use to determine retention and graduation rates, create baseline data retrospectively, track changes over time, and create comparison groups. See Carolyn Brennan and Russell Cannon's newsletter and blog articles on using institutional data for grant writing and evaluation at bit.ly/instdata.

Share responsibility

Leverage internal and external evaluation. All ATE projects require external evaluators, but that doesn't mean they can or should do all the evaluation-related work. Project leaders and evaluators should negotiate which aspects of the evaluation can be handled by the project team. To learn about different ways to organize internal and external evaluation functions, see Lori Wingate's article in EvaluATE's Fall 2014 newsletter at bit.ly/int-ext.

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