Southeast Evaluation Association

Southeast Evaluation Association

August 2009

Weathering the Storm: Internal Evaluation in State Government

John Austin
State Sector Representative

Photograph courtesy of John Austin

Suppose that you are not an auditor within the state government system whose primary responsibility is to perform audits, conduct management reviews, and present findings. Instead, imagine that your job is to assist management with making decisions based on qualitative or quantitative data analysis. If this is the case, then you are probably in the precarious position of an internal evaluator, ever teetering on the unstable thread between evaluation method purity and pragmatism pressed by political and financial realities. In many circumstances, program survival trumps analytical piety, and incentives are stacked against spending the time and resources for the most comprehensive analysis.

Consider this scenario: Based on the findings from a Revenue Estimating Conference and subsequent presentations by the Florida Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR), it is determined that there is a deficit in the state budget requiring some sort of fiscal strategy. According to the EDR, there are essentially five types of fiscal strategies: 1) budget reductions and reduced growth; 2) trust fund transfers or sweeps; 3) revenue enhancements; 4) funding redirections; or 5) any combination of these. However, due to a sharp economic decline, redirecting, transferring, or sweeping funds cannot make up for the shortfall. What remains is a limited set of options, either make budget cuts or bring in more revenue. Since increased taxation rarely wins a political popularity contest, finding ways to increase fees and maximize federal funding becomes a primary pursuit, along with an effort to find opportunities to impose budget reductions.

With knowledge of the budget realities at hand, the governor requests that the Office of Policy and Budget perform an exercise wherein each state agency provides plans for a budget reduction of a certain percentage. This reduction exercise may be specific to salaries and benefits but generally is open for proposed reductions from any fund type. The obvious reason for this exercise is to have opportunities to make cuts readily available in order to prevent raising fees, or worse, taxes. Budget personnel within the various departments scramble to identify potential funds that can be cut to limit the impact on services and staffing levels. Working under tight deadlines, they consider various ways to address the budget shortfalls and proceed to brief management which then set budget caps on programs. At times, layoffs are scheduled, travel is suspended, hiring freezes are administered, and limits on purchases are introduced to ensure that the percent reduction in the budget is achieved.

At this point you might ask, "Where is the internal evaluator in this process?" Well, in scenarios like this, there is usually not enough time to conduct a thorough analysis of the program. At most, managers will request data from the internal evaluator to verify or bolster preset ideas to realize the cuts. From this point, until a decision is made (*continued on page 2*)

Inside this issue:

Weathering the Storm 1-2

SEA President's Message 3

The Joys & Challenges of Consulting 4

Book Review 5

SEA's Annual Conference 6

Highlights from recent SEA Programs 6

SEA's Essential Skills Workshop 7

Mark Your Calendars! Future SEA Programs

- September 14-16, 8:30-5: Essential Skills Training
- October (date TBD) - Emerging Issues in Health
- October 7, 12-1: Positive Psychology
- October 29, 9-12: Survey Development
- November (date TBD): Economic Forecast
- November 9-14: AEA Conference in Orlando
- December 4: SEA Holiday Social
- January 2010, 3-5: Qualitative Data Collection & Analysis

See SEA's Website for updates!

Weathering the Storm (continued)

"Budget personnel within the various departments scramble to identify potential funds that can be cut to limit the impact on services and staffing levels."

to accept the proposed budget reductions, the program is in a holding pattern, suspended from normal operations. This predicament introduces special cause variation in some performance measures used to justify a program's value and, ultimately, its existence.

Decisions made by managers in response to budget reductions hinge on preset ideas, assumptions, and in some cases, guesswork. According to Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, and Smith (1994), "We live in a world of self-generating beliefs which remain largely untested. We adopt these beliefs because they are based on conclusions, which are inferred from what we observe, plus our past experiences." (p. 242). Senge et. al. describes this concept as a *Ladder of Inference* where decisions are based on one evaluating personal experiences, deeming them as truth, developing beliefs from this truth, and taking action on these beliefs. Managers making decisions climb this *ladder of Inference* to reach conclusions. With this concept in mind, what can an internal evaluator do to ensure that budget exercises do not jeopardize the effectiveness of a program while adding value to management decision-making through effective evaluation?

First, the internal evaluator can solicit ideas from the entire organization on cost savings opportunities and ideas for revenue enhancements. Using this information, the internal evaluator can facilitate a team to categorize and prioritize these opportunities using weighted criteria to develop a list of cost-saving projects. While this approach is reactive, it can aid management in locating and prioritizing options to realize the proposed budget reductions.

Second, the internal evaluator can work with management to ensure all operating capital outlays and other expenses are mission critical by establishing or updating an internal performance management system. This proactive approach can require extensive preparation; however, it ensures that budgeting, along with performance, are measured on how they contribute to specific strategic goals/objectives. As the performance measures are monitored, performance gaps are identified, thereby providing insight for the internal evaluator to explore correlations and contributions to perceived performance anomalies.

Guajardo and McDonnell (2000) explain that "by evaluating programs and services, government officials and program administrators can assess how well program inputs are used to achieve department goals and objectives." (p. 68) In addition, the authors conclude that "without the use of performance measures, finance and program administrators cannot adequately assess and improve a government's programs and services nor can they readily develop initiatives for improving service delivery." (Guajardo and McDonnell, p. 69) With consistent monitoring of performance measures, the internal evaluator can focus advanced analyses more effectively to help management make informed decisions to withstand budgetary shortfalls.

John Austin is the State Sector Representative on SEA's Board. He currently works for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as an internal consultant to the Director of the Division of Law Enforcement. His primary focus is in increasing productivity and effectiveness of programs.

Guajardo, S.A., and McDonnell, R. (2000). An Elected Official's Guide to Performance Measurement. Chicago, IL: Government Finance Officers Association.

Senge, P.M., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C. and Smith, B.J. (1994). The Fifth Discipline Field book: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization. New York, NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

The President's Message

By Kathy McGuire

Our goal this year is to expand our professional development opportunities beyond Tallahassee. As part of that effort, we will video conference two training opportunities this year:

- **Survey Development**, 9:00-noon, October 29. Dr. Steve Harkreader, Dr. Kathleen Del Monte, and Jenny Wilhelm, OPPAGA
- **Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis**, 3:00 - 5:00 p.m., January 2010. Dr. Linda Schrader, FSU, and Dr. Linda Smith, **consultant**.

We are still developing locations to broadcast to, so PLEASE let us know if you are interested.

We hope to see you in Orlando at the American Evaluation Association's annual conference November 9-14, 2009. Look for our host state booth—leave your business card for a chance to win a free 2010 SEA membership!

We are also planning our next SEA Conference in Tallahassee, February 22-23, 2010. If you have ideas for topics you would like to know more about, Gary Walby, our conference organizer, would love to hear from you!

Finally, we have several great brown bag lunch events planned for Tallahassee, including an Emerging Issues in Health Roundtable and presentations on Positive Psychology and SEA's Essential Skills Workshop will take place September 14, 15, & 16 - see page 7 for more information! On behalf of us all, I want to thank Sean Little and Bernadette Howard for putting together these great newsletters. If you have a topic you would like to see highlighted, please drop us a line!

SEA President
Kathy McGuire

Photograph courtesy of Kathy McGuire

Call for Stories: Evaluator Creativity (or Turning Lemons into Lemonade)

John Austin's article (page 1-2) is one evaluator's story of how he used the tools of evaluation to respond creatively to the budget crunch. The financial meltdown creates an increased need among managers and other end-users for decisions, requiring high quality information. This could be an opportunity for evaluators to be creative and to prove our worth, benefiting program services, the field of evaluation, and our individual careers. In order to cross-fertilize our creativity, we would like your stories on how you used this "opportunity" to use evaluation tools to solve problems. One page of this newsletter is about 500 words so we would like to keep your stories to that length or less. Please - no dissertations! Send your stories to Bernadette Howard with "Evaluator Creativity" in the subject line. Please do not identify your agency or specific individuals. SEA would like to avoid lawsuits.

Thank you!

Source: Microsoft Clip Art

SEA Summer Social:
The Joys and Challenges of Consulting

With Dr. Connie Bergquist and Kaye Kendrick, moderated by Dr. Betty Serow (June 11)

By Michelle Chandrasekhar

This pleasant social was well-attended and informative! Our speakers had varied experiences and offered advice, stories, and answered questions. Advice highlights are:

1. Two kinds of consulting practices are yours to choose from. The first option is to hire a good team with well-rounded expertise that will meet the needs of most contracts and maintain the continuing contracts to make payroll. The second option is to work around each contract (i.e., hire sub-contractors for specific tasks). In both options, the consultant has a heavy time commitment. Our experts recommended new consultants obtain a network of people with various evaluation skills as well as a good accountant, lawyer (for liability issues), and a banker. A second income source is important, too!

2. Consulting requires juggling multiple skill sets every day: business administration, marketing, IT, project management, and all the usual skills of an evaluator. The hours can be long and sometimes solitary, but you set them. If you dislike writing proposals and reports, or need your routine to do your best, don't do consulting!

3. Some contracts are lucrative but cash flow can be an issue with 3-6 months between billing and payment. Some funding agencies cannot pay up-front costs or will withhold payment until a report is signed off as "satisfactory". Negotiate money matters in the initial contract. Define pay schedules, who signs off, and for what products. Try to have 30% up front for an early deliverable (like a needs assessment), then place the funds in an escrow. This will provide you with cash needed to complete the contract. Remember: state and federal monies cannot pay for work done prior to the signed contract date!

4. Persons new to consulting should consider the following tips. First, new consultants underestimate the time needed to do the work, so double your time estimate. Second, agencies will rarely award an RFP to an unknown consultant. You may have to submit two to three bids on different RFPs to the same agency before that agency becomes familiar enough with you to seriously consider your proposal. Third, clarify if you will be working as an internal or external evaluator, who the incumbents might be, and who will read the report. You may write several reports for different audiences. Fourth, communicate often since expectations can change, but with cell phones and email, consider how accessible you want to be.

Lastly, consider sub-contractors: if they can't do the work or do not integrate well, either you will do the work or your contract will suffer. The panel suggested that you offer subcontractors more than their bid, since an employee who feels undervalued can end up doing poor quality work. Your subcontractors are making bids to get jobs from you. They, like you, may underestimate what a particular job is actually going to require and find themselves stuck with a lower than reasonable estimate. Then you find yourself with an employee who is feeling undervalued and overworked. Rather than let that scenario cause problems in terms of their work quality (where they consciously or unconsciously try to cut their 'losses'), the suggestion was to pay more than the bid. Paying slightly higher shows that you value the employee and their work and in effect, creates a loyal employee.

5. What are the potential earnings? A subcontractor can be paid a flat fee depending upon quality and task or an hourly rate – both will vary by level of experience and the nature of the task. The day, however, could be a 12-hour day or longer! Market value can determine hourly rates as well. Expertise in rare-content-high-demand areas might command higher rates than those for expertise in common-content-low-demand areas. How much to charge can be a matter of your costs and needs, but it also must cover the "dead" hours spent marketing your business and writing proposals. Since giving specific amounts of compensation in newsletters of professional organizations may be considered "price fixing" and can't take into account all of your time, it is a good idea to spend some time doing research on compensation rates in your areas of expertise.

Remember that your proposals are estimates. Project planning and proposals will improve with good tracking of time and experience, but the panelist's advice is to plan in terms of days rather than hours. In addition to costs and salary, consider retirement, insurance, social security, and taxes. Plan on 33-40% of your net going into the bank to cover these expenses.
One final piece of advice: listen to your client. What they want is not always clear, but part of your job is to help them define it in evaluation terms. What you want is not part of it at all! With every contact you are building future contracts. Plan for these testimonials and get a letter of recommendation from every client.

Michelle Chandrasekhar is a Ph.D. student at Florida State University and a member of SEA.

Stufflebeam & Shinkfield (2007), Evaluation Theory, Models, and Applications. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Jossey–Bass (718 pages, with glossary)

For some reason, I had avoided reading Stufflebeam. When I finally did read him, I found him to be extremely thorough and methodical, as befits someone famous for creating checklists. His definition of evaluation may the longest (and most informative) that I've encountered: "The systematic process of delineating, obtaining, reporting and applying descriptive and judgmental information about some object's merit, worth, probity, feasibility, safety, significance, or equity." The authors (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield) explicate and operationalize each and every gerund and noun in that sentence, producing an eleven page extension of that definition. They maintain that level of methodical detail throughout all 718 pages of text.

Within those pages, the authors include a glossary which forms one of the most useful parts of the book. When an author provides a glossary, it helps the author think through his definitions and the reader to understand those definitions. It also makes clear that not all evaluators use the same terms to mean the same thing. Unfortunately, glossaries are not standard in most texts.

The authors describe, analyze, and compare 26 approaches to evaluation, including Stufflebeam's CIPP (context, input, process, product) model. Grad students and novice evaluators will find these explanations and comparisons of these evaluation approaches very valuable. The authors then select the eight approaches that they feel have the most value for the 21st Century. This selection process forms the most disturbing portion of the book. The authors selected the Stufflebeams's CIPP model as one of the eight most relevant for the 21st century. It very well may be one of the eight best, but giving accolades to yourself tarnishes your credibility, particularly when you have spent your career promoting ethical behavior. While the authors recognized the conflict of interest, It would have been better to take the CIPP model out of the selection process.

The other seven approaches considered most valuable are the following: 1) Objectives-Based Evaluation, 2) Experimental Design, 3) Case Study Evaluation, 4) Consumer Oriented Evaluation, 5) Responsive/Client Centered Evaluation, 6) Constructivist Evaluation, and 7) Utilization Focused Evaluation. With the exception of the constructivist approach, the authors discuss the seven approaches (including the CIPP model) in detail using the same illustrative case for each approach, which helps to contrast the different approaches.

The book contains chapters on the business aspects of evaluation: budgeting and contracting. This practicality would be invaluable in a graduate program or for evaluation consultants, particularly if their non-intentional "consultancy" status resulted from budget cuts or layoffs. The emphasis on the practical nuts-and-bolts aspect of evaluation comes as a welcome divergence from the theoretical nature of most evaluation texts.

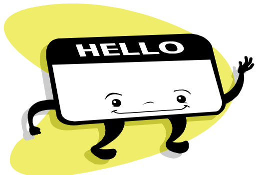
The authors probably designed the book as a graduate text, as it has review questions and group exercises at the end of each chapter. If used as a text, it would be best to also assign The Program Evaluation Standards, by the Joint Committee as the authors constantly refer to these standards, which Stufflebeam helped create. The authors also suggest specific topics in evaluation in need of examination and testing which could be fertile dissertation material.

At 700+ pages, this is not a light read but it has both merit and worth for the grad student, the novice evaluator, the non-intentional "consultant", and the seasoned practitioner.

"The authors describe, analyze, and compare 26 approaches to evaluation, including Stufflebeam's CIPP model."

Sean Little, Editor & Book Reviewer

Sean Little currently works in Monitoring and Evaluation for Child Support Enforcement in Fort Lauderdale. His background is in HIV prevention and Substance Abuse from a Harm Reduction perspective – fields to which he hopes to return. He has an MA in Psychology (Social) and a BA in Sociology. Currently, he is studying evaluation through The Evaluators' Institute. He is also a transit minority, preferring public transportation to the inconvenience and expense of owning a car. He used to rely on public transit in Broward County during daylight hours until, after two rate hikes and decreasing service, it became cheaper to drive. He also misses side walks.



SAVE THE DATE! February 22 – 23, 2010

SEA's 2010 Annual Conference

By Gary Walby

SEA is thrilled to welcome Dr. Melinda Forthofer to be the workshop speaker and keynote speaker for SEA's 2010 annual conference being held at the Tallahassee Community College in Tallahassee, Florida. While SEA's Conference Chair Dr. Gary Walby is in the early stages of working with Dr. Forthofer, the workshop will target the use of mixed methods in different types of evaluation settings, e.g., program vs. community-based, with an emphasis on how mixed methods can be used for more cost-effective and impactful evaluations. The keynote will address incorporating and using a "lens" of social determinants when doing evaluation.

Dr. Forthofer is the Director of the Institute for Families in Society at the University of South Carolina-Columbia. She received her PhD in Health Behavior/Health Education and Sociology from the University of Michigan. While at the University of Michigan, Dr. Forthofer was on the staff of the NIMH-funded National Co-Morbidity Study at UM's Institute for Social Research.

From 1996-2006, Dr. Forthofer was Associate Professor in the Department of Community and Family Health at the University of South Florida College of Public Health. Dr. Forthofer was a Co-Founder of the CDC-funded Florida Prevention Research Center which developed and tested a prevention intervention and evaluation framework. She served as Director of the Center's Research Methods and Evaluation Unit from 1998-2005.

Within the FPRC, Dr. Forthofer led the development of a strategic research agenda aimed at continued investigation of the FPRC prevention intervention and evaluation framework's feasibility and value. She also examined mechanisms for enhancing the capacity of community organizations, local and state health departments, and academic researchers to collaborate effectively in such efforts.

Dr. Forthofer was also Principal Investigator of the Florida Health Literacy Study, an evaluation of Pfizer Inc.'s health literacy program for patients with diabetes and/or hypertension in community health clinics in Florida. She also was Director of Evaluation for the CDC-funded four-city demonstration of Friendly Access, a health service delivery model that the Lawton and Rhea Chiles Center for Healthy Mothers and Babies had developed. In addition, Dr. Forthofer has served as Director of Evaluation for the HRSA-funded Central Hillsborough Healthy Start Initiative.

SEA will be sending out a "call for proposals" very soon - tune in for more information!

Emerging Issues in Criminal Justice - August 5th

By Kathy McGuire

If you wanted to know the real facts about criminal sentencing, you could ask a judge, a public defender, a prosecutor, corrections officials, legislative staff, and forecasters - - or, even better, you could invite them all to sit down together over lunch to discuss sentencing from their respective vantage points. That's what happened at SEA's Emerging Issues in Criminal Justice Roundtable in August. The group discussed and debated several issues, including alternatives to incarceration, declines in county jail populations, treatment of substance abusers, and the recent business community interest in addressing correctional problems and reducing related expenditures. The group felt the cross-agency dialogue was very useful, and plans to met again in January. In October, SEA will host a similar Emerging Issues in Health Roundtable.

The Next Phase of the Influenza Pandemic

by Kathy Pilkenton

The SEA co-sponsored a presentation by Scott McPherson titled, "The Next Phase of the Influenza Pandemic" during a luncheon roundtable on August 10. Mr. McPherson, Chairman of the Florida CIO Council's Pandemic Preparedness Committee, emphasized the next phase of the current Swine Flu (H1N1) Pandemic will begin this fall. He reviewed lessons learned from historical pandemics, contrasted those with the current situation, and said experts are looking at what is now happening in South America where the Southern Hemisphere flu season is well underway and H1N1 deaths are increasing. As well, he noted the vigilance required by epidemiologists as flu viruses are notorious for mutating and recombining into more virulent forms. Mr. McPherson also referenced several websites for becoming better informed about H1N1:

Florida CIO Council: http://bpr.state.fl.us/pandemic/

Florida Department of Health: http://www.doh.state.fl.us/DEMO/php/FluInfo.htm

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: http://pandemicflu.gov/

2009 Essential Skills Training

WHEN:

September 14-16 (Monday -Wednesday), 8:30– 5:00 p.m. Sign up for one, two, or all three days (registration fees range from $100—$300).

WHO SHOULD ATTEND:

Experienced researchers who want a refresher; new evaluation or program professionals; and those who manage evaluation projects for their organizations.

CONTENT:

DAY 1: Program Evaluation

- Introduction to Program Evaluation
- Types of Evaluation
- Ethical issues with Human Subjects
- Planning an Evaluation

DAY 2: Monitoring, Process, and Outcome Evaluation

- Introduction to Process Evaluation
- Designing Process Evaluations
- Introduction to Outcome Evaluation
- Designing Outcome Evaluations
- Outcome Monitoring Systems
- Relating Results to Program Costs

DAY 3: Data Collection Techniques and Using Evaluation Results

- Data Collection Techniques—Interviews, Focus Groups, and Surveys
- Communicating Evaluation Results
- Evaluation utilization

INSTRUCTORS:

Top-Notch in the field of program evaluation:

- Dr. Fran Berry, Director, Askew School of Public Administration, Florida State University (FSU)
- Dr. Tamara Bertrand-Jones, Office of Research, Division of Student Affairs, FSU
- Byron Brown, Chief Legislative Analyst, Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA)
- Dr. Kathleen Del Monte, Senior Legislative Analyst, OPPAGA
- Nancy Dufoe, Chief Legislative Analyst, OPPAGA
- Dr. Steve Harkreader, Methodologist, OPPAGA
- Dr. Betty Serow, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Data Analysis, Department of Health
- Dr. Gary VanLandingham, Director, OPPAGA

LOCATION

Conference Room #302 of the Pepper Building at 111 West Madison Street in Tallahassee. Parking is available at Kleman Plaza with an entrance on Duval Street (one-way north) near the Duval and Jefferson Street intersection (see a map of downtown Tallahassee). See SEA's website for registration and more information!

Southeast Evaluation Association

P. O. Box 10125
Tallahassee, FL 23202

E-mail: seacoordinator@southeastevaluation.com
Web: www.southeastevaluation.com

We're on the web!
www.southeastevaluation.com

The **Southeast Evaluation Association** (SEA) is a regional affiliate of the American Evaluation Association. We represent evaluators and evaluation-related professionals from the state, university, school system (local) and private sectors. Our members come from a variety of backgrounds: policy analysis, program auditing, teaching, program evaluation, and performance measurement. SEA's annual conference attracts nationally recognized speakers and participants from the entire southeast region. Several agencies use our programs and conferences as low cost training and networking opportunities for their employees.

Annual membership ($30; $10 for full-time students) offers reduced registration fees for the Annual Conference, Pre-Conference Workshop, Essential Skills Workshop, and the various training sessions held throughout the year. Members also receive a periodic newsletter throughout the year. The newsletter is a great way to keep up with the SEA activities and innovative research in the field of evaluation. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to **email** us.

Suggestions

SEA welcomes all ideas for topics for future workshops, brown bag lunches, and conference sessions. Please contact Bernadette Howard (seacoordinator@southeastevaluation.com) with your ideas!

Thank You

Many thanks for getting this newsletter out are due to the diligent work of the Newsletter Production Crew:

Sean Little, Editor

John Austin, Michelle Chandrasekhar, Sean Little, Kathy McGuire, Kathy Pilkenton, and Gary Walby, Contributing Authors

Bernadette Howard, Susan Dusoe, and Sean Little,
Desktop Publishing