

AEA 2007/2008 Internal Scan Online Question and Answer (Q&A) Groups Protocol

The American Evaluation Association undertook an internal scan to learn more about its membership during the period September 2007 to January 2008. Methods included an online survey of the full membership, follow-up interviews, and online Question and Answer (Q&A) groups.

Currently available reports from the scan include:

- *American Evaluation Association Internal Scan Report to the Membership*
- *Index of Quantitative Analysis of the 2007 AEA Member Survey*
- *Index of Qualitative Analysis of the 2007 AEA Member Survey*
- *Index of Qualitative Analysis of Interviews from the 2007-2008 AEA Internal Scan*
- *Index of Qualitative Analysis of Online Q&A Groups from the 2007-2008 AEA Internal Scan*
- *Presentation of the American Evaluation Association Internal Scan Findings*

Currently available instruments from the scan include:

- *AEA Member Survey 2007*
- *AEA Member Interviewer Guidelines and Interview Protocol*
- *AEA Online Question and Answer (Q&A) Groups Protocol*

All reports and instruments listed above may be found online on the AEA website at www.eval.org.

This document contains the *AEA Online Question and Answer (Q&A) Groups Protocol*. The online Q&A groups were held asynchronously using vBulletin during the winter of 2008.

AEA Online Question and Answer (Q&A) Groups Protocol

Three different groups of AEA members will participate in three separate online Q&A groups:

- 1) New members (new both to AEA and to evaluation)
- 2) Independent contractors
- 3) Evaluators working in firms

Building on the data we've obtained thus far from the member survey and interviews, Q&A groups will obtain additional targeted feedback about members':

- 1) Professional identity in evaluation
- 2) Evaluation-related professional challenges and how they are addressed
- 3) Perceptions of how AEA is and can be involved in evaluation policy and the advancement of high quality evaluations

Introductory information for group participants:

This group follows up on the recent AEA member survey and interviews with a sample of members. We're inviting responses from you to strengthen our understanding of AEA members' experiences in evaluation, including your professional identity in evaluation and evaluation-related professional challenges you may face and how those are addressed. We also are interested in your opinions about the role AEA may play in evaluation policy. We will post a few different questions over the next five days and will ask you to respond to those questions as well as to responses from others in the group.

Under separate cover, we are sending group participants detailed instructions for participation in the groups and responses to frequently asked questions. We also will be telling participants that they will participate in a group with other evaluators who are new/independent contractors / work in firms.

Question Area 1: Professional Identity

First, we're interested in learning more about members' professional identities. Evaluators come from a variety of educational paths and background training, and evaluation itself pulls in content and methodology from various disciplines. Some AEA members identify themselves primarily as evaluators, and some identify themselves in other ways. How do you refer to yourself primarily – as an evaluator or in some other way?

Potential follow up questions:

- In describing your work, do you differentiate “who you are” from “what you do?”
- What background and disciplines do you draw upon in your evaluation work?
- What are the characteristics/elements of your work that make that your primary identity?
- What factors are necessary to identify yourself as an evaluator?

If not mentioned, we'll probe specifically on the pros and cons of self-identifying as an evaluator, and on the perceived necessary characteristics for one to be able to be called an evaluator.



Question Area 2: Professional Issues and Resources

What are the biggest challenges you face in your daily evaluation-related work, and what information do you find yourself seeking out (or are you in need of) to help respond to those challenges?

Potential follow-up questions:

- Are there certain issues or challenges that come up regularly?
- Where and how do you get those needs met?
- What kinds of resources could/should AEA offer that would help address those issues?

If not mentioned, we'll probe specifically about issues such as: the need for evaluation or their quality of work being questioned, a lack of technical support or collegiality in their daily work environment, client relations, getting direction from people who don't understand evaluation, etc.

Question Area 3: Evaluation Policy

As the field of evaluation expands to include a wide range of consumers, funding sources, and decision-makers, how do you envision AEA's involvement in conversations intended to maintain and promote high quality evaluations?

Potential follow-up questions:

- What do decision makers need to know about evaluation?
- How should AEA involve members and their expertise in these conversations?
- How should AEA convey progress and the status of such conversations to the membership?
- How might that affect (help) you in your continued evaluation work?

If not mentioned, we'll probe more specifically about whether participants believe AEA should influence evaluation policy, as well as whether and how they already do.