The National Science Foundation's Advanced Technological Education (NSF ATE) program focuses on the education of technicians for the high-tech fields that drive the nation's economy. The faculty members of community colleges, which are the main source of technician education in the United States, have leadership roles in the initiatives that involve partnerships with industry and other educators. Since 1994, NSF ATE initiatives have developed a wide-range of innovations to serve students, inform educators, and address employers' needs.

A group of NSF ATE centers formed the Centers Collaborative for Technical Assistance (CCTA) in response to a Department of Labor request to NSF for technical assistance services to recipients of Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grants. The centers are National Center for Convergence Technology (CTC), South Carolina ATE National Resource Center (SCATE), Florida Advanced Technological Education Center (FLATE) and Bio-Link National Center (Bio-Link). The identification and sharing of NSF ATE best practices are among the services CCTA offers.

MEETING EVALUATION REQUIREMENTS & EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

An effective evaluation by an external evaluator does not simply respond to funders' accountability expectations, it helps a project succeed. An evaluation, particularly when it begins at the outset of a project, informs continuous improvement efforts; reports accomplishments, what did not work, and lessons learned to funders; shares results with participants, partners, and stakeholders; and gathers evidence to support future work.

Lori A. Wingate, director and principal investigator of EvaluATE, created the webinar "Meeting Requirements, Exceeding Expectations: Understanding the Role of Evaluation in Federal Grants" in collaboration with CCTA. In addition to leading EvaluATE, the evaluation support center for the ATE program, Wingate is director of research for The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University.

STEPS TO START

1. Read the program solicitation several times; pay close attention to instructions regarding evaluations.
2. Confer with an evaluator while preparing a proposal.
3. Create a logic model—a graphic depiction of project inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes—as a foundation for planning the evaluation.

TIP: Use EVAL to search the electronic version of a program solicitation. Copy and paste each section that mentions evaluation in a separate document. Use this document as a checklist for your evaluation plan to make sure it complies with the program-specific guidance regarding evaluations.

Think of evaluation as an investment in your project and your future work. If you invest adequate time and money upfront, it will pay dividends in the form of information to improve your work and evidence to explain the impact and lessons learned.

10 ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE EVALUATION PLANS

1. Evaluation Questions to clarify what aspects of the project are being evaluated.
2. Indicators to identify what will be measured relevant to evaluation questions.
3. Data Sources
4. Data Collection Methods and Instruments } to explain how data will be collected and analyzed to derive meaningful conclusions.
5. Data Analysis Procedures
6. Evaluation Deliverables to demonstrate timely and useful products from the evaluation.
7. Timeline to track the alignment of evaluation activities with project milestones.
8. Personnel Identification to explain qualifications of individuals conducting the evaluation.
9. Budget to document appropriate resources for evaluation costs.
10. Plan for Use of Results to demonstrate commitment for improving and sharing lessons learned.

EVALUATIONS

1. Ask important questions about a project's processes and outcomes.
2. Gather evidence that will help answer those questions.
3. Interpret data and answer the evaluation questions.
4. Use the information for accountability, improvement, and planning.

LOCATING & SELECTING AN EXTERNAL EVALUATOR

- Read this resource: *Finding and Selecting an Evaluator* (evalu-ate. org/resoures/finding-evaluator).
- Use ATE Central's evaluator map (atecentral.net/evaluators). This interactive map can be used to identify evaluators by location and the types of ATE projects they evaluate.
- Check the American Evaluation Association's Evaluator Directory.
- Contact university-based evaluation centers.
- Ask colleagues for recommendations.
- If funding has been awarded, post a request for proposals in the "Career" section of the American Evaluation Association's website.

EvaluATE
evalu-ate.org

For more info, go to:
evalu-ate.org/webinars/2016-may
or
atecenters.org/webinar-archives-2016

Proposal budgets should include funds for evaluation in alignment with the solicitation.

Evaluation Budgeting Rule of Thumb
10%
of the cost of conducting the project should be allocated to evaluation.

PROPOSAL REVIEWERS LOOK TO SEE IF EVALUATION PLANS

- match the scope and scale of the project;
- contain specific details about data collection methods;
- align with the project's activities and goals; and
- explain how findings will be used.

"If you have a terrific evaluation plan, it can help your proposal move along because then the program officer knows that you are going to be contributing to the field and learning more about what's going on in your project, and accounting for how you are spending the funds."

LESLIE GOODYEAR
PRINCIPAL RESEARCH SCIENTIST AT EDC

Read more of Leslie Goodyear's tips for strong NSF proposals at
evalu-ate.org/blog/goodyear-aug2016

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