

Environmental Program Evaluation TIG

Dear TIG members,

As this year's AEA conference nears, we would like to welcome you to another EPE TIG newsletter... We are very excited about seeing all of you in DC soon...

Evaluation 2013: The State of Evaluation Practice in the Early 21st Century 27th Annual Conference of the American Evaluation Association Washington Hilton | Washington, DC, USA

Conference: October 16-19, 2013

Professional Development Workshops: October 14-16 & 20, 2013 Join more than 3,000 evaluators to experience more than 875 sessions spanning the breadth and depth of the field.

Registration is Open and Updated Registration Procedures are in Place.

Review the registration deadlines and fees and [register now!](#) In light of the government shutdown, AEA has updated its registration procedure regarding the standard registration rate. Please review the updated registration procedure.



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Lions and Tigers and Bears, and Frogs Oh My

By Christina Kakoyannis
& Dima Reda

Join us for the **EPE TIG Field Trip to the DC National Zoo!**
Noon to 2:30pm, Thursday October 17th

The demonstration session offers participants an opportunity to help solve a real-world problem via an exchange of ideas about the challenges of evaluating a complex conservation program. Session participants will visit the DC National Zoo to see the amphibian exhibit and learn



more about *the Panama Amphibian Rescue and Conservation Project*. The project was launched in 2009 to rescue amphibians in grave danger of extinction due to a deadly fungal disease spreading through Central America.

Dr. Brian Gratwicke, the project's international coordinator, will lead a tour of the amphibian exhibit, present the project, and provide information about the evaluation challenges the project is experiencing. The session will conclude with an open discussion to solicit feedback and generate ideas about how best to evaluate such a program. Questions that will be considered include: are there other indicators that could contribute to tracking the success of the project? Are there lessons that can be drawn from other disciplines about how to evaluate programs with an objective that includes developing a cure for a disease?



LOGISTICS:

We will be meeting in the Hilton lobby at **NOON** to leave for the zoo. We will provide some snacks but please grab lunch prior to departure. We also suggest wearing comfortable shoes for walking.

We will depart from the zoo by 2pm in order for people to have time to return to the Hilton in time for the 2:40pm session.

Space is limited to 25 people on a first come first-serve basis due to space limitation and transportation needs.

Please **RSVP** for the field trip by **October 10th** via email to:

Christina Kakoyannis: Christina.Kakoyannis@NFWF.ORG
Or
Dima Reda: dread@adaptation-fund.org

Evaluability Assessment: Checking your program's readiness for evaluation

By Michelle Mandolia

Hi, I am Michelle Mandolia from the US EPA's Evaluation Support Division. My colleague, Yvonne Watson, asked me to share some thoughts on my recent experiences with Evaluability Assessments (EAs). I want to start by saying my own use of EA is in the early stages. I had the pleasure of taking Debra Rog's Evaluator's Institute class on Evaluability Assessment and regularly refer to the course materials (including in drafting this piece). I have commissioned and overseen two EAs for EPA client offices. I am sharing my thoughts as someone who is interested in but still quite new to EA.

Background

I became interested in EA as an option for a situation we regularly face in my division: we commit to an evaluation for a client office and mid-way through discover that the data we anticipated using or collecting is not suitable to answer one or more of the evaluation questions. To some extent, this is the nature of the evaluation process: you cannot know exactly how it will go. Still, it can be disappointing to a program pumped about getting findings, awkward for those who have promised information to decision makers, and can be wasteful of human and financial resources. EA can help you anticipate and prevent this situation. An EA is the process of determining the readiness of a program for evaluation. An EA also helps a program determine the changes needed to increase readiness and the type of evaluation most suited to answering the program's particular evaluation questions. EAs are used to avoid wasting resources on inappropriate evaluation, to guide decisions on whether to undertake an evaluation, to refine a program before beginning an evaluation, to help design the evaluation, and to build consensus among decision makers.

Process

The EA process we have used closely mirrors the initial steps of an evaluation. We use a team of key stakeholders to guide the process. The team:

- Creates a logic model or program theory of change
- Refines the evaluation questions
- Determines possible methods to use to answer each question
- Identifies and investigates key data sources for answering the questions
- Determines the extent to which questions can be answered



Other important aspects of an EA are to analyze the plausibility of the program model, the extent of management and stakeholder support for evaluation, and the likelihood of use of evaluation findings.

My experiences

I have twice commissioned EAs for EPA programs. In each case, the program came to my division with a proposed evaluation and in each instance, we had concerns about the availability of data to answer the program's key performance questions. In the first instance, we commissioned the EA as the initial stage of the evaluation. We used the EA findings to make go/no go decisions about which evaluation questions to pursue; simply striking the no go questions off our list and proceeding with those that remained. This worked for the program because the questions were largely answerable. But what if

they had not been? I am not sure how the process would have gone. I myself decided against funding an EA as part of an evaluation again. In the second instance, we decoupled the EA from any eventual evaluation study; making the EA its own discrete project. Along with the assessment of readiness for each question, we commissioned a data improvement plan in which our evaluator outlined the improvements that would need to be made to pursue the desired evaluation. The program's outcome questions were found to be largely unanswerable and now the program has detailed information on the data issues. Once improvements are made, the office can pick up where the EA left off.

The EA process we have chosen to use takes about a third to a quarter of the time of one of our typical evaluations. We ended up spending about a fourth of the cost we typically spend commissioning an evaluation. To my division, this could mean touching more programs interested in using data to answer their program performance questions. It also means faster returns, albeit on a different set of questions, as EA findings do not answer the evaluation questions but rather questions of program and data readiness for evaluation. Time will tell how we use EAs moving forward, but after just a couple of experiences I can say it is an option I want to have always available to me.

EPE TIG Week

Better known as the time we all write and attempt to publish a blog!

Every spring the EPE TIG hosts the [AEA365 blog](#) during Earth Week. This very helpful blog provides a wealth of topical information and useful resources for evaluation. For Earth Week, the EPE TIG features posts that provide tips and information that are particularly relevant to environmental evaluation - but that also would appeal to the broader AEA population. Ideas include how evaluation addresses current and emerging environmental issues, useful tools for the environmental evaluation field, and resources to help readers think more environmentally.

Here are some of the articles from this year's blog...

Tracy Dyke-Redmond on Evaluating Adaptation Plans

Hello, I'm **Tracy Dyke-Redmond**, a Senior Associate at IEC, an environmental and economics consulting firm in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I work on all types of evaluation and performance measurement for EPA and other federal clients. Recently, we have seen an uptick in interest in evaluating adaptation planning efforts to respond to the effects of climate change. As states and federal agencies ramp up their climate change adaptation efforts, they want to track their progress and understand if their efforts are successful. This is challenging, since many climate change adaptation efforts are in the early planning stages, and relatively few efforts have resulted in projects in the field.

Hot Tip: Given the state of the science on climate change adaptation and the diversity of projects affected by climate change, agencies interested in measuring progress are more likely to focus on activities and processes, rather than outcomes. Developing ways to measure the extent to which organizations are integrating climate change considerations into existing procedures is a very important step toward understanding the state of response to climate change.

Rad Resource: The U.S. Global Change Research Program National Climate Assessment is a comprehensive study of climate change science and impacts in the United States. The draft report is available now and includes a chapter on Adaptation that presents an informative overview of climate change adaptation activities at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels in the United States. The report is due to be finalized in 2013.

Rad Resource: The Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (formerly the Pew Center on Global Climate Change) maintains information on federal and state actions on climate change adaptation, as well as market & business and international adaptation resources.

The screenshot shows the EPA's Climate Change page. The header includes the EPA logo, a search bar, and links for Advanced Search, A-Z Index, Contact Us, and Share. The main navigation menu has options like LEARN THE ISSUES, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, LAWS & REGULATIONS, and ABOUT EPA, with 'Climate Change' selected. Below the menu, a breadcrumb trail shows 'You are here: EPA Home > Climate Change > Impacts & Adaptation'. The main content title is 'Climate Change Impacts and Adapting to Change'. It features a large image of a flooded street with houses and a speed limit sign. A text box explains how climate change impacts society and ecosystems. Below this, there are two sections: 'Impacts and Adaptation by Region' showing a map of the US with regions labeled Northwest, Great Plains, Midwest, Northeast, Southwest, and Southeast; and 'Impacts and Adaptation by Sector' showing images for Agriculture and Coasts. A footer at the bottom right contains the URL 'www.epa.gov via curate.us' and social media icons.

Rad Resource: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency maintains a website on climate change adaptation that describes climate impacts and adaptation efforts by region of the country and by sector.

Lesson Learned: Climate change adaptation requires partnership across federal, state, tribal, and local jurisdictional boundaries. Coordination and information sharing is essential for making progress, particularly in these early stages of learning which adaptation strategies are appropriate and effective in different situations.

Lesson Learned: There is considerable uncertainty about the best approaches to adaptation in any particular location or situation. As the science continues to evolve, many jurisdictions are taking a "no regrets" approach, recognizing that efforts to make communities more resilient to climate change often

have other benefits such as improving readiness for all types of natural and manmade disasters and enhancing overall quality of life.

Anna Williams on Why I am NOT an Environmentalist

My name is **Anna Williams**. I'm an independent evaluator based in Seattle, Washington. I evaluate global societal challenges.

I would like to have reason to unlearn a lesson.

How many of you tune out when you hear the word "environment"? If you are a self-described "environmentalist" do you see eyes glaze over when you use this word?

Observe.

Be honest.

I experience about 90 percent "glazage."

Why?

I postulate that even progressives poorly understand environmentalism, and that environmentalism is anything but homogeneous. Like with religious extremism, the behaviors of a few do not represent the many, nor should they.

Nonetheless, preconceptions and barriers are real. Environmentalists are anti-progress and anti-prosperity. They don't "get" socially or economically driven work. They speak a different language. Environmental evaluators are no different.

Right?

I hope I'm wrong...

Billions of people who are least responsible for – and are most vulnerable to – global problems like overfishing and lack of clean water, are taking the brunt of global *environmental (societal)* problems. Water is the future gold, though food security will compete. These are humanitarian concerns, driven by compassion for people, not to mention countless other species.

Do you perceive walls between environmental evaluators and other evaluators?

Do eyes glaze over when the word is spoken?

Are environmental sessions at the AEA's annual conference well attended?

At a conference I recently attended in Kathmandu on evaluation for development in South Asia there

was serious “glazage.” Evaluators in Indonesia, India, and elsewhere painfully described the challenge of conveying the relevance of their work on climate change and other “environmental” issues.

Yet not only are our hearts in the same place, but as evaluators we use the same methods and face the same challenges. We can and should help each other.

Some of us are, though to get there I stripped “environmental” from my title. I don’t mention it when I meet people, and I hope that the word’s appearance in my degrees will not be held against me, even though I believe that, if disclosed, it will be.

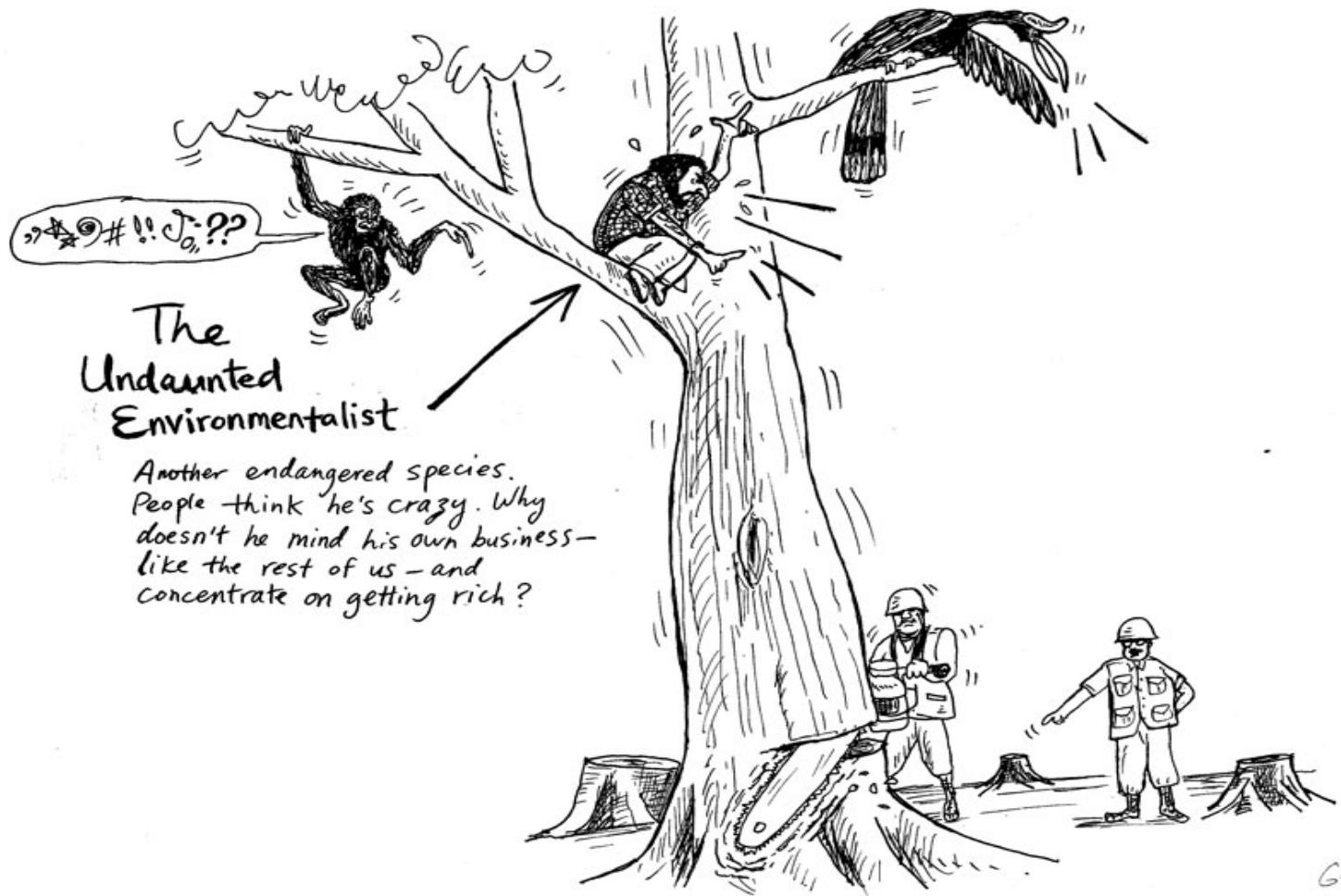
Modern environmentalism started as conservationism, which in this country *used* to be a bipartisan issue (root word = conservative!), but *long* before we deeply understood that conservation was fundamental to our survival.

I hope this false dichotomy between “environmental” and “social” will fade once more and those of us in the closet can come out unapologetically and without consequence.

Rad Resources:

More public health and humanitarian organizations – and evaluators – *are* connecting the dots. Here are a few rad resources along these lines:

- Climate Change: our Sin of Omission
- The Arab Spring and Climate Change
- Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security



Environmental Evaluators Network - Pacific Forum: Networked Learning for Sustainable Systems

September 22 – 24, 2013 Corbett, Oregon

The Environmental Evaluators Network (EEN) and the Oregon Program Evaluators Network (OPEN) co-hosted the first EEN Pacific Forum at the Menucha Retreat and Conference Center east of Portland, Oregon in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Recreation Area on September 22-24, 2013. The purpose of the EEN is to improve the field of environmental evaluation through more systematic and collective learning among both evaluators and evaluation users.

We gathered with friends and colleagues for a networking-intensive, learning-focused “evaluation camp” in an informal retreat setting where we discussed how our disciplines and organizations make collective progress toward sustainable systems and societies in our region.



The Challenge

Organizations involved with the environment, natural resources, and economic and ecological sustainability strive for evidence-based policies, programs, and operational decisions. However, from the complexity of ecological and social systems flows a buzzing, blooming confusion of data and information. Different approaches to research and evaluation reflect the varied academic disciplines and settings where this work is done: government agencies and NGOs from local to international scales, philanthropic organizations, businesses, and academia. The Pacific region of the U.S. and Canada have unique natural resource and environmental issues; how can we weave together a learning network of people, organizations, methods, knowledge, and perspectives for better design of solutions to these challenges?

Theme: Networked Learning for Sustainable Systems

The Forum explored:

- Who we are – building the regional environmental evaluation network
- What we do – sharing our tools, methods, networks, and innovations
- Seeing sustainability through systems thinking and systems-oriented evaluation
- Tools, practices, skills, methods, knowledge, and information that increase our capacity to learn and collaborate on environmental evaluation and sustainability
- The Future – Next steps to advance environmental evaluation research

Priority Issues

- Biodiversity and Ecology
- Sustainable Systems
- Public Health
- Education
- Environmental Justice & Social Equity

Audience

The forum welcomed professionals who conduct, commission, or use environmental evaluation and who work in conservation, environmental protection, natural resource management, or sustainable development in government, foundations, consulting, nonprofits, academia, and transnational institutions.

Format

In addition to traditional presentations and panel discussions, the forum provided a venue for lively, participant-driven dialogue and participatory sessions with ample time for informal, spontaneous interaction and innovative experiential formats and technology applications.

EPE TIG Session Schedule – October 14-16 & 20, 2013

For all of you coming to DC in a few weeks, here are the EPE TIG sponsored sessions during AEA's "Evaluation 2013: The State of Evaluation Practice in the Early 21st Century" Evaluation Conference.

Please note that the **EPE-TIG Business Meeting** is scheduled for October 17, 2013 from 6:10 - 7:00 p.m. in Jay. In addition to a few quick housekeeping items, the Agenda for the meeting includes a dialogue with AEA's 2014 President-Elect Beverly Parsons and Highlights from the EEN Pacific Meeting. In addition, the EPE-TIG is looking for individuals who are interesting in assisting our Web Master, Communications Lead and Program Co Chair. Please join us Thursday night to learn more about how you can help.

Session Title	Time	Room
Evaluating Climate Change Interventions: The Epitome of a 21st Century Challenge	Wednesday, Oct 16, 4:30 PM to 6:00 PM	Jay
Grassroots Efforts to Coordinate Evaluation of Climate Education Initiatives Across Three Federal Agencies: Perspectives and Lessons Learned From Agencies, Program Officers, and Project Evaluators	Thursday, Oct 17, 8:00 AM to 9:30 AM	Jay
Roundtable Rotation I: Evaluating Biodiversity Conservation Effects on Human Wellbeing: A Crowdsourcing Roundtable	Thursday, Oct 17, 11:00 AM to 11:45 AM	Suite 5101
Roundtable Rotation II: Developing An Environmental Literacy Assessment Tool for K-4 Urban Children		

Session Title	Time	Room
Lions, Tigers and Bears, and Frogs Oh My: EPE TIG Field Trip to the DC National Zoo	Thursday, Oct 17, 1:00 PM to 2:30 PM	AEA Registration Desk
One Agency: Multiple Approaches: Exploring Evaluation Practice at the United States Environmental Protection Agency	Thursday, Oct 17, 2:40 PM to 4:10 PM	Jay
Roundtable Rotation I: An Outcomes-Based Approach to Environmental Education Evaluation: Tools to Build Staff Capacity, Consistency, and Rigor Roundtable Rotation II: Capacity Building and Developing the Practitioner-Evaluator in Arts and Cultural Organizations	Thursday, Oct 17, 4:30 PM to 6:00 PM	Suite 5101
Environmental Program Evaluation TIG Business Meeting and Discussion with 2014 AEA President Beverly Parsons	Thursday, Oct 17, 6:10 PM to 7:00 PM	Jay
Approaches and Methods for Evaluating Environmental Education and Conservation Outcomes	Friday, Oct 18, 8:00 AM to 9:30 AM	Jay
USAID's Global Climate Change Impact Evaluation Agenda and You: Your Chance to Provide Feedback on USAID's Learning Agenda	Friday, Oct 18, 11:00 AM to 11:45 AM	Columbia Section 12
Collaborative Evaluation Efforts to Integrate Environmental and STEM Topics Towards E-STEM Practice	Friday, Oct 18, 11:00 AM to 11:45 AM	Lincoln West
Moving Towards 'Transformative Resilience': Building Evaluation Knowledge for Effective Climate Change Adaptation	Friday, Oct 18, 1:45 PM to 2:30 PM	Suite 1101
Making Lemons into Lemonade: Using Creative and Mixed-Methods Evaluation Approaches for Overcoming Data-Poor Environments	Friday, Oct 18, 2:40 PM to 4:10 PM	Jay
Sustainability and the Public Good: What Does it Mean for the 21st Century Evaluator?	Friday, Oct 18, 4:30 PM to 6:00 PM	Lincoln West
Evaluating Resilience to Climate Change: Impact Evaluations of USAID Climate Change Programming	Friday, Oct 18, 4:30 PM to 6:00 PM	Monroe
Challenges to Monitoring and Evaluating Climate Change Adaptation Interventions	Saturday, Oct 19, 8:00 AM to 9:30 AM	Jay

Using Evaluation to Inform and Improve Policy Implementation: Case Studies in Energy Policy and Forest Management	Saturday, Oct 19, 9:50 AM to 10:35 AM	Lincoln West
Perspectives and Profiles in Evaluation: A Comparison of Evaluation Methodology and Evaluator Background in the Energy Efficiency Sector	Saturday, Oct 19, 10:45 AM to 11:30 AM	Embassy
Perspectives From the ground: Evaluating adaptation to climate change in the water sector	Saturday, Oct 19, 10:45 AM to 11:30 AM	Lincoln West
Roundtable Rotation I: A Framework and Philosophy for Impact Evaluation of Natural Resource Management Research (NRMR) Programs	Saturday, Oct 19, 1:00 PM to 2:30 PM	Suite 5101
Roundtable Rotation II: Evaluating Public Health Readiness for Climate Change: Meeting the Challenges of Assessing Proximal Indicators of Resiliency		
Much Ado About Methods: Using Methods to Enhance Understanding, Participation in and the Rigor of Our Evaluations	Saturday, Oct 19, 2:40 PM to 4:10 PM	Jay

