# **T4PA CENTER** Evaluation Guide

This Evaluation Guide (Guide) is intended to serve as a companion piece to the Title IV, Part A (Title IV-A) LEA Needs Assessment Tool (Tool). The Tool prompts local education agencies (LEAs) to think first about the desired outcomes, then work backward to identify the programs, projects, or activities (interventions) that will best serve those outcomes under the Title IV-A statute. This Guide offers a high-level overview of the evaluation cycle and can assist LEAs in evaluating whether a selected program is meeting the needs and desired goals identified in the Tool.

While providing an overview of evaluation basics and the steps of an evaluation, the Guide utilizes sample scenarios to demonstrate what each step looks like, along with resources to learn more. The T4PA Center's goal is for this Guide to assist users in evaluating the performance of selected interventions. Additionally, this Guide will help state education agencies (SEAs) and LEAs that work with an outside evaluator to better understand the processes and procedures as they develop and execute the evaluation.

This Guide is intended to be used for interventions funded by Title IV-A; however, the information presented herein could be applied to all interventions. LEAs may use Title IV-A funds for a variety of programs, and the Guide may be used to help evaluate some or all of them.

## EVALUATION BASICS

Evaluation is a means to assess the performance, merit, and worth of a program. Evaluations should be thorough and meaningful and yield actionable information to help improve the program and intended outcomes. LEAs should evaluate a program over the course of implementation.

To ensure quality evaluations, it is best to integrate them from the beginning of program implementation. However, this Guide will provide the basic steps for carrying out an evaluation that can be applied regardless of the time when the evaluation begins. It is better to integrate some aspects of evaluation along the way even if you were not able to initiate it from day one.

**Evaluation starts with a question: Did the intervention achieve the expected results?** Finding the answers to this question is the essence of an evaluation.

## PROCESS EVALUATION AND OUTCOME EVALUATION

This document will reference the two main types of evaluation – process and outcome. Evaluations can focus on processes, outcomes, or both. Each type of evaluation serves a different purpose. When used in combination, they provide a more detailed picture of the program.

**Process evaluation** answers the question "Does the intervention work as intended?" Otherwise stated, "Are teachers, counselors, or other school staff getting enough support so that the program,

project, or activity can be implemented as intended?" Some key issues and questions that might arise during a process evaluation are the following:

- What types and how frequently are professional development activities conducted for this intervention?
- How are teachers, counselors, and other school staff being held accountable for implementing the intervention with fidelity?
- Are there measures in place to assess the students' comprehension of the intervention?

Process evaluations focus on the implementation process. They seek to uncover if the intervention is going according to plan.

**Outcome evaluation**, on the other hand, answers the question "Does the intervention have the intended impact?" Simply stated, "Did the intervention or program accomplish what it was designed to accomplish?" Outcome evaluations determine the degree to which a program achieves its stated goals and objectives and are what most people think of when they hear the word evaluation.

**A combined approach is critical.** Both process and outcome evaluations are essential to assessing the true impact of the intervention on the intended audiences. Both types require indicators, or measures, by which to ascertain performance and benchmarks of success by which to recognize that the intervention is achieving its intended outcome. A quality evaluation includes both types of evaluation in order to provide a more complete picture of the success or failure of an intervention, as well as a possible explanation for those outcomes. When possible, it is recommended to incorporate both in the evaluation plan.

**Evaluation process.** Figure 1 illustrates the continuous cycle of evaluation. Evaluation involves evaluating, making changes, and re-evaluating to get the best results from the program or project. The following sections provide detail on each step of the evaluation process.

An evaluation can take many forms, but all evaluations have the same basic steps to remember:

## FIGURE 1. EVALUATION PROCESS



1. **Ask questions:** Determine what your LEA and other stakeholders are trying to learn from this evaluation and what pieces of information are needed to get there.

2. **Organize the evaluation using a logic model and/or evaluation plan:** Setting a plan in place will let stakeholders know what to expect.

3. **Create goals/benchmarks:** What goals will the intervention set to attain? What benchmarks are needed along the way to show the program is working?

4. **Design measurements and/or indicators for the evaluation:** What are the indicators of program success? Find measurement tools to measure outcomes, or create your own. Decide what type of data to use (quantitative, qualitative, or both) to evaluate the program.

5. **Carry out the evaluation:** Setting up data collection via survey, phone calls, observations, data collections, and/or in-person or Web-based focus groups.

6. **Report the results:** Answer the evaluation questions, and determine if any changes should be made to the intervention.

7. **Repeat as needed.**

## EVALUATION IN DETAIL

At its very essence, evaluating an intervention shows whether the program was implemented correctly and is producing the desired outcomes. Throughout the remainder of this Guide, the following scenario will be used as an example: *An LEA purchases a program using Title IV-A funds to improve language arts performance for elementary school students. It promises to move students from "Needs Improvement" to "Proficient" on the statewide reading test.*

The evaluation conducted on the program will provide information to determine effectiveness. Underlying the evaluation are two essential overarching questions. One focuses on the process evaluation: Are the teachers/counselors/staff implementing the program, project, or activity as intended? If it is not implemented correctly, the desired results from the intervention may not occur. The second focuses on the outcome evaluation: Is the intervention producing the expected results?

### 1. Ask Questions

The initial step to the evaluation is essential. As with many projects, an evaluation is only as good as its plan. Ideally, the decision to evaluate the program is included when considering which interventions to implement, by using either the **Tool or another needs assessment.** As part of the planning process, contacting stakeholders and obtaining buy-in are integral steps. Stakeholders may include teachers, staff, other LEA officials, parents, and/or students. Allowing input from the stakeholders at the start of the process will help identify key questions in context, as well as anticipate potential roadblocks and ways to circumvent them.

The questions to be answered by the evaluation are both process and outcome focused. The following questions relate to the scenario provided at the beginning of this section:

a) Process: How does the program move students from "Needs Improvement" to "Proficient"?

b) Process: How do teachers learn the program, and what can you expect to see when they implement it?

c) Process: At what point in the program should improvement be expected?

d) Outcome: Did the scores improve? By how much?

e) Outcome: Did the scores improve enough?

In the example scenario, the LEA will want to consult the elementary reading and language arts specialists as to what constitutes an effective language arts intervention. The LEA would also consult with principals and teachers to determine what aspects an intervention must have to be successful. Finally, the LEA should talk with students and their families to assess any auxiliary benefits they might desire. At this step in the

### PARTNERING WITH AN OUTSIDE EVALUATOR — THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Working with an outside evaluator is not a mandated part of Title IV-A. If LEAs have used Title IV-A funds to purchase or fund interventions that cross multiple age groups, locations, subjects, and/or student types (English Learners, students with disabilities, etc.), they may wish to partner with an outside evaluator to more holistically assess the targeted student performances. Using an outside evaluator can eliminate the appearance of bias concerning the evaluation's success or failure, as well as provide an overarching view of the intervention and where it fits in with the current state of the LEA.

While it is ideal to partner from the onset of the project, it is not an absolute necessity. Outside evaluation at any point provides a useful perspective from someone who is not involved with the day-to-day aspects of the intervention. As such, an outsider can provide critical observations and critiques at key junctures.

To find an evaluator, check with your local universities. Most have faculty or staff who are familiar with local evaluators and can help facilitate a connection.

process, it is also a good idea to consult with the research office within the LEA (if there is one) or to consider partnering with either an outside evaluator or a local university that can provide expert help when needed.

Setting up the evaluations, both process and outcome, at the start of the intervention allows you the opportunity to see from the initial launch any problems or setbacks that might occur. For example, using the language arts intervention described above, assume that students did not meet the desired benchmarks after the first year. If a process evaluation was not in place from the start, all you would know is that students did not perform as expected. Important details would have been missed. For example, teachers may not have enough time during the daily schedule to implement the program with fidelity. A process evaluation would help identify this and other similar roadblocks from the outset. If an outcome evaluation is not in place from the start, it is difficult to objectively measure the success of a program.

Both process and outcome evaluation questions are critical to ask, as they provide insight into how and why interventions either succeed or fail.

## 2. Organize the Evaluation With a Logic Model and/or Evaluation Plan

A common pillar of evaluations is known as the logic model. The logic model lays out in visual form the relationship between planned activities and outcomes. Additionally, the logic model organizes the pieces of the evaluation into an easily accessible format. Presenting a logic model to stakeholders gives them a clear picture of the problem, the plan, and the expected outcomes of a selected intervention.

Many components of a logic model may already have been identified in a needs assessment. These components include the inputs, activities, benchmarks, and outcomes. A sample logic model is shown in Figure 2.

In the sample logic model, the **inputs** refer to the features and people in your LEA that are going to be impacted by the intervention. In this case, students and teachers will be impacted by the intervention. The **activities** represent the program itself. The **benchmarks** are the individual outcome
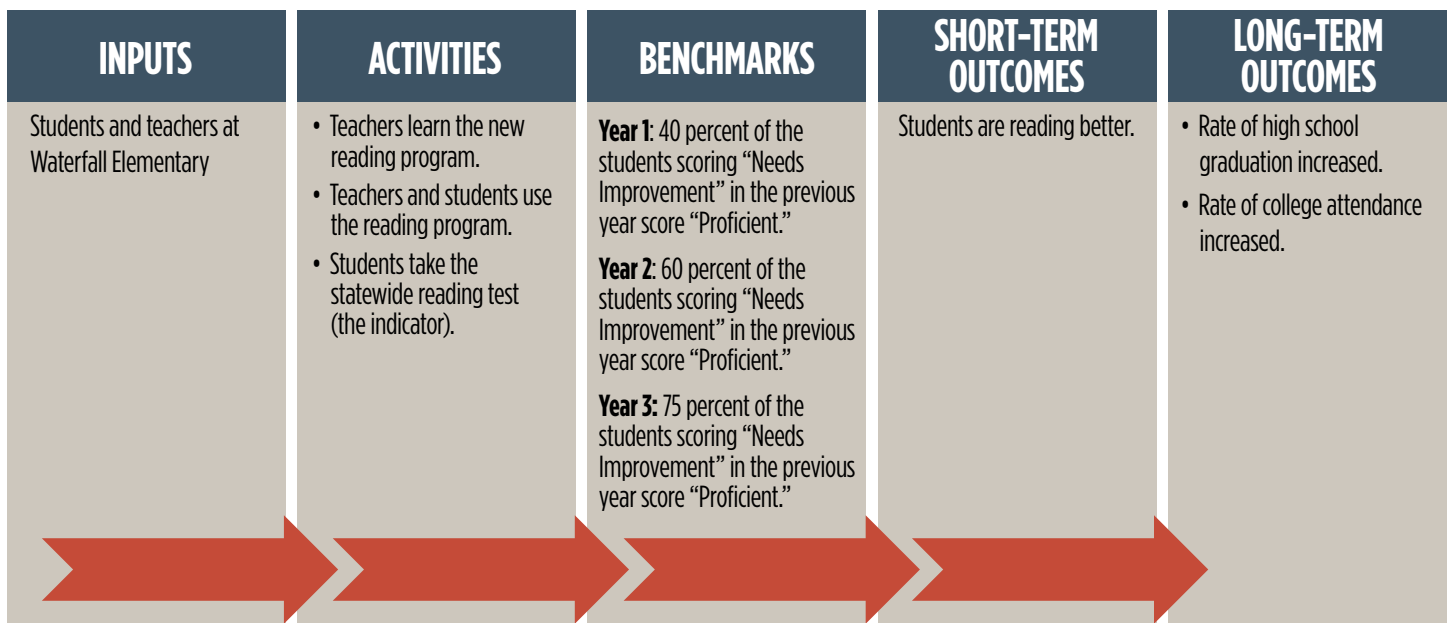
### RESOURCES FOR LOGIC MODELS

- The *Kellogg Foundation Logic Development Guide* is a step-by-step guide as to how to create a logic model. It provides a basic introduction as well as information about more detailed topics, including how to expand the logic model to fit the program. https://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resource/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide

- The Innovation Network's *Logic Model Workbook* provides instructions and exercises to help build each piece of the logic model. http://www.pointk.org/client_docs/File/logic_model_workbook.pdf

- The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University provides numerous checklists and guides to help evaluators develop high-quality evaluations. Its checklist, *The Evaluation Center: Checklist of Key Considerations for Development of Program Logic Models*, provides a summary of the literature and practice wisdom to support the development of logic models. https://wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/u350/2018/logic-models-macdonald_0.pdf

targets that students need to meet in order to consider the intervention successful. The **short-term outcomes** are what happens immediately or soon after a benchmark is met, whereas the **long-term outcomes** are the "wish" factors, i.e., the ultimate desired result after the intervention is finished and the students have moved on. In Figure 2, an LEA may be able to reach the year 1 benchmark with little difficulty. The objective has been met when more students exhibit improved reading proficiency.

- However, the reality of assessing the program's impact is often not as simple or straightforward as the logic model. Logic models represent an iterative process and include feedback loops to inform the program and activities. The process in actuality could look much more like what is
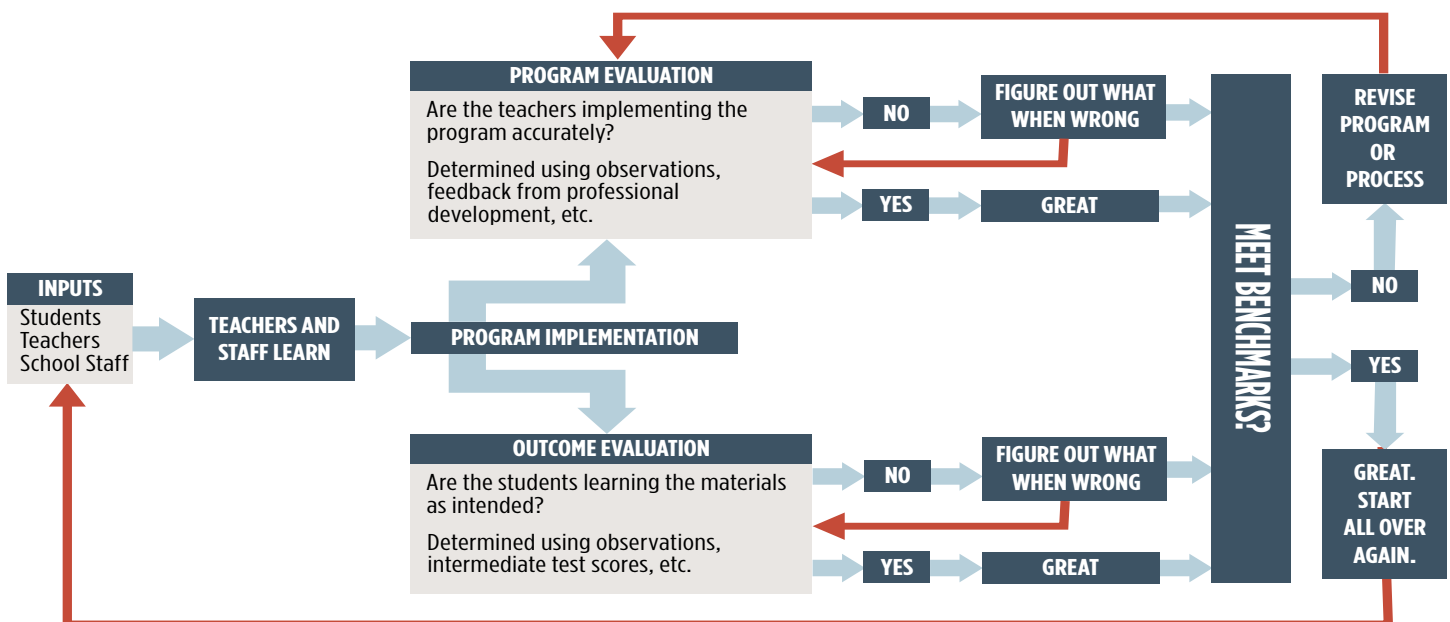
## FIGURE 2. SAMPLE LOGIC MODEL

| INPUTS | ACTIVITIES | BENCHMARKS | SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES | LONG-TERM OUTCOMES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students and teachers at Waterfall Elementary | • Teachers learn the new reading program. <br>• Teachers and students use the reading program. <br>• Students take the statewide reading test (the indicator). | **Year 1**: 40 percent of the students scoring "Needs Improvement" in the previous year score "Proficient." <br><br>**Year 2**: 60 percent of the students scoring "Needs Improvement" in the previous year score "Proficient." <br><br>**Year 3:** 75 percent of the students scoring "Needs Improvement" in the previous year score "Proficient." | Students are reading better. | • Rate of high school graduation increased. <br>• Rate of college attendance increased. |

shown in Figure 3. Evaluations may take a variety of paths as an intervention progresses through implementation stages. Unexpected delays and roadblocks can cause additional upset to the idealized logic model representation. It is important to note that, at each step of the process, there are key "rest stops." At each of these critical points, it is important to consider ways to overcome any unforeseen obstacles before continuing the intervention.

Figure 3 highlights the iterative nature of the evaluation process. Orange arrows indicate critical points where an evaluation could identify that additional planning or course correction needs to occur. Part of the evaluation process is to assess each step of the logic model to ensure that the intervention is going to plan. If it is not, it is important to identify where the issues are and work to resolve them.

## FIGURE 3. MORE TYPICAL EVALUATION PROCESS

**PROGRAM EVALUATION**

Are the teachers implementing the program accurately?

Determined using observations, feedback from professional development, etc.

**INPUTS**
Students
Teachers
School Staff

**TEACHERS AND STAFF LEARN**

**PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION**

**OUTCOME EVALUATION**

Are the students learning the materials as intended?

Determined using observations, intermediate test scores, etc.

NO — FIGURE OUT WHAT WHEN WRONG

YES — GREAT

NO — FIGURE OUT WHAT WHEN WRONG

YES — GREAT

**MEET BENCHMARKS?**

**REVISE PROGRAM OR PROCESS**

NO

YES

**GREAT. START ALL OVER AGAIN.**

The key pieces to remember about any evaluation are to establish from the start what the evaluation process is, what the desired outcome(s) should be, and how to plan for all activities and roadblocks along the way. Using a logic model or another version of an evaluation plan is a good way to organize the components of the evaluation in such a way that little is missed.

## 3. CREATE GOALS AND BENCHMARKS

The most impactful goals to have in an evaluation are SMARTIE goals.[1]

SMARTIE goals are the following:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**ttainable
- **R**elevant
- **T**imely (or Time-bound)
- **I**nclusive
- **E**quitable

Using SMARTIE goals establishes realistic benchmarks for the target audience. It is quite rare and unrealistic to expect that 100 percent of the target population will meet each benchmark at the same time. SMARTIE goals are realistic and set expectations as to what changes stakeholders can anticipate seeing in their target audience over the lifetime of the intervention.

Using the example of the elementary school language arts program presented in Figure 2, example SMARTIE goals could include the following:

- Seventy-five percent of students at the elementary school will improve from "Needs Improvement" to "Proficient" on the state reading test within 3 years.
- Eighty percent of students will improve reading proficiency scores by 8 to 10 percent during the winter semester.

The following demonstrates SMARTIE elements using the example presented in Figure 2:

- **Specific:** The goal specifies the population (elementary students and teachers) and the location (Waterfall Elementary School).

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[1] http://www.managementcenter.org/resources/smartie-goals-worksheet/

- **Measurable:** The goal specifies a direction (improvement) from one level ("Needs Improvement") to another level ("Proficient").
- **Attainable:** The goal doesn't overestimate the likelihood of completion. An example of an overestimating goal is: _All the students in the Natural Features School District will move from "Needs Improvement" to "Above Grade Level."_ Instead, the goal estimates that within 3 years, 75 percent of the students who score "Needs Improvement" will move to "Proficient" on the state reading test.
- **Relevant:** As an LEA using Title IV-A funds to implement the reading program, the current goal is relevant to the LEA.
- **Timely (or Time-bound):** The goal gives 3 years to move from the baseline test rates of "Needs Improvement" to "Proficient."
- **Inclusive:** The goal includes all students who are impacted by the process, such as those students with disabilities or English Learners.
- **Equitable:** The goal addresses a systemic issue. By including all students in the evaluation (including those with disabilities or who may be learning English), it is a more complete representation of the intervention's impact on the students.

## 4. DESIGN MEASUREMENTS AND INDICATORS

Measurements and indicators assess whether a goal or outcome was reached. The measurement is what is used to measure the progress, i.e., a test, survey, or other metric. Indicators are measurements that also highlight the directional progress of the program. Selecting indicators and measurements intentionally means that they should align closely with the program. For example, if an LEA is instituting multitiered systems of a support program, looking at test scores would not be the most appropriate indicator for evaluating the impact of the program. However, looking at the rate of suspensions and expulsions could be good indicators of direct program success.

Often when people think of designing measurements and indicators, it is assumed they must be quantitative, such as the results from

a survey or the number of students passing a certain test. However, not everything has to be purely quantitative. Most indicators can have an associated qualitative measurement. Measuring the impact of a program could include the use of teacher classroom observations, focus groups, or other more qualitative measures in addition to student test scores. Many educational or behavioral programs provide assessments when purchased; however, an LEA-developed observation form or open-ended questionnaire could be pilot tested and adopted.

A key thing to remember is that, in most cases, the program, project, or activity is not unique. As such, creating new indicators for the evaluation may be more work than is required. Chances are a measurement tool found online will fit. Adapting existing surveys, questionnaires, rubrics, and focus group protocols is a good way to increase the results' reliability and validity. A local university-based evaluation center may have good resources to help find appropriate measurements and indicators.

## 5. CARRY OUT THE EVALUATION

Once the evaluation begins, it is a good practice to let the stakeholders know and keep them informed of its progress. Ideally, the evaluation plan will include a schedule to observe (if needed) and/or to receive the data and submit the reports.

As the evaluation progresses, schedule regular intervals to revisit the evaluation process to ensure that what is supposed to be measured is actually being measured. This is done by revisiting the benchmarks as well as seeing if both the process and outcome indicators are being met. Keep in mind that, regardless of whether the benchmarks and indicators are met, reporting too soon on results or waiting too long to make changes can make the evaluation more complicated. For example, if the program is designed to take a year to get started, it is a good idea to check in on its progress after 6 months to see if adjustments in program scope or timeline need to be made.

## 6. REPORT THE RESULTS

As shown in Figure 1, reporting the results of the evaluatio 1n at regular intervals to stakeholders will allow time for necessary changes to be made to the program. Depending on the audience, the reporting can take the form of a brief email or a more in-depth report. There are no set rules for the reporting. The following is an example of a brief outline:

1. The need for the project in the school: What arose from the needs assessment that necessitated this program/project/activity?

2. Who was involved: Who were the key players – teachers, students, or both?

3. What was the program: What project, activity, or intervention was selected, and what were its key features?

4. How the intervention worked: How was the intervention implemented?

5. The results of the evaluation: What did you discover as a result of the evaluation?

6. Any changes and modifications: How will the intervention be changed as a result of the evaluation?

## 7. REPEAT AS NEEDED

A good evaluation is ongoing, typically lasting until the intervention is complete or a new intervention and evaluation rise to take its place. Most interventions are multiyear and may take time to achieve the desired outcome. As the recommended changes are implemented, the evaluation will continue to assess the intervention. As the changes occur, evaluation indicates when additional changes may be necessary.

## CONCLUSION

The T4PA Center designed this Guide to jump-start conversations within LEAs and SEAs about what constitutes an evaluation, who needs to be involved, and what the steps are in an evaluation. Numerous resources are available online and in local libraries. The list of resources on the next page serves as a starting point for more in-depth evaluation work. Additionally, SEAs and LEAs may want to consider partnering with a local evaluator to help with the evaluation. Even as a thought partner, an outside evaluator can provide valuable insights into a program that many may unintentionally overlook.

For more information on evaluation topics, please review the resources on the following page, the resources listed in the text boxes, and resources offered by the American Evaluation Association (www.eval.org).

## RESOURCES

The Federal government has a number of resources and overall guides to evaluation. A few are presented below:

- The Corporation for National and Community Service has a knowledge base about evaluation on its Website. It contains information about evaluation planning, implementation, analysis of the resulting data, and ways to use your evaluation results to improve the program. https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation at the Office of the Administration for Children and Families has developed *The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation*. The guide is designed to provide start-to-finish advice on evaluation. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/the-program-managers-guide-to-evaluation-second-edition

- The National Science Foundation also published a guide to project evaluation, *The 2010 User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation*, designed to provide a basic guide to evaluating educational projects. http://www.nsf-i3.org/resources/view/the_2010_user-friendly_handbook_for_project_evaluation/