AMERICAN EVALUATION ASSOCIATION

Guiding**Principles**

The American Evaluation Association's mission is to improve evaluation practices 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. Evaluation involves assessing the strengths and weaknesses of programs, policies, personnel, products, and organizations.

Preface to Evaluators' Ethical Guiding Principles

Glossary of Terms

Common Good – the shared benefit for all or most members of society including equitable opportunities and outcomes that are achieved through citizenship and collective action. The common good includes cultural, social, economic, and political resources as well as natural resources involving shared materials such as air, water and a habitable earth.

Contextual Factors – geographic location and conditions; political, technological, environmental, and social climate; cultures; economic and historical conditions; language, customs, local norms, and practices; timing; and other factors that may influence an evaluation process or its findings.

Culturally Competent Evaluator – "[an evaluator who] draws upon a wide range of evaluation theories and methods to design and carry out an evaluation that is optimally matched to the context. In constructing a model or theory of how the evaluand operates, the evaluator reflects the diverse values and perspectives of key stakeholder groups."[1]

Environment – the surroundings or conditions in which a being lives or operates; the setting or conditions in which a particular activity occurs.

Equity – the condition of fair and just opportunities for all people to participate and thrive in society regardless of individual or group identity or difference. Striving to achieve equity includes mitigating historic disadvantage and existing structural inequalities.

Guiding Principles vs. Evaluation Standards – the Guiding Principles pertain to the ethical conduct of the evaluator whereas the Evaluation Standards pertain to the quality of the evaluation.

People or Groups – those who may be affected by an evaluation including, but not limited to, those defined by race, ethnicity, religion, gender, income, status, health, ability, power, underrepresentation, and/or disenfranchisement.

Professional Judgment – decisions or conclusions based on ethical principles and professional standards for evidence and argumentation in the conduct of an evaluation.

Stakeholders – individuals, groups, or organizations served by, or with a legitimate interest in, an evaluation including those who might be affected by an evaluation.

Purpose of the Guiding Principles: The Guiding Principles reflect the core values of the American Evaluation Association (AEA) and are intended as a guide to the professional ethical conduct of evaluators.

Focus and Interconnection of the Principles: The five Principles address systematic inquiry, competence, integrity, respect for people, and common good and equity. The Principles are interdependent and interconnected. At times, they may even conflict with one another. Therefore, evaluators should carefully examine how they justify professional actions.

Use of Principles: The Principles govern the behavior of evaluators in all stages of the evaluation from the initial discussion of focus and purpose, through design, implementation, reporting, and ultimately the use of the evaluation.

Communication of Principles: It is primarily the evaluator's responsibility to initiate discussion and clarification of ethical matters with relevant parties to the evaluation. The Principles can be used to communicate to clients and other stakeholders what they can expect in terms of the professional ethical behavior of an evaluator.

Professional Development about Principles: Evaluators are responsible for undertaking professional development to learn to engage in sound ethical reasoning. Evaluators are also encouraged to consult with colleagues on how best to identify and address ethical issues.

Structure of the Principles: Each Principle is accompanied by several sub-statements to amplify the meaning of the overarching principle and to provide guidance for its application. These sub-statements do not include all possible applications of that principle, nor are they rules that provide the basis for sanctioning violators. The Principles are distinct from Evaluation Standards and evaluator competencies.

Evolution of Principles: The Principles are part of an evolving process of self-examination by the profession in the context of a rapidly changing world. They have been periodically revised since their first adoption in 1994. Once adopted by the membership, they become the official position of AEA on these matters and supersede previous versions. It is the policy of AEA to review the Principles at least every five years, engaging members in the process. These Principles are not intended to replace principles supported by other disciplines or associations in which evaluators participate.

[1] American Evaluation Association (2011). Public Statement on Cultural Competence in Evaluation. Washington DC: Author. p. 3.

AEA Guiding Principles

A: Systematic Inquiry: Evaluators conduct data-based inquiries that are thorough, methodical, and contextually relevant.

A1. Adhere to the highest technical standards appropriate to the methods being used while attending to the evaluation's scale and available resources.

A2. Explore with primary stakeholders the limitations and strengths of the core evaluation questions and the approaches that might be used for answering those questions.

A3. Communicate methods and approaches accurately, and in sufficient detail, to allow others to understand, interpret, and critique the work.

A4. Make clear the limitations of the evaluation and its results.

A5. Discuss in contextually appropriate ways the values, assumptions, theories, methods, results, and analyses that significantly affect the evaluator's interpretation of the findings.

A6. Carefully consider the ethical implications of the use of emerging technologies in evaluation practice.

B: Competence: Evaluators provide skilled professional services to stakeholders.

B1. Ensure that the evaluation team possesses the education, abilities, skills, and experiences required to complete the evaluation competently.

B2. When the most ethical option is to proceed with a commission or request outside the boundaries of the evaluation team's professional preparation and competence, clearly communicate any significant limitations to the evaluation that might result. Make every effort to supplement missing or weak competencies directly or through the assistance of others.

B3. Ensure that the evaluation team collectively possesses or seeks out the competencies necessary to work in the cultural context of the evaluation.

B4. Continually undertake relevant education, training or supervised practice to learn new concepts, techniques, skills, and services necessary for competent evaluation practice. Ongoing professional development might include: formal coursework and workshops, self-study, self- or externally-commissioned evaluations of one's own practice, and working with other evaluators to learn and refine evaluative skills and expertise.

C: Integrity: Evaluators behave with honesty and transparency in order to ensure the integrity of the evaluation.

C1. Communicate truthfully and openly with clients and relevant stakeholders concerning all aspects of the evaluation, including its limitations.

C2. Disclose any conflicts of interest (or appearance of a conflict) prior to accepting an evaluation assignment and manage or mitigate any conflicts during the evaluation.

C3. Record and promptly communicate any changes to the originally negotiated evaluation plans, the rationale for those changes, and the potential impacts on the evaluation's scope and results.

C4. Assess and make explicit the stakeholders', clients', and evaluators' values, perspectives, and interests concerning the conduct and outcome of the evaluation.

C5. Accurately and transparently represent evaluation procedures, data, and findings.

C6. Clearly communicate, justify, and address concerns related to procedures or activities that are likely to produce misleading evaluative information or conclusions. Consult colleagues for suggestions on proper ways to proceed if concerns cannot be resolved, and decline the evaluation when necessary.

C7. Disclose all sources of financial support for an evaluation, and the source of the request for the evaluation.

D: **Respect for People: Evaluators honor the dignity, well-being, and self-worth of individuals and acknowledge the influence of culture within and across groups.**

D1. Strive to gain an understanding of, and treat fairly, the range of perspectives and interests that individuals and groups bring to the evaluation, including those that are not usually included or are oppositional.

D2. Abide by current professional ethics, standards, and regulations (including informed consent, confidentiality, and prevention of harm) pertaining to evaluation participants.

D3. Strive to maximize the benefits and reduce unnecessary risks or harms for groups and individuals associated with the evaluation.

D4. Ensure that those who contribute data and incur risks do so willingly, and that they have knowledge of and opportunity to obtain benefits of the evaluation.

E: **Common Good and Equity: Evaluators strive to contribute to the common good and advancement of an equitable and just society.**

E1. Recognize and balance the interests of the client, other stakeholders, and the common good while also protecting the integrity of the evaluation.

E2. Identify and make efforts to address the evaluation's potential threats to the common good especially when specific stakeholder interests conflict with the goals of a democratic, equitable, and just society.

E3. Identify and make efforts to address the evaluation's potential risks of exacerbating historic disadvantage or inequity.

E4. Promote transparency and active sharing of data and findings with the goal of equitable access to information in forms that respect people and honor promises of confidentiality.

E5. Mitigate the bias and potential power imbalances that can occur as a result of the evaluation's context. Selfassess one's own privilege and positioning within that context.

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