



## Chair's Column. Embedding Collectivism in Evaluation

*Naaima Khan, IC TIG Chair*

**Dear IC TIG members,**

As we wrap up 2025, I have been sitting with a reflection: *What did we try to build together this year and how do we continue to build onward?* Not just in terms of online sessions and events, but in terms of culture, courage, and the conditions that make independent consulting an intellectually honest, principled and courageous path for many of us.

From the beginning of my term as Chair, my hope has been to highlight and reinvigorate the idea of collectivism in the IC TIG space, so that we can be a place where independent consultants can be honest about the realities of this work, grounded in justice, and supported by people who are committed to practicing with more accountability.

### **What we focused on in 2025**

This year, much of our energy has gone into three big priorities:

- 1. Helping TIG spaces navigate tough realities.**

We tried to surface hard conversations, including financial precarity, navigating the anxiousness of our times, boundary-setting, and figuring out what “equity” and “justice” might mean in day-to-day work. My hope is that you felt at least one IC TIG space where you could engage more deeply in such conversations.

- 2. Treating independent consulting as a collective practice.**

Throughout the year, we cultivated connections among consultants at different stages of their journeys: folks just thinking about starting a practice, consultants in their first shaky year, and those who have been doing this work for longer. A core aim has been to bring us together to share wisdom and strategy that dares us to try things differently.

- 3. Increased attention to global majority perspectives.**

Some of you have raised, explicitly or implicitly, the tension of working in systems that are shaped by whiteness, philanthro-capitalism, and U.S.-centric norms while trying to incorporate practices and values rooted in other intellectual, spiritual, and cultural traditions. We experimented in creating a space to imagine futures that are not limited to “business as usual.”

Even if you only joined one session, or mostly engaged via email, you have been part of shaping this culture. This TIG takes shape through the collective energy we bring to it.

### **Looking ahead: Questions for consulting life in 2026**

The following questions come to mind as I think about the work ahead:

- **Alignment:** Where does our work align with our spirit? Where are we closest to our values? Where is there room to close gaps?

- **Power and purpose:** How can we use our role as a consultant to redistribute power, not only to “advise” it? What might it look like to center communities who are usually consulted last, or not at all?
- **Collective practice:** Who do we need around us to feel connected and energized? How do we come together to hold one another accountable in the work ahead?

If you are so moved, I invite you to reflect and/or journal on even one of them and then share our reflections with another IC TIG member.

## Gratitude

Finally, I’d like to share a heartfelt thank you:

- To the IC TIG leadership team and volunteers, whose time and labor are often invisible but essential.
- To every consultant who showed courage and mutual support whether by sharing feedback or their experiences for the benefit of others in our community.
- To those of you who continue to practice and carry the values of justice, accountability and dignity into the work, even when it is not easy or rewarded.

Serving as Chair this year has been humbling and edifying. You have trusted me with your questions, your struggles, and your visions for something better than the status quo. I do not take that lightly.

May the coming year bring us work that fulfills our souls and moves us closer to the world we are trying to help build.

My wishes for peace, safety and a blessed holiday season for those with upcoming holidays!

## Naaima



**Member Feature: What Will 2026 Bring for Evaluation Consulting?** *Tina Faulkner*  
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/tinafaulkner/>

As I spoke with independent evaluation consultants (ICs) about they’d like to see in a newsletter article, it became clear that many ICs had concerns about the outlook for evaluation consulting. This article is an attempt to gain some insights about IC’s views regarding near-term opportunities in evaluation, whether these views vary depending on certain characteristics, and what ICs think about opportunities in evaluation-adjacent fields.

My data gathering was opportunistic. I talked and emailed with five ICs and sent a survey to the IC TIG Discussion Board. The survey had 36 responses. Despite the small sample and biases in the data, I had some interesting findings, which I summarize here. The ultimate goal of this article is to prompt discussion on the outlook for IC among this community. I will present my findings in detail during the IC Chat on Thursday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, and I hope you will join in that discussion!

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The majority of respondents to both the survey (65 percent) and the qualitative interviews/emails through opportunities for ICs were likely to decrease during 2026. About 15 percent of respondents thought opportunities were likely to increase, while 20 percent said they would stay the same. More positive responses, however, emerged based on the kinds of work evaluators do as well as where they work.

When asked about opportunities in the subject matter in which they do the most work, respondents working in most fields reported that opportunities were likely to decrease. However, ICs in Education, College Access, and/or Youth Focus were more positive – half of them thought consulting work would stay the same or increase during 2026. When asked about future opportunities based on the region in which their clients were concentrated, 62 percent of ICs in the Southern region thought consulting opportunities would decrease, while in the West, only 50 percent of ICs anticipated a decrease.

The survey asked ICs working in some evaluation-adjacent fields what they believed the outlook was for such fields in 2026. While ICs working in research were a bit more pessimistic, 86 percent of ICs with experience in facilitation and in strategic planning thought opportunities were likely to stay the same or increase.

These data show general concern about the near-term future of IC in evaluation. However, respondents working in the Education field and in the Western region are more optimistic. The majority of respondents working in adjacent fields of both strategic planning and in facilitation believe opportunities in those areas will either stay the same or increase. While working in a different subject matter is not a short-term solution, these data suggest that trying to expand one's client base to different regions and leaning into evaluation-adjacent fields may be strategies for ICs to consider.



**Editor's Notes: Rest. Restore. Regulate.** *Ashima Singh, Newsletter Chair*

Looking back, this year held a lot of uncertainty and emotional ups and downs. Through them all, we took deep breaths, leaned on each other, and welcomed new IC-TIG members who were looking for a professional peer group. We kept going even though it took a lot of energy, a strong willingness to contend with ambiguity, and resilience.

There is a cultural tendency to think of resilience as an ability to roll with the punches and keep functioning. The violent implications of rolling with punches notwithstanding, what looks like “functioning” could easily be a state in which a person is reactive, disengaged, or performing automated routines. This automaticity of going from one moment to the next is rooted in an overwhelmed, dysregulated nervous system where, because we rely heavily on reacting, we relinquish agency in choosing what we think and do.

Seen through the lens of the nervous system, “functioning” could also be a dance of the soul in which we experience each moment as fully as possible and use that information to act deliberately and with forethought. This requires the nervous system

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to slow down, be calm and regulated so it can gather as much information as possible to make informed choices about what we think and do. To get the most out of life, a regulated nervous system is clearly preferable. So, how do we get there?

The road to regulation is paved with rest. As we approach the end of the year, I invite you to rest, nourish your body and mind, be creative, and spend time with (not by) yourself and with people who fill your heart. Routinely check in with yourself and ask which mode of functioning you are in. If frenzied and dysregulated, rest some more until you have several data points (i.e. a steady trend) that indicate you are calm and regulated. Encourage those around you to do the same. When you are in that state of restored equanimity, you will be ready to act with information and intention in the new year.

If a rested individual can be informed, thoughtful, and deliberate in making choices, imagine what an entire country filled with rested people could do!

To get a head start, brew a cup of tea, get comfy, and listen to some [kora music by Toumani Diabaté](#).



### Resources Shared by IC-TIG Members

The following resources and links were shared by IC-TIG members. If you find information that you'd like to share, please send it to me at [ashima@ashimasingh.org](mailto:ashima@ashimasingh.org). I will consolidate all submissions and update this list with each newsletter. New additions are highlighted in bold red.

#### **Making Suggestions to AEA**

- [Welcome - Thoughtexchange](#)

#### **Adapting to Language Changes**

- [A New Way to Talk about the Social Determinants of Health](#), Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- [Banned and Trigger Words in Federal Grant Writing in the Trump Administration 2.0 | Grant Writing & Funding](#)
- [Federal Government's Growing Banned Words List Is Chilling Act of Censorship - PEN America](#)

#### **For ICs Working with Nonprofits**

- [The Impacts of the Recent Executive Orders on Nonprofits](#), National Council of Nonprofits
- [Resources to navigate uncertainty](#), Minnesota Council of Nonprofits
- [Webform: Effects of Executive Actions on Nonprofits](#) – Please complete if your organization is continuing to experience issues with federal funding

#### **Education Data and Resources**

- [Digest of Education Statistics and IPEDS](#) data made available by [Jon Boeckensted](#)
- [An R Shiny website with IPEDS data](#) from Smith and Tufts

#### **Federal Reports and Data Resources**

- [Land & Liberation](#)

- [Purged federal agency data](#)
- [About Data Rescue Project](#)
- [Oversight of USAID-Funded Humanitarian Assistance Programming Impacted by Staffing Reductions and Pause on Foreign Assistance](#), USAID Office of Inspector General

#### Federal Awards Under Review

- [Cruz-Led Investigation Uncovers \\$2 Billion in Woke DEI Grants at NSF, Releases F...](#)
- <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/4BD2D522-2092-4246-91A5-58EEF99750BC>

#### Staying Informed

- [Dr. Heather Cox Richardson on Facebook, Substack, and YouTube](#)
- [Chop Wood, Carry Water | Jessica Craven | Substack](#)
- [Authoritarianism Resource Library](#)
- [One Million Rising: Strategic Non-cooperation](#)

This list of resources, with or without updates, will be included in the newsletter regularly.



#### IC-TIG Member-Led Events

*The following are official IC TIG sponsored programs/events/initiatives coordinated by the elected 2025 IC TIG board. If you have any questions or concerns about these please contact a member of the [TIG board](#).*

**Business as Unusual** (currently on a temporary hiatus) is a space within the American Evaluation Association's Independent Consulting TIG, created to:

- Explore the role of independent consultants in advancing racial, economic and social justice goals
- Create a shared understanding of how to pursue anti-extractive business practices
- Share tools and resources that we can use to apply equity and justice in our work consistently.

Join us for a monthly, hour-long, virtual, participation-based conversation. We are interested in your experiences, reflections and wisdom. We welcome ideas for future topics.

**Register in advance [here](#).** After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

**IC TIG Healing Circle.** Facilitated by IC TIG Outgoing Chair, Dr. Tasha Parker, Ph.D., LCSW, MPA, ACHT, the Healing Circle is a time for Independent Consultants to come together in a nurturing environment to release and recharge. Although not therapy, the goal is to have a therapeutic effect borrowing on the Liberating Structures Conversation Cafe technique.

**Register in advance [here](#).** After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

**IC TIG Calendar.** Get the word out! Add your event, workshop, or discussion to the [IC TIG Calendar](#) by inviting [aeaictig@gmail.com](mailto:aeaictig@gmail.com) as a guest to your calendar event. It's that simple!

*The following are programs/events/initiatives led by members of the IC-TIG community. If you have any questions or concerns about these please contact the sponsoring individual or organization.*

**Ann Price's Office Hours.** For new, emerging, and experienced Evaluation Consultants on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month at 12pm EST. Bring your questions, challenges, and successes.

**Register in advance [here](#).** After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

**IC Topic Chats.** These 60-minute chats are held each week on Thursdays at 12pm EST and focus on Independent Consulting with a different topic of interest each week. Registration is open through December 2025 and you may register for as many sessions as you'd like. Click on the registration link to see upcoming topics.

**Register in advance [here](#).** After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

**Metrics and Mentors Roundtable.** IC TIG Members [Emma Alston \(Duer\)](#) and Heidi Berthoud (bear-too) co-host this monthly roundtable, which is an opportunity for peer support coaching. The group meets the 1st Tuesday of each month from 10-11am PST / 1-2pm EST.

**Register in advance [here](#).** After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

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