Call for Papers for Special Issue of Evaluation Review

Evaluation Technical Assistance

Designing, implementing, and reporting on rigorous impact evaluations is difficult. Increasingly, federal grant programs require high-quality impact evaluations; in particular, impact evaluations that will pass standards designated by external systematic reviews (e.g., WWC/What Works Clearinghouse). Experience suggests that—without assistance—many evaluators and evaluations will not pass satisfy those standards. This is likely due to a combination of lack of knowledge of appropriate standards, low capacity to conduct high quality evaluation, and other factors.

One constructive approach to meeting the goal of high quality impact evaluations while addressing the difficulty of executing them is evaluation technical assistance (ETA). In this model, in addition to funding the programs and the evaluations, the federal agency also hires a contractor to work with the evaluators and/or the grantees to assure that the evaluations will be of high quality and, in particular, that the evaluation satisfy standards. In recent years the ETA model has also been utilized by philanthropic funders to assist their grantees.

Such efforts vary widely along several dimensions, including the intensity of the ETA per evaluation assisted, the extent to which the ETA provider can require that the evaluation be conducted in a specific way; the topics/focus of the TA; and the mix of online, in-person and one-on-one, and group TA.

We seek papers addressing key issues related to evaluation TA, including:

- Discussions of technical issues in evaluation practice. For what aspects of an evaluation is ETA particularly important and what are successful approaches to providing ETA for those areas?

- Challenges and successes experienced by agencies and funders in requiring rigorous evaluation and the role of ETA in such efforts.

- Discussion of the role of ETA for grant programs in the broader context of evaluation, systematic reviews, and evidence based program selection.

- Evaluation TA in the broader context of capacity building efforts

This Call for Papers also seeks case study papers describing specific ETA efforts—from the government perspective, from the evaluator perspective, or from the ETA provider perspective. Such case studies would usually include:
• A description of the context of the grant program and the ETA program, including (i) policy background of the grant program, (ii) description of the grantees, (iii) evaluation requirements, (iv) contractual structure governing the relationship between the grant making agency, the grantees, the evaluators, and the technical assistance provider, and (v) expectations for the strength of the completed evaluations.

• A discussion of the ETA content and process including the goals, nature and intensity of the ETA provided (e.g., discussions of how providers chose ETA topics and delivery method, specific issues that arise in the delivery of ETA and the common challenges encountered by grantees and their evaluators).

• A review of the achieved strength of the evaluations, whether they met the expectations of the funding agency and external reviews, and reflections on the experience for stakeholders.

• Appendices with copies of illustrative ETA materials.

To respond to this Call for Papers, please submit a one-page abstract outlining the proposed paper, essay, or case study by October 1 to: Beth_Boulay@abtassoc.com. The selected authors will be notified by November 15, and papers will be due by February 1, 2018. For questions about this special issue, please contact Beth_Boulay@abtassoc.com, Diana.Epstein@gmail.com, or Jacob_Klerman@abtassoc.com.