A windy time in the city of big shoulders. Chicago certainly lived up to its windy name for the annual AEA meeting with some impressive autumn storms. If you made it to the meeting, I hope you had a great time in the Second City and were able to network with your colleagues. It really is my second city as I lived there for four years, my sister lives in the suburbs, I have clients downtown, regularly attend professional meetings there, and live 4.5 miles south of the city in Illinois. (I’m even a member of the Chicago Evaluation Association.) We accomplished a lot during the meeting including an update on the implementation of the strategic plan, election of new officers, and the adoption of organizational principles.

During the next year the IC TIG board and I intend to focus our efforts on strengthening the TIG through (1) further implementing the strategic plan, (2) particular focus on linking the program co-chairs and the media co-chairs, (3) reinforcing the structure of the organizational principles, and (4) focusing on the AEA metrics for TIGs.

**Strategic Plan.** Implementation of the strategic plan has informed our efforts for the upcoming year and provided a way for others to engage in our process. For my part, my committee will be reporting on the member survey in Spring 2016 to provide all of us with a better understanding for our peers.

**Linking Program with Media.** The program activities have held an important role with the TIG, but have been underutilized in our newsletters, Facebook postings, and with the TIG eGroup. This year I will encourage the program chairs to actively recruit our conference presenters to contribute during the year. Further, those who have expressed interest throughout the year will be actively recruited to present at the conference.

**Organizational Principles.** The organizational principles, which act like by-laws, reinforce our existing organizational beliefs and provide structure for the TIG. Importantly, they identify expectations for the TIG leadership, including who is on the board, how elections are coordinated, when meetings occur, and what is expected of the leaders.

**AEA Metrics.** AEA is actively considering different structures for the TIGs and it is important that we remain steadfast in our understanding of how the Independent Consulting TIG benefits the association. It continues to be important to AEA that TIGs maintain membership and produce programs at the annual conference.
Meet Laura Keene

Each quarter we will feature a member in this newsletter. This quarter, we reintroduce you to our new Chair-Elect. Send your suggestions for future interviewees to Loretta Kelley L.Kelley@kpacm.org

1. Please describe your independent consulting practice.
I have a one-woman shop called Keene Insights based in sunny Los Angeles, California. What I like to say is: I help people find their inner data geek, harness the power of data, and have a greater impact on the communities they serve. In other words, I provide evaluation training and support to non-profits, foundations, and other community-based organizations. Although my background is in public health, I’ve become more of a generalist over the years, working in education, social services, and healthcare as well.

2. What is your disciplinary background?
I have a BA in Psychology from UC Berkeley and a Master of Public Health from Columbia University.

3. How long have you been evaluating, and how long have you been an independent consultant?
I’ve been an evaluator for more than ten years now. I stumbled into the world of evaluation (like most evaluators) my final year of college thanks to a last minute internship. I fell in love with the work immediately and have been hooked ever since. For a variety of reasons (probably similar to your own), I jumped ship from my 9 to 5 in early 2012 to start Keene Insights. The business is continuing to grow and I thoroughly enjoy being my own boss, including the part where I have to learn something new seemingly every week.

4. Are you primarily qualitative, primarily quantitative, or mixed methods? Which do you prefer?
I’ve always done both, but qualitative research tends to suck me in a little more. It turns up the most fascinating findings.

5. What was your favorite evaluation experience?
A number of years ago I was working with an organization to evaluate a Juvenile Drug Court (JDC). This program was a last resort for adolescents with repeated drug-related offenses. It was either JDC, a very intensive case management and counseling program, or jail. It’s definitely my favorite project to-date. The staff was so amazingly committed to the kids and they were invested in the evaluation, wanting to learn and improve.

6. What type of experience have you had that was less than ideal?
I struggle with projects where, despite all my best efforts, I can’t get the client invested in the process and the results. I’m guessing you’ve had of few of those projects too, the ones where you’re pretty sure the final report is going to end up propping up an uneven desk somewhere.

7. Have you had any comical experiences? Describe them.
Sometimes, when I get deep into work, particularly analysis and writing, I have a bad habit of forgetting to move, eat, or even take a bathroom break for many, many hours. Often, my husband (who is also a freelancer) has to wander by or call every couple of hours to make sure I get up and say hello to the world.

8. What do you like to do when you’re not evaluating?
My husband and I love good food. He’s an amazing cook. Plus, we’re always on the hunt for new cafes and restaurants. Our latest find is a wonderful little place in Hollywood that serves food from El Salvador, mainly delicious pupusas. There we can stuff ourselves to the brim for less than $20, unheard of in Los Angeles.

9. Is there anything else you would like for your peers to know about you?
I’m so thrilled to be the next Chair-Elect. I started lurking around the IC TIG when that sense of isolation started to kick in. I was fortunate to find an incredible group of people. I’m looking forward to continuing the great work of the TIG. If you have any thoughts or suggestions, please feel free to email me anytime (laura@keene-insights.com).

Want to meet more TIG members?
Attend the TIG Business Meeting and TIG Dinner at the next AEA Annual Meeting.

IC TIG members enjoy Chicago style pizza and good company.
We All Love a Good Joke - Rachel Becker-Klein, Peer Associates & Theresa Fox, Rutgers University

Humor has been used to create change. Political cartoonists have played an important role in not only telling the history of particular time periods, but using humor to bring awareness to current events. Thomas Nast and Joseph Keppler wrote popular cartoons advocating social reform. A current cartoonist, Liza Donnelly of The New Yorker, raises feminist issues.

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How does this relate to evaluation? As evaluators, we are often seen as outsiders coming into an organization to judge the program or staff. Our tools, processes, and analyses may be foreign to our clients. Our lengthy reports, attention to process, and data presentations are frequently considered the driest, most boring part of a meeting. We need to explore ways to bring our practice to coworkers in a positive, simplified manner. Enter humor—jokes and cartoons can help us explain our craft and make it seem less intimidating. Adding humor makes us more relatable while communicating our understanding of the issues.

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Community Evaluation Solutions Evaluation Capacity Questionnaire (ECQ)

I have been asked to share our company’s Evaluation Capacity Questionnaire (ECQ). The ECQ is intended to help guide the conversation between clients and evaluators. We use the ECQ as a pre/post assessment of evaluation knowledge and organizational evaluation capacity, but it can be used as a pretest only or a posttest assessment only.

The ECB Questionnaire is based several other ECB surveys (Cousins, Goh, Clark, Lee (2004); Volkov, B. & King, J. (2007) among others and includes six constructs:

1. the background of the client;
2. the organization’s climate and support for evaluation;
3. leadership support for evaluation;
4. the presence of specific evaluation activities (e.g. evaluation plan, logic model etc.);
5. organizational learning; and
6. the organization’s increased capacity for evaluation.

Prior to starting an engagement, meet with the client to explain and define evaluation capacity and provide examples of the six constructs. Ask participants to complete the survey using the answer choices provided. You should also complete the survey independently of your client. Instruct the client to take note of any questions, identify areas of concern, and note any discrepancies. For example, staff may assess the organization as having the necessary internal resources to support the evaluation and the evaluator may be concerned about staff members’ technical capacity. After the evaluation engagement is complete, the ECQ can be used as a post-assessment to assess the organization’s change in evaluation knowledge and capacity.

We have used the ECQ in close-out one-to-one sessions with the key leader and in sessions with a group of stakeholders. If you use the ECQ individually, plan on about 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire individually. For a group discussion, you will want to budget about 1 hour.

You may want to use these discussion questions:

- What are the action steps implied by this conversation?
- What is the most significant learning from this evaluation? What about this was significant?
- What about the evaluation was most surprising?
- Which evaluation activity was most helpful and why? Which evaluation activity was least helpful and why?
- Where does your organization need additional support or training to continue its growth in evaluation capacity?

For more information or to receive a copy of the ECQ, contact Ann Webb Price, Ph.D. at 770-367-0942 or email at aprice@communityevaluationsolutions.com.
**FAQs and What to Do About Them!**

**Question: What, Me Volunteer?**

**Answer:** I know what you are going to say. “I’m too busy!” Being busy is an indicator of our business health, but let’s put health in a broader context. We can make the pie (i.e., your life) just a bit bigger, as Fisher and Ury (1991) would suggest, by using an old negotiating tactic on yourself. Divide your life in four sections:

- Family—to ground you
- Work—to challenge you
- Self Care—to support your physical and spiritual health
- Community—to connect to the wider world

Because we consultants spend a lot of time alone, working in our heads, community engagement is actually a survival strategy. Start by volunteering in your professional community. Why do we see so many of our senior colleagues at AEA and other evaluation conferences? Because they see their professional organization as a fabulous networking and learning opportunity. They routinely act as mentors, trainers, and committee members, all ways to continue their own professional development.

Another great place to volunteer is in your own neighbourhood or city. Find a non-profit board to join or provide direct service to agencies such as a food bank or support line. The learning dividends are huge. You will develop better communication skills, see how an organization works from the inside, and understand more deeply the connections between organizations and their environments.

Getting to know community members you wouldn’t meet otherwise has subtle benefits as well. You can build your reputation, demonstrate your values, and model your work ethic just by being present, sharing a vision, and working on joint projects. You are actually marketing without even trying. In the long run, when these individuals think about evaluation, they will think about you.

So stretch out your hand and see who you can touch. Volunteering is time consuming and it comes with its own set of challenges but it adds balance to your life. Give without thought of reward and see what happens. And oh, yes, there is one caveat. Be prepared for a whole lot of friendship and fun!

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Gail Vallance Barrington, President
Barrington Research Group


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I invite ideas for topics that interest our members. **Send questions or suggestions for future columns to gbarrington@barringtonresearchgrp.com.**

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**2016 Independent Consulting TIG Leadership**

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