



Chair's Column. Embedding Collectivism in Evaluation

Naaima Khan, IC TIG Chair

Hello IC TIG members,

A theme I've been running across in conversations I've been having with folks is how we might embed a stronger sense of collectivism into the framing of our evaluations. Too often, our work zeroes in on individual-level results (i.e. services delivered, income gained, or skills acquired, etc.) rather than collective outcomes that reveal deeper structural truths (i.e. why services need to be delivered, what difference income gained makes in the long run, whether/how skills acquired transfer power, etc).

To get closer to the root causes of inequities, we need to ask not only what results are occurring, but who is materially benefitting from them. When we shift our frame to collective-level analysis, we begin to see how groups - defined by history, geography, political dynamics and/or identity - are differently positioned to use resources, power, and opportunity. Contextualizing programs in this way helps us see that "impact" is not neutral; it exists within broader systems and histories.

In reviewing the American Evaluation Association's guiding principles, I was struck by how context appears in three areas:

- Systematic Inquiry, which calls for contextual relevance;
- Competency, which highlights cultural responsiveness; and,
- Common Good and Equity, which encourages attention to power and positionality.

These are important anchors. Yet, I've been wondering if our field might go further toward contextualizing not just findings, but the questions themselves. For example: what are our evaluation questions designed to accomplish? What assumptions do they carry? Who benefits from the answers, and who might remain unseen?

Context, then, is not only a matter of environment or culture; it is also about positionality, purpose and intention. It demands that we interrogate the "whys" behind our work—why this program, this community, this outcome at this time? As we continue evaluating amid challenging and shifting political landscapes, two questions feel especially urgent:

1. How do we ensure our evaluations consistently reach for root-cause and structural analysis rather than surface-level fixes?

2. How do we hold rigor with accountability back to the communities we are working with?

Perhaps it begins with naming things clearly, with understanding the histories that shape our present, and carrying collectivist, structural analyses as through-threads in our work.

In practice,
Naaima



Editor's Notes: Should we “Should”? *Ashima Singh, Newsletter Chair*

This newsletter is late; note the cheeky “Bi-Monthly(ish)” above. It “should” have been in your inbox in August 2025. The delay was unintentional, life got in the way, and I appreciate your grace.

Early in my career, I didn’t think twice about using “should” or “must” in writing recommendations for programs I evaluated. Then I learned better than to use that language in personal and professional contexts.

The word “should” and its close cousin “must” implicitly tell the recipient of the directive that they somehow fell short of an ideal or missed the mark. Both ignore why the mark was missed, whose values set the mark in the first place, and the context for having missed it. It simply points to personal failure, which is a road sign we all pass on our hasty way to shame.

Shame laser focuses attention on personal deficiencies. It leaves no room for dialog. It is a judgement that provokes insecurities. It puts a person in a corner, quite possibly with a cap on their heads labeled “Dunce.” While it is unavoidable at times – we are all human – it is possible to acknowledge its presence and gently move past it. It does a lot of damage and the one thing it does not do is inspire change in either thought or action. Thus, it can prevent us from fulfilling our commitment to [AEA’s Guiding Principles](#), especially D.

Inspiring change requires an emotional opening and an ability to see possibilities that were obscured before. It reminds a person that they have agency, their voice matters, and the impacts of their actions matter. It invites playful curiosity, joy, and eagerness.

As evaluators, we seek to effect change for our clients whose impact ripples into their services. Shame can interfere with that desired effect. We can mitigate the chances of provoking shame in our clients by softening the language of recommendations. We can opt, instead, to use language that creates room for possibilities and dialog. The term “consider” is a reasonable substitute, but I invite us to go further. How about prefacing considerations with, “We, as evaluators, have a bird’s-eye view and do not enjoy the granular engagement with the program and its recipients that <our clients> have. With that in mind, we see possibilities and invite a conversation with <our

clients> to identify those that are feasible now or in the future and others that are not.” Any recommendations clients pursue can be documented in a follow-up memo or subsequent reports.

Admittedly, that language lacks the brevity of “should” or “must”, but it opens an emotional door for change that can translate into effective action. It reminds program leaders of their agency and passion. It tells a funding agency that program leaders engaged in wise, informed, and context-driven choices about what changes were possible. It also helps us meet our professional guiding principles. It’s a win-win, no matter how I look at it.

Nowadays, I know that the only “should” I should do is not “should-ing” myself or others. Doing so wouldn’t have gotten this newsletter into your inbox any faster, and it would have made me feel bad about myself. No one benefits from that.



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**.

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](#)

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., LSCSW, 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, 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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