



Chair's Column. Practicing the Harder Values *Naaïma Khan, IC TIG Chair*

As independent evaluation consultants, many of us work in isolation—on contracts, with clients, managing the day-to-day grind of deliverables and deadlines. But none of us are truly separate from the political and social conditions that shape our work. The violence, erasure, and manufactured scarcity playing out globally—and here at home—are not abstract. They show up in what gets funded, who defines impact, who is deemed credible, and who is seen as disposable.

In moments like this, it's easy to retreat into the values we think we already embody. To believe that because we “care” about equity, we're already living it. But BIPOC feminist scholars have long reminded us: care without accountability is insufficient. And accountability without community is nearly impossible.

The American Evaluation Association lists core competencies like reflective practice, cultural responsiveness, and situational awareness—not as boxes to check, but as living capacities we must build and return to again and again. That means asking ourselves hard questions: How do I benefit from the same systems I claim to critique? How do I apply my values when no one's watching? What am I willing to risk or release in service of equity, not just in rhetoric, but in material terms?

Living our values is not a destination. It's daily practice, often rooted in small and unglamorous decisions. Patience, humility, and generosity aren't soft skills. They're the real foundation that supports justice, especially when we're navigating client demands, institutional pressures, or limited scopes of work.

The call right now is not just to be good people doing good work. It's to be willing to be changed—to deepen our political clarity, to act in collective interest, and to keep returning to alignment even when it's inconvenient or costly. Not perfectly, but on purpose.

We need each other for this. Not just for networking or referrals—but for collective reckoning, collective courage, and collective care. Our independence as consultants doesn't absolve us from interdependence as people. Let's stay in that tension together.

In community,
Naaïma Khan



Member Insights. Reflections on Pivoting *Malaka Refai, Freelance Consultant*

Pivoting has surfaced often in recent professional conversations and virtual spaces. The topic seems to be on many people's minds as we all try to negotiate shifts in funding sources, employment, and consulting opportunities. The word "pivot" implies a point on which a lever turns, yet we talk about it as abruptly turning and changing directions and potentially miss the opportunity to conceive of it as an opportunity to reflect and learn.

I was born and raised in New Jersey with roots extending to Egypt and have always had a foot in each culture and country. After finishing my MA in Peace and Conflict Resolution in the U.S., I moved to Egypt. I worked there for 12 years in Peacebuilding and International Development. About two and a half years ago, I moved back to the U.S. with a goal to transition into U.S. domestic Peacebuilding. It never occurred to me that doing the same work in the U.S. would entail a career pivot, and a total restructuring of my professional networks.

When I came back to the U.S. I applied to many jobs and completed many RFPs related to my core area of expertise. I slowly realized that the term "peacebuilding" had different implications here. In fact, it seemed that most domestic based organizations did not use it at all and leaned instead towards "bridging," "social cohesion," or "community building," among others and each had a different nuance that was centered within that organization. These nuances are translated into the mission and values of each organization.

I was at a nexus where terminology and nuanced definitions met and positioned me to make meaning of each by reaching into – and expanding – my own knowledge and skills. I took many a moment to reflect and came to a few realizations. One, I realized my own need to unpack my professional experiences – gathered in the U.S. and internationally – to deeply understand the strengths and weaknesses I hold in any moment for any project. This was eye-opening as I came to realize, despite the job rejections, I DO have unique skills.

Second, I gained a re-appreciation for grounding in the community of interest a definition of whatever peacebuilding-adjacent term they preferred. While on the surface each synonym seems to be self-explanatory, it is not. So, I learned to dive deeply into a myriad of values and terms that exist under the umbrella of "peacebuilding" to give the term more dimension in my mind.

Lastly, mapping my skills onto community needs helped me redefine how I can adjust to our ever-evolving landscape. It helped me see how my experiences and understanding of others could be pivoted and framed to adapt to each unique situation.

Through this deep dive into myself and my topic of interest through this multi-faceted lens, I learned to uncover talents I did not realize I had. Pivoting became an act of self-discovery and learning. Rather than being an act of trying to find new directions, it became a reflective act of self-appreciation. Just as it should be.



Editor's Notes: Culture, Norms, and Our Work *Ashima Singh, Newsletter Chair*

Western cultures are somewhat reductively labeled individualistic while eastern ones are collectivist. Naaima Khan, Chair of the IC-TIG, in the February 2025 column, invited our TIG to reflect on the theme of "collectivism." That framework, she described, is a way of acknowledging that humans, despite our independent operations, are interconnected. We influence each other and in doing so shape not only individuals but also our culture and society. Collectivism, she emphasized, "is not just about collaboration – it is a lived practice of mutual care, shared responsibility, and collective progress."

Cultures are created through social rules and guidelines, or social norms, that define behavioral expectations in certain groups or situations. Norms can be implicit – e.g. dining etiquette – or explicit – e.g. laws. In either case, they help us categorize what is normal or acceptable and what is not while operating at multiple levels, from guiding social etiquette to morality. They can vary between cultures, as you may know from being in spaces that are culturally different from your own. Norm violations are perceived as rude, unsociable, and even hostile depending on the circumstances.

A recent encounter led me to revisit these ideas of collectivism and social norms. In a conversation with an acquaintance, my inclination toward deferential verbal mannerisms I realized later, is grounded in my collectivist roots. The goal of that mannerism – in my culture of origin – is to communicate messages like "you may not be necessary but are valued," "the door is always open," and other similar sentiments that imply value for the other. The person to whom this was addressed comes from an individualistic culture and perceived me to be saying that "I am incapable of doing this by myself" or "I am not smart enough to figure this out without you." Neither of us was wrong, but we had a conversation in which neither of us met in the middle because we were both relying on unspoken, implicit cues grounded in social norms of our different cultures of origin. Not reaching mutual understanding in that conversation was an unfortunate but unsurprising outcome.

That interaction led me to wonder how much information we invariably miss in our professional capacity as evaluators when we do not confront the reality of social norms that shape our speech and comprehension. In working with colleagues from a minoritized culture, how do we orient ourselves to their worldview to ensure they have an authentic voice? In working with East Asian immigrant or Native American populations, as a pithy example, how do we set aside the goggles of our cultural norms and try to see what they see? How do we trust that our vision is unclouded?

There are no quick and easy answers to my questions, of course. The pathway to an answer sometimes varies by the communities we are engaging with. However, those questions are worth considering. The way we as evaluators see and report "reality," and our role in it, has the power to shape future partnerships, impact people's lives and communities, and control resources that may be available to them. None of these are responsibilities we can afford to take lightly while continuing to maintain our commitment to [AEA's Guiding Principles](#). I invite you to consider how norms within your culture(s) shape your perceptions of and interactions with your world and people in it. What can you do to examine how that influences your work as an independent consultant?



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. I will consolidate all submissions and update this list with each newsletter. New additions are highlighted in **bold red**.

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](#)

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

- <https://app.box.com/s/t9q3n0txjh5zwqw3rler9jlmo3fghk0x>, Digest of Education Statistics and IPEDS data made available by [Jon Boeckensted](#)
- https://sc-kaloisio.shinyapps.io/ipeds_compiler/, an R Shiny website with IPEDS data from Smith and Tufts

Federal Reports and Data Resources

- [Land & Liberation](#)
- <https://www.policymap.com/blog/purged-federal-agency-data-available>, 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

Making Suggestions to AEA About Disseminating Resources and Strategies

- [Welcome - Thoughtexchange](#)

Federal Awards Under Review

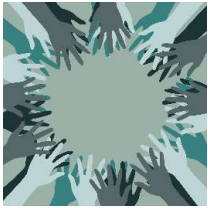
- [Cruz-Led Investigation Uncovers \\$2 Billion in Woke DEI Grants at NSF, Releases F...](#)

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- <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 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 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 and emerging 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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