

Winter 2011-12

Independent Consulting TIG Newsletter

Reflection and Appreciation

by Norma Martinez-Rubin, Out-going TIG Chair

As the year closes, an opportunity to reflect on some of the successes that you, Independent Consulting Topical Interest Group (IC TIG) members have accomplished is in order.

Stephen Maack and Geri Lynn Peak, IC TIG webmaster and webmaster assistant, made it possible for the IC TIG to launch a website via the AEA. By November, 218 AEA members had subscribed to the IC TIG e-group, accessible through the website, and there were 290 posts including requests for collegial assistance, responses to those requests, announcements, and updates.

Thank you to Amy Germuth and Michelle Baron who coordinated with AEA so the IC TIG could host a week of AEA365 blogs in April. Thank you to blog authors!

Thank you to those who, along with Susan Wolfe and MaryLynn Quartaroli, our newsletter co-editors, contributed articles to help produce this and earlier newsletters in January, July, and September. They were distributed electronically to approximately 1,333 IC TIG members worldwide through the fall.

Following electronic distribution of each quarterly newsletter, we appreciated email letting us know that the newsletter has served you well to maintain a connection with each other through the year.

To those of you who submitted conference proposals in the spring, thank you for making it possible for the IC TIG to be represented at Evaluation 2011 in Anaheim. Thanks to Rita Fierro, Susan Wolfe, and Deborah Levy who, as program co-chairpersons, shared the task of proposal review. The IC TIG was primary sponsor of 13 sessions: five panel presentations, two skill-building sessions, two Think Tanks, two multi-paper sessions, a demonstration, and a business meeting.



Throughout the annual conference, we had an IC TIG Exhibit Table on which about 50 of you placed your business collateral material and let others discover the IC TIG and your evaluation services.

The business meeting's attendance allowed the adoption of the IC TIG mission statement, the election of IC TIG leaders for 2012, and sharing with one another through a Virtues Project activity facilitated by Geri Lynn Peak.

Approximately 30 of you joined us after the business meeting for a flavorful dinner at Thai Nakorn Restaurant in Garden Grove. Thanks to Stephen Maack and Arlene Hopkins for scouting about for an accessible location and for coordinating dinner attendance. (We look forward to dining in Minneapolis, where Michael Herrick spontaneously volunteered to coordinate the IC TIG dinner next year. Thanks, Mike!)

It has been a privilege to serve as IC TIG chairperson for 2011 by working behind-the-scenes and virtually with this year's IC TIG Leaders, contributing to AEA365, reading through email from IC TIG members, being part of the Meet the Pros skill-building session led by Robert Hoke at AEA 2011, hosting the business meeting, and celebrating in good company by sharing a meal among you, too!

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SO, what're you thinking?

The IC TIG newsletter is published four times each year and we need your help!

We feature the work of our colleagues and share information about successes to make this newsletter a vehicle for sharing with one another.

Please feel free to submit short articles, send us a note about an upcoming event, or drop us a line with ideas.

Deadlines for 2012 are February 29, May 31, August 31, and November 30.

Please send submissions to your newsletter content editor Loretta Kelley at

LKelley@kpacm.org



Meet an IC TIG Member

Each quarter we will feature an IC TIG member in this newsletter. Send your suggestions for future interviewees to Loretta Kelley LKelley@kpacm.org

Rita S. Fierro

"It took me five minutes to start breathing and ask where in Africa. It took ten minutes for us to figure out how to get me to work for them in Ethiopia. As I write this, I'm waiting for my plane to Nairobi!"



Rita S. Fierro
2012 IC TIG Chair

**Independent Research
and Evaluation
Consultant**

1. Please describe your independent consulting practice (e.g., are you a sole proprietor, is this 100% what you do or on the side from another job, what is the primary and secondary focus, do you collaborate or subcontract, etc.)

I am a sole proprietor. Besides research and evaluation and leadership development (group facilitation) I also offer Reiki treatments to two mental health and HIV/AIDS recovery clinics in Philadelphia and teach Reiki seminars in the United States and Italy. Reiki is a relaxation technique I learned to help my own chronic migraines that are since gone. [See Rita's article on Page 4 for more information.]

2. What is your disciplinary background?

Sociology and African American Studies. I got into Sociology for my love of history and interdisciplinary work while I lived in Italy. My Ph.D. is in African American Studies, which I started to find answers to my own experiences of bicultural identity and prejudice.

3. How long have you been evaluating, and how long have you been an independent consultant?

I started as an internal evaluator in 2001 and have been an independent consultant as my primary source of income for three years.

4. Are you primarily qualitative, primarily quantitative, mixed methods? Which do you prefer?

Religiously mixed methods, and this is why: my first evaluation experience was a predominantly quantitative evaluation I designed that was supposed to help mothers who lost their children to foster care regain custody by gaining employment. The program did not work. I became frustrated at how the stats did not tell the mothers' stories. My dissertation became the qualitative counterpart. The results were completely different. Only the qualitative work could answer the question: Why is this program not working?

5. What was your favorite evaluation experience?

I worked for an afterschool program that wasn't improving. Since I had no management power, I decided to use the testing effect: I began asking questions about things I knew needed to change. For instance, I asked: How often do you write lesson plans? Who provides feedback on lesson plans? How frequently? Years later, my client told me: "I watched my new manager. The more she worked to meet your requirements, the more she grew as a manager."

6. What type of experience have you had that was less than ideal?

I had a client pressure me to change a report. I found some middle ground. I was not rehired anyway. Later on, it was a major selling point to show my integrity to the United Nations. At the time it hurt me, but it also taught me to be more selective of my clients.

7. Have you had any comical experiences? Describe them.

After two years of unsuccessful bids to work in Africa, I planned a trip to Kenya trusting that I will be able to do evaluation work there. A week after I buy my flight, I'm on the phone with a company I have been negotiating with for four months to do a project in North Carolina. She says they have money; I ask exactly to do what. "Well, they've been working on different things, one person went off to AFRICA...of COURSE, we can't afford to send anyone there...." It took me five minutes to start breathing and ask where in Africa. It took ten minutes for us to figure out how to get me to work for them in Ethiopia. As I write this, I'm waiting for my plane to Nairobi!

8. What do you like to do when you're not evaluating?

I'm an intellectual artist. I love to dance, Italian folk and West

By Cindy Banyai

Executive Director, Refocus Institute

Expanding into Facebook: Potential Benefits

Facebook is all the rage these days—posting pictures, updating your status—what’s not to love? While these are the activities teenagers are concerned about, don’t underestimate the positive impact Facebook (FB) can have on your business. Independent consultants, especially those interested in finding new clients and maintaining relationships with old ones, should harness this low-cost way to promote themselves online.

In September the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported FB wants more small business users, offering free advertising credits to get them. The promotion is slated to start January 2012, so if you don’t have a FB business page, now might be the time.

For those of you who are still hesitant, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- ◆ You need a personal page to set up a business page, but they are separate. This means you can share family pictures

with those close to you and still maintain a professional FB image for clients.

- ◆ New security settings allow you more control over who sees your content and what others can post on your page, meaning more privacy, especially for personal accounts.
- ◆ FB business pages are searchable, adding to your online presence without cost.
- ◆ FB business pages are tools to build relationships, share content, and create dialogue. Your website, email newsletter, and blog are for broadcasting and advertising. You can use FB to drive traffic to these places.
- ◆ FB use is nuanced, building long-term trust and brand recognition, shunning all but the most subtle plugs.

A TIG Facebook page will help potential clients or partners find us online, in addition to creating a forum for members

to share current projects, articles, events, and ideas, allowing our collective network to support our businesses. It is extremely rare to have a “Facebook firestorm,” particularly because the conversations are public, thus part of the online image of the poster, usually favoring polite discussion over hostility.

With these thoughts in mind, I encourage you to give Facebook a try (again??) and consider the potential benefits of a TIG page.

Here are two resources for more information:

[New York Times - “How to Market Your Business With Facebook”](#)

[Mashable – “Top 5 Facebook Marketing Mistakes Small Businesses Make”](#)



“There is nothing wrong with change, if it is in the right direction.”

Winston Churchill

Fierro Interview — continued

African, sculpt ceramics, and hiddenly sing-songwrite. I spend a lot of time writing my book *“Gimme back my child: Black women speak up on the child welfare and legal system that binds them”* – a collection of stories of mothers who lost their children to foster care and are fighting to get them back. Most mothers lose their children for poverty and homelessness, not abuse. The book is about them, but also

about me. They taught me so much.

9. Is there anything else you would like for your peers to know about you?

I’m emerging from a branding strategy you’ll see from my website ([ritafierro.com](#)) hopefully by the end of December. I learned that it is in the **bridges** between my interests, that my unique consultant power, personality, and contribution lie.

2012 IC TIG LEADERSHIP TEAM

Chairperson: Rita S. Fierro, Fierro Evaluation & Research Consulting

Chairperson-Elect: Randi K. Nelson, Parnters in Evaluation, LLC

Lead Program Chairperson: Deborah K. Levy, SuccessLinks, LLC

Program Co-Chairperson: Stephen C. Maack, REAP Change Consultants

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The Independent Consulting (IC) Topical Interest Group members are sole proprietors, or have formed limited liability companies, partnerships, or corporations who work alone, with small staffs, or "as needed" sub-contractors. Our backgrounds are as varied as most of AEA. What we share in common is collegial and friendly support of one another as independent evaluators.

IC TIG MISSION STATEMENT IN BRIEF

- *Foster a community of independent evaluators by reducing the isolation of being an independent consultant*
- *Promote independent consulting as an evaluation profession*
- *Increase the professionalism of independent consultants*

The complete text of the mission statement is on the IC TIG website below.

[Independent Consulting TIG website](#)

Bringing Personal Health to Evaluation

By **Rita S. Fierro**

Fierro Consulting

At our conference this year, I presented a workshop with outstanding colleagues Dominica McBride and Pauline Brooks entitled: *Is your evaluation tired? Rejuvenate it!*

We have been using alternative health practices for 10 years while we grow as evaluators: Dr. McBride with meditation, Dr. Brooks with Tai Chi, and I with Reiki. We gained tremendous benefits personally and professionally; we shared this with our 24 participants. The workshop was experiential; we started with a scenario from a stressful site visit and did Tai Chi, meditation, and emotional energy exercises to help participants get out of their heads and into their bodies.

Reiki is a traditional technique that helps relax, relieve pain, and sometimes heal. Research shows its positive effects on stress, anxiety, depression, and pain by simply laying hands (www.reikiresearch.org). Scientists

found that the energy of our hands has a unique frequency. This explains the instinct to put our hands on a spot in pain!

The workshop came about as I found myself talking to colleagues at AEA about how practicing Reiki enriched my work: it helps me to offset the stress of traveling and sickness and to establish a self-reflective consulting practice. By addressing present and past emotions within, I find my relationships with clients becoming more honest, genuine, and smooth. I am also attracting clients who value my contributions more, who share my vision, and whose work I admire. My ability to be patient, clear, and creative is increasing.

In the workshop, I offered lessons from Reiki relevant to evaluation. (1) Our throat is the communication energy center. It is balanced when we listen attentively and speak mindfully. (2) A person that invests too much energy in emotional blockages (being overwhelmed

or repressing emotions) will not have much left for intuition (ability to see the larger picture and think out of the box). (3) The people who most irritate us are either mirrors (behaving like we do) or shadows (behaving the opposite). By shifting our own behavior and learning to love ourselves, we may discover that the situations we used to always find ourselves in are no longer there!

Participants were ecstatic for the opportunity to be in their bodies, take home tools to use, and see new possibilities for balance in their work. Many encouraged us to propose a pre-conference workshop for next year on the first day at AEA to help relieve the stress of traveling. We're also interested in focusing on biased lenses (personal, cultural, gender, racial) we bring to respond to our personal physical and emotional discomfort. To know more, lookup [our AEA 365 blog post](#), contact me at fierro.evaluation@gmail.com, or come to next year's workshop!