

Is the EEE-TIG Achieving Its Goals Across the Breadth of Cooperative Extension?

Occasionally, associations need to ‘dust off’ their goal statements and examine them relative to current issues. Perhaps the Extension Education Evaluation-Topical Interest Group (EEE-TIG) of the American Evaluation Association should do this kind of “goal tending.” There are numerous ways that the Extension Education Evaluators (EEEs) could and probably should evaluate our overall progress. As current representative from the Cooperative Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) to the Board of the EEE-TIG, I suggest that one way to evaluate goal achievements by EEEs is relative to *scope* i.e., *institutional scope* of the Cooperative Extension system (CES).¹

What is the *institutional scope* of the Cooperative Extension System? Three *categories* of educational institutions are named in the Extension portion of the CSREES budget that is funded by the Congress. If you will, the collectivity of these categories constitutes a working definition of the *institutional scope* of the CES. The CES was formed originally between Extension Service-USDA and the Extension Services of a set of land grant colleges established by federal law in 1862. CES then was broadened by inclusion of Extension Programs of a set of historically African American colleges that was established by federal law in 1890; and CES was further broadened by federal law in 1994 to include Extension Projects of American Indian tribal colleges.²

Institutional Distribution of EEE-TIG Participation

This “Hear It From the Board” item raises a few questions about *institutional inclusiveness* of EEE, and offer a few ideas for follow-up discussion. Does extent of participation in EEE (including membership in it) tend to be associated with size of individual institution? Although over time EEE has picked up participation from most states, I would say that faculty/staff from the larger/more highly funded 1862 land grant institutions tend to participate proportionately more in EEE than do those from smaller/less well funded 1862 institutions. There is *markedly lower* EEE participation by faculty/staff from the 1890 institutions and the 1994 institutions; these tend to be smaller/less well funded than the smaller 1862 institutions.

Should the EEE-TIG have developmental processes that serve to increase activities/membership by those faculties and staffs doing extension work through the smaller 1862 institutions, the 1890 institutions, and the 1994 institutions? Perhaps the answer lies in the nature of the American Evaluation Association and its goals; the nature and goals of EEEs; and how these goals are interpreted by the membership of EEEs.

EEE members may not have not memorized the goals of EEEs, nor posted them right over their office computers, nor placed them in their billfold for frequent referral. EEE goals are quoted below (from

EEE-TIG's official brochure produced through the attention of Richard Rohs, EEEs 1998 Chair, as well as EEEs web site <http://danr.ucop.edu/eee/aea/>):

1. To promote the professional development of evaluators working within the Cooperative Extension system and in other nonformal educational organizations.
2. To improve evaluation performance through a better understanding of the unique contexts of evaluation in various informal education and technology transfer settings.
3. To recognize and enhance the relationship between the functions of program evaluation, program planning, staff development and organizational development in Extension and informal education.
4. To provide and promote opportunities for sharing evaluation theories, issues, approaches, and practices in Extension and informal education.
5. To encourage exemplary evaluation practice in the field of Extension Education.
6. To support the mission of the American Evaluation Association (AEA).

What is AEA's mission? As a reminder, the goals of AEA are as follows (quoted from the same source mentioned above):

- ◆ Improve evaluation practice and methods;
- ◆ Increase evaluation use;
- ◆ Promote evaluation as a profession; and
- ◆ Support the contribution of evaluation to the generation of theory and knowledge about effective human action.

On the basis of the above goal statements, one might raise this question: *should EEE take action to increase our 'institutional diversity' i.e., increase EEE participation (including membership) by extension faculties and staffs³ of the 1994 institutions, the 1890 institutions, and the smaller 1862 institutions?* Excerpts from the above goal statements might be woven together to build a rationale for posing the preceding question.

Selected excerpts from the above goal statements are as follows:

- ◆ promote professional development of evaluators working within the *Cooperative Extension system* (EEE goal No. 1);
- ◆ improve evaluation performance . . . in *various informal education . . . settings* (EEE goal No. 2);
- ◆ *sharing* evaluation theories, issues, approaches, and practices in Extension (EEE goal No. 4); and
- ◆ promote evaluation as a profession (EEEs final goal prompts it to support this AEA goal which, as

seen below, includes an objective to ‘build *diversity*’ in AEA).⁴

On the basis of its goals, should EEEs consider whether EEE is, and should be, as inclusive as is the CES? Before moving to ideas for possible actions, I wish to state a caveat. Because of the *voluntary* nature of the AEA and EEEs, I am *not* suggesting that EEE participation and membership necessarily mirror the size/funding distribution of the array of organizations that comprise the Cooperative Extension System.

Policies of Related Associations

Looking at selected policies and activities of professional associations might nudge us farther in the direction of considering whether ‘institutional diversity’ is a responsibility of and growth opportunity for EEEs?⁵ Granted, the comparisons below are not with other Topical Interest Groups; however, EEEs is no ordinary TIG in the AEA.

EEEs is perhaps the AEA’s largest TIG. EEEs is as large as some small, freestanding professional associations. Moreover, many of our members are supported through funding from the same national, institutional partnership, i.e., Cooperative Extension. This means that EEE is actually *more* than just a topical *interest* group: EEEs is to some extent bound together by at least federal legislation and formula funding (a February 12-14, 2001, “Partnership Workshop” involved nearly all state directors of Cooperative Extension Services and Agricultural Experiment Stations, as well as most program and administrative staff of CSREES; the Workshop declared that its number one priority for strengthening the national “partnership” is to augment federal formula funding). Moreover, with *regional* Extension programming required by 1998 congressional action, state Cooperative Extension Services may be increasingly evaluating the same programs.

Professional association approaches to increasing participation in and benefits from association activities include the following.

Marketing. AEA’s current Initiative to Build Diversity in the Evaluation Community seeks to ‘increase the inclusion and capacity of people of color, and those who work cross-culturally in the field of evaluation’ (Working ‘cross-culturally’ refers here to evaluation practice by persons of one race/ethnicity in settings of a different race/ethnicity). Currently, the Diversity Initiative is building a Directory of Evaluators of Color and Cross-Cultural Evaluation Practitioners, in order to link them to a spectrum of public agencies and private organizations. The relative *scope* of the overall diversity initiative of AEA could arguably be compared with a potential EEE ‘institutional diversity’ initiative.

Scholarships: The Rural Sociological Association (RSS) in some ways is comparable to AEA (e.g., its numerous interest groups include one focused on extension). Besides having a standing committee on diversity, the RSS solicits from its members *voluntary* contributions to two RSS funds: one fund is to enhance professional growth in rural sociology; and the other is to support travel by minority scholars to attend RSS meetings. Managed by designated committees and the treasurer of the RSS, contributions to these two funds are tax deductible: a list of donors to

these RSS funds appears annually in the RSS professional development publication.

- (a) The National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA) provides several opportunities to receive full registration for NACAA's annual meeting/professional improvement conference.
- (b) The National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA) provides several opportunities to receive: full registration for NAE4-HA annual meetings; stipends for travel only; and free membership in NAE4-HA for a year.

The National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS) provides several opportunities to receive full registration for NEAFCS annual meetings; (notably, for its 2001 annual meeting, NEAFCS has invited extension faculty from 1994 colleges to conduct a session to educate members about these tribal colleges).

Epsilon Sigma Phi (ESP), the professional honorary for Cooperative Extension, provides opportunities to receive full registration for national ESP conferences and travel stipends.

Mentoring: Through involving their employed and retired members in mentoring activities, some associations provide *personal* encouragement for association participation by under-represented groups. An application of this approach, geared to encouraging EEE participation from under-represented institutions, could include offers by experienced EEE members to informally 'pre-review' proposals by those submitting proposals, for the first time, for presentation at an AEA meeting.

Conference Themes: A step frequently employed by associations, in order to 'pull-in' any particular type of participant to their annual conference/meeting, is to select one or more conference themes in which the sought-after, potential participants are especially interested. In this regard, a continuing priority for EEE-sponsored sessions might be titled, 'evaluations of programs having diverse audiences'. Such a 'theme approach' might be especially considered as a way to encourage submission of proposals for presentations from faculties/staffs of the 1890 institutions and the 1994 institutions.

While most of the association policies/actions listed above are not 'diversity-specific,' they do suggest ways that under-represented groups might be encouraged to become involved in EEEs. For example, EEEs might provide participation opportunities, supported by 'scholarships,' to those potential recipients who demonstrate both opportunity and intent to apply what they learn. Such opportunities afforded by EEEs could be brought to the attention of potential recipients through mass announcements as well as personal contacts from individual members of EEEs.

A tried and true, long-held principle of extension education is that a *combination* of several techniques over a sufficient time period usually is required to be persuasive with most extension audiences. A

combination of the above-mentioned approaches might be required to significantly increase EEE participation from among the 1890 institutions, the smaller 1862 institutions, and the 1994 institutions. Even then, progress probably would be slow.

What Kind of TIG Does EEEs Want?

The questions raised above are only *one* facet of a more fundamental issue concerning the EEEs, i.e., what kinds of a TIG do EEE members want to have by, say, three years, five years, and 10 years from now? What is EEEs *future importance* to its members' professional growth and career advancement? This question may be especially important to EEE members in their early and mid-careers. These questions are not asked rhetorically; I have no idea what the relevant trends and projections may be.

It seems to me that, up to now, the EEE-TIG has focused almost entirely on supporting evaluative work and recognition of individual (and team) extension evaluators who participate in activities of EEEs. The EEE Board annually handles the establishment of sessions for paper presentations, and provides recognition for admirable evaluative work. Am I correct in saying that EEE-TIG spends little time in discussion of policies for developing itself? If this is so, perhaps it is because EEEs defer to AEA leadership regarding policy development?

How important is it to EEE members to further develop the EEE-TIG? In this 'Hear It From the Board' item, am I pointing to real needs, or only toward 'make work' ideas? Maybe the added effort required to further develop EEEs simply is not worth it? (Current and previous Board members of EEE will attest that considerable time is required just to *maintain* the TIG). Is further development of EEEs important enough for a wider circle of EEE members, outside the current composition of the EEE Board, to spend time on 'growing' the EEEs?

If EEEs is to become more vital and growth-oriented, it might need to establish one or more ad hoc and/or standing committees: there is a limit to the EEE Board's time to handle more specific TIG activities. Such committees could include the following:

- (a) strategic planning (e.g., forging connections with extension program planners (such as area and regional directors) and evaluators of relevant research efforts);
- (b) development (e.g., as focused on institutional inclusiveness as suggested above); and publications (e.g., has EEEs already begun the basis for an incipient publication series by eliciting 'Hear It From the Board,' evaluation-practice contributions?).

Conclusion

These perceptions, questions, and suggestions are intended to stimulate discussion within EEEs relative to our scope/equity responsibilities and possible growth opportunities. Please comment on the above ideas (e.g., agree with or elaborate upon the above observations and suggestions, or disagree and/or offer alternate observations and suggestions). Post comments on the EEE list serv, eee-tig@ext.msstate.edu as a way of making this topic 'inclusive' for all members.

