

Environmental Program Evaluation TIG

Dear TIG members,

As a recent transplant into the field of evaluation, I was thrilled to attend the 2012 AEA Annual Conference in Minneapolis.

I was highly impressed by the degree of professionalism and the quality of the sessions. Between Professional Development Workshops, interactive sessions, and evaluation presentations and discussions, I was able to meet and interact with a number of fellow evaluators and learn quite a bit from them in the 3 days we interacted. Being amongst not only evaluators, but also environmental practitioners, and connecting with the EPE TIG and later joining the team as the communications lead was the highlight of my trip.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the newsletter, and I look forward to meeting all of you on October 14th in DC

Sara El Choufi – EPE TIG Communications Lead



Call for Proposals – Due March 15, 2013

Theme: Evaluation Practice in the Early Twenty-First Century

Hello fellow EPE TIG members

This year's American Evaluation Association's (AEA) Annual Evaluation Conference will meet in Washington DC, from October 16th to 19th. It's a great opportunity to get involved and contribute to the exchange of ideas that enriches evaluation practice. We encourage you to write up and submit a proposal that reflects your evaluation work on a wide range of environmental topics, such as energy programs, climate change practices and policies, conservation biology, environmental policy and management, environmental and conservation education. Similarly, topics that intersect with the interests of other TIGs --such as PreK-12 Education, Evaluation Use, Disaster & Emergency Management Evaluation, Qualitative Methods, Quantitative Methods: Theories and Design, etc... – offer terrific opportunities for co-sponsorship.

2

Call for Reviewers:
for AEA Conference
Proposals

3

10 minutes with ...
Beverley Parsons

5

10 minutes with ...
Katherine Dawes

7

AEA 365 Blog

8

EPE 2012 Field Trip:
Complex Ecology in
Action

There are many different formats for submissions from which you might choose, including:

- Multiple related papers
- Single papers
- Roundtables
- Demonstrations
- Expert Lectures
- Ignite Presentations
- Posters
- Skill-building workshops
- Think Tanks
- Birds of a Feather Gatherings

You are also invited to submit a proposal for a 3, 6, or 12 hour Professional Development Workshop. These workshops will be scheduled for October 14, 15 and 20th.

Learn more about all the formats at <http://www.eval.org/eval2013/13sessiontypes.htm>

Finally, 2013 AEA President Jody Fitzpatrick has selected the following theme for 2012:

Evaluation Practice in the Early Twenty-First Century

In selecting this theme, she encourages you to explore what evaluation practice looks like today – who is doing it, what types of evaluations are being conducted, in what disciplines, what methods are being used, and how can we use this knowledge to improve the overall quality of evaluation today. Jody Fitzpatrick writes: “By developing knowledge on what we actually do – and how it differs across disciplines, content areas, states and countries – we can learn about ways we might move beyond our current practice to incorporate innovative ideas and approaches. We can teach each other.” Click here <http://www.eval.org/eval2013/13theme.htm> to read her full description of the conference theme.

We trust this theme will spark some fantastic discussions and reflection, and we cannot wait to see what will surface from this fine bunch of evaluators!

You must submit your proposal via AEA’s website by midnight (Eastern Time Zone) on **Friday, March 15th, 2013**. Instructions on submitting proposals can be found at:

<http://www.eval.org/eval2013/13proposals.htm>

Best regards,

Your 2012 AEA Environmental Program Evaluation TIG Leadership Team

Call for Reviewers for AEA Conference Proposals

In addition to submitting a proposal, another great way to get involved in AEA and the Environmental Evaluation TIG is to volunteer to review proposals and help select the papers and sessions for the conference. Three people, following a standard review rubric; will review each proposal and reviewers’ comments are returned to submitters for constructive feedback. Although it depends on how many proposals and reviewers we end up with, in the past each reviewer has received 3-5 proposals to review. The timeframe for the review will be several weeks in April, after April 9th. If you are interested in serving as a ‘double blind’ reviewer, please contact Program Co-Chair, Chris Parry (chris.parry@sbcglobal.net).



Beverly Parsons

10 Minutes with... Beverly Parsons

Interview by Lydia Lange
EPE TIG Co-Chair

From 2009-2011, Beverley Parsons has dedicated her time and service to the AEA as a member of the Board of Directors. She is a regular contributor to the *AEA365* blog, and is the President Elect for 2014. We congratulate her on her appointment.

Your current role is.... Executive Director of InSites, a Colorado-based nonprofit organization.

Tell me how you first got involved in evaluation?

I trained first in Chemistry and received a B.S. in Medical Technology (University of Wisconsin), but I had always had an interest in education, specifically education research. So I pursued further study in those fields and obtained my PhD in Educational Research and Evaluation at the University of Colorado. I am not sure I knew what I was getting into at the outset, but I have always enjoyed the growth that comes through learning, and the chance to explore issues from multiple perspectives, as well as meeting new people. Evaluation is a good fit for my interests. I later obtained further certification in Sustainable Business (Bainbridge Graduate Institute), in Human Systems Dynamics (Human Systems Dynamics Institute), and Appreciative Inquiry facilitation (Company of Experts).

How long have you been a member of the EPE TIG?

Six or seven years now I think, around the same time I completed a certification in Sustainable Business. A long-standing interest in the environment drove me to get involved.

If you could describe yourself as an 'approach to evaluation' what would it be?

I am interested in both theory and practice: practice-based theory and theory-based practice. I draw from multiple disciplines, though I am expressly interested in theories of change, and how systems change. I am driven to better understand the collective steps we can take to move social systems for greater public good for both people and the environment.

What do you find most challenging working in evaluation?

In a positive sense, the greatest challenge is also our opportunity: that is to grow and develop in order to add value to whatever it is you are evaluating. Additionally, it is challenging to think about stakeholders. In any project or program, there are so many ways to consider those who are involved, to ask who are the winners and losers, and then to communicate the findings. It is imperative to remember the greater community in our findings.

10 minutes with...

Katherine Dawes

Interview by Lydia Lange
EPE TIG Co-Chair

Your current role is....

Director, Evaluation Support Division, Office of Strategic Environmental Management, US Environmental Protection Agency

You were recently awarded the Alva and Gunnar Myrdal Government Evaluation Award for your outstanding and influential work in furthering advocacy, management and use of evaluation in the United States as well as internationally! Congratulations! How did that feel?

It was a really wonderful experience and I continue to be thankful to have the chance to talk about evaluation. I don't usually get so excited, but I was moved to hang the [award] plaque in my office. Not only is it a pleasure to look at it, but if anyone comments on it I get to remind them of the contributions of our whole team of dedicated public servants, including those who don't necessarily see themselves as evaluators! It really celebrates the achievements of our whole Division.

Tell me how you first got involved in evaluation?

It traces right back to my time at Grad School where a project

I ended up working on found me talking to people about the conversion of buses from diesel to natural gas. It was my first practical evaluation for a government entity, and while I had done some survey work prior, this work required me to interview government employees. There was a significant reporting component to the project, and my fellow classmates and I had to do a presentation. I distinctly recall how much I enjoyed working with my fellow classmates to analyze our findings; I had some great debates amongst my peers. Today, I still enjoy the interactions with my colleagues about evaluation.

How long have you been a member of the EPE TIG?

When I started attending AEA in 2001, I was thrilled to discover the EPE TIG, and joined almost immediately. Our founding members ten years ago worked in institutions such as schools and museums, so the focus of the TIG was largely on Environmental Education. They were certainly open to broadening their scope, and now our member base covers a huge array of topics such as natural resource management, policy, environmental management, and pollution control. We also have a variety of government tiers represented in the TIG - local,



state and federal. I feel the EPE TIG is now more self-assured. We are more comfortable that we belong at AEA now, and believe it is not our only home, but a good one nonetheless.

If you could describe yourself as an 'approach to evaluation' what would it be?

[Laughs] Well I consider myself first a Practitioner of Evaluation, so there is not one theory really. Instead I encourage all [our staffs] to use the methods best suited to the job. I can't say I am a strict devotee of any of our leading theorists, but I do try and stay in touch with current discussions about values and evaluation theory. I certainly have a great list of good books to start with if anyone new to the field is asking, but not a specific preference.

What do you wish other people knew about environmental program evaluation?

That people knew it was more than just a cost benefit analysis! Though again we are seeing some change and people are beginning to understand the breadth of methods that can be applied to environmental evaluation.

... It continues to surprise me that people are surprised that environmental evaluation is not resourced like the fields of Public Health, Education and Justice. These fields are certainly not flush with cash but EPE really suffers from a shoestring mentality. This makes innovation in our field tough, and I wish people understood this. I think we will see some change though, as we utilize opportunities with policy makers to leverage to a better position to use the depth of our data stores.

What would you say to someone wanting to be more involved in environmental program evaluation?

Optimism is essential, and a dose of realism is helpful! Be willing to celebrate smaller and less visible successes. It is a real achievement when a [client] uses the findings of a report.

What might (someone) be surprised to know about you?

Ah the confessional question! I confess to being an avid *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fan. I have the entire series in a box set, and, now that she is old enough, my daughter and I watch them together.

Your favorite getaway in nature is....

Anywhere there is a wharf overlooking water; you will find me on it! I have come to enjoy scuba diving too. I am also a passionate urban environmentalist, enjoying the nature in our built environments.

“It continues to surprise me that people are surprised that environmental evaluation is not resourced like the fields of Public Health, Education and Justice.”



AEA 365 Blog

Seeking bloggers for AEA 365 Blog – Earth week, April 17-24, 2013



Share your hot tips, cool tricks, rad resources and other lessons learned with the evaluation community! This spring, for the 3rd year, the EPE TIG will host 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. In the past, these blog contributions have been a great way to share information, as well as improve the visibility of the TIG. Posts should be written in first person and be concise - approximately 250-400 words. Click [here](#) for contribution guidelines.

If you are interested in writing a post for the week, send a brief description (3-5 lines) of your post topic along with your article to Sara El Choufi (selchoufi@thegef.org) no later than **March 20, 2013**.

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. We hope to have a diversity of posts to exemplify the breadth and diversity of topics in environmental evaluation.

Here's some of what we wrote last year...

Matt Keene, Alex Ortega-Argueta, Lieven De Smet, and Lisa Eriksson on The Environmental Evaluators Network in 2012

My name is Matt Keene; I work with the US [Environmental Protection Agency](#) and coordinate the Environmental Evaluators Network. The purpose of the EEN is to advance the field of environmental evaluation through more systematic and collective learning.

Rad Resource: [Environmental Evaluators Network](#). This site provides updates and links for all of the EEN events internationally...

... Continue reading [here](#)

Anna Williams on The False Dichotomy Between “Environmental” and “Social”

Hi. I am Anna Williams, a Senior Associate at Ross & Associates Environmental Consulting in Seattle, Washington. I have devoted the past 20 years to solving complex environmental-social issues. I use the words “environmental-social” here intentionally: Fundamentally both “environmental” and “social” challenges – and their solutions – are the same

Rad Resource: www.climate-eval.org, an online platform of the climate evaluation community of practice...

... Continue reading [here](#)

Meet the TIG

Sara El Choufi – EPE TIG Communications Lead

Geographic Location: Washington, DC

Employer: The Global Environment Facility (GEF)

Education: BS in Biology, American University of Beirut; MS in Environmental Policy and Planning

Area of Specialization: Environmental Policy

Years of Experience in the Field: 5 years in environmental policy and planning, evaluation focus for the past 2 years

Professional/Personal Interests: Sustainability, Development, Biking, and Photography

Methodologies Used: I try to tailor the methodology used to the situation. But I'm mostly interested in quantitative methods, case study evaluations, and results management.

How did the evaluator come to be interested in environmental evaluation?

Working at the GEF as part of the Results Management Team, I was thrown into the field headfirst and I instantly loved it.

Description of Current Work: Among other things, I currently help produce the GEF's Annual Monitoring Review, which is the main reporting tool of the organization.



Advice for other evaluators:

Be critical of yourself (and others), and read as much as possible about the progression of evaluation...

Complex Ecology in Action

Field Trip to the Outdoor Stream Lab and Mississippi River – AEA 2012

On Thursday, October 25 2012, over 20 evaluators boarded a yellow bus braving the Minnesota cold, snow, sleet and rain to visit the Outdoor Stream Lab (OSL) near St. Anthony Falls and Stone Arch Bridge – a large-scale experimental facility dedicated to stream restoration research.

The field trip provided an opportunity to learn more about water quality research projects in the region including reach -scale issues of sediment transport, geomorphology, and ecohydraulics under controlled laboratory conditions and the role of evaluation in assessing the outcomes of these projects. After viewing the outdoor lab, we visited the McKnight Foundation headquarters where – over hot beverages, we discussed the history of the OSL, history and issues associated with the Mississippi River, successes and challenges of implementing and evaluating water quality projects along the Mississippi River and in the region and strategies for improving evaluation efforts. Questions considered during our discussion were: How can the human element be considered in evaluation along with the more common biophysical indicators? What could stream restoration projects learn from program evaluators? Is mandating evaluations a good idea?

A special thanks to: Jess Kozarek (Research Associate and OSL Manager), Aimee Witteman (Program Officer, The McKnight Foundation), Karlyn Eckman (Researcher, University of Minnesota Water Resource Center) and EPE-TIG member Mary McEathron (Director, The Evaluation Group at the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota) for planning the trip. Their multiple perspectives created a rich presentation and dialogue. Thank you all for a fabulous field trip!



EPE TIG Field Trip 2012 – Minneapolis, MN