

AEA Student Case Competition - Pre-Read before the Competition

The Theme for the 2023 Student Evaluation Case Competition: Advancing Racial Equity

Referencing a wide range of credible studies, Savage et al. (2022, p. 7) conclude that “race is one of the most reliable predictors of life outcomes [in the United States] across several areas, including life expectancy, academic achievement, income, wealth, physical and mental health, and maternal mortality.” They trace these disparate outcomes to the root cause of structural racism, which occurs “when public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations and other norms work to perpetuate and often reinforce inequity” (p. 5). African Americans are disproportionately harmed by structural inequities, a fact laid bare during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wright & Merritt, 2020).

Program evaluation is likewise implicated in the historical legacy of structural racism within the United States and beyond (Caldwell & Beldsoe, 2019). However, as equity-focused approaches to evaluation gain more awareness and adherents (e.g., Equitable Evaluation Initiative, 2022; Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment, 2023), evaluation is increasingly recognized as a potential tool to advance racial equity. Indeed, the American Evaluation Association (AEA, 2018) has explicitly incorporated equity into its Guiding Principles, which it defines as “the condition of fair and just opportunities for all people to participate and thrive in society regardless of individual or group identity or difference” (p. 2).

Preview of Your Task

For this year’s inaugural case competition, the case will focus on a ***statewide nonprofit’s private grant-funded program in the United States aiming to advance racial equity within local communities by providing diverse reading materials, professional development, guided community conversations and events, and additional support to libraries of all kinds (public, school, academic, prison, etc.)***. Teams will be asked to propose an evaluation of the program, conducted over the course of one year and ending in summer 2024. Just as the program centers racial equity, so must the evaluation.

Your external evaluation proposal will need to focus on the following:

- Engaging program staff and partners in every stage of the evaluation process
- Articulating the program’s outcomes
- Evaluating priority outcomes in an equitable and culturally responsive manner
- Guiding the program in using evaluation findings to enhance the delivery and outcomes of its future racial equity programming
- Ensuring the evaluation is feasible to implement within a one-year time constraint (i.e., ending summer 2024), and prioritizes the organization’s most relevant evaluation questions and information needs to make maximal use of limited resources for evaluation (although there is no specified budget for this work)

Proposal Requirements

To accomplish this, your team will need to develop the following deliverables for the case organization in the form of a proposal. Each of the following sections will need to be explicitly addressed, and together they should cohesively support your overall evaluation proposal.

Your proposal should include:

1. An **overview** of your understanding of the program, the evaluation requirements, and the context in which the program is situated. This should go beyond restating the information provided to teams in the case materials to be sent on the competition day (i.e., the “Request for Proposals,” or RFP for the evaluation) to demonstrate your team’s understanding of the most important aspects of the organization and program, their context, and evaluation needs.
2. A **logic model** for the program that clearly illustrates the activities through which specific outcomes are expected to be achieved. Provide a **narrative** explaining the program logic model in prose; this should not simply restate the logic model in words but rather tell a narrative story of the program by reference to its logic model and articulate hypothesized connections among key elements of the logic model prioritized for evaluation.
 - o You should identify at least one underlying assumption and at least one external factor that may influence program outcomes; these can be part of the logic model and/or discussed in the narrative.
3. A **partner analysis** that identifies all relevant partners (i.e., primary and secondary intended users)¹ and how you will engage them in the evaluation process, how you will communicate with them throughout the evaluation, and how you intend for them to use evaluation findings. The partner engagement process should be inclusive and culturally responsive.
4. An **evaluation matrix** (typically presented as a table) that provides a framework for evaluation of the program that is feasible and relevant to the organization. It should be accompanied by a **narrative** description of the evaluation theory or approach (if applicable), evaluation design, and data collection methods you recommend and why you recommend them (e.g., how each method links to your overall evaluation proposal and credibly responds to the prioritized evaluation questions). The matrix should include:
 - o Between three and five main evaluation questions, with the possibility of adding sub questions as desired, clearly linked to the logic model and of highest priority for the organization based on your interpretation of their evaluation needs;
 - o Measurable indicators to respond to each question;
 - o Main sources from which your team will collect data regarding the indicators you identified, including approaches to participant sampling or selection;
 - o Quantitative and/or qualitative data collection methods to gather the required information from these sources.

¹ This is sometimes called a stakeholder analysis, although we refrain from using the term stakeholder due to its harmful connotations. See this [AEA365 blog post on avoiding the term stakeholder](#).

5. A **description of how the plan explicitly addresses equity, cultural responsiveness, and ethics.** These three concerns need to be built into all aspects of the evaluation proposal. A designated, separate section of the submission should highlight how each is intentionally addressed within the proposal. Teams must independently determine how to define and operationalize these constructs within the context of their evaluation.
6. A **description of anticipated challenges** to implementing any aspect of the evaluation and how your team proposes to deal with them. This description should be clear about potential limitations of the evaluation, whether or not they can be addressed.

Technical Specifications

Proposals will need to meet the following technical specifications, depending on the team's chosen format, or their submission may be disqualified:

- **Text report**
 - Maximum of **12 pages**, excluding the cover page (no cover letter or table of contents necessary), written in English;
 - Standard paper size (8.5" x 11");
 - 12-point minimum font size for text;
 - 1 inch margins on all sides;
 - For tables and figures, minimum font size is 10-point and margins may be less than 1".
- **Slide deck presentation ("SlideDoc" Report)**
 - No more than **25 slides**, in English;
 - Only what is shown on slides will be considered (i.e., notes in the slides will not be considered);
 - Font should be readable, similar to 12-point minimum font size in a 8.5"x11" page report.
- **Video presentation**
 - Maximum of **15 minutes**;
 - Slides and narration must be in English;
 - We recommend submitting either an MP4 or WMV file, or uploading your video to another service (e.g., YouTube);
 - We recommend no webcams during the video to limit identification of team members and minimize any potential bias during the judging process;
 - Closed captioning available (this can be an auto-transcription).

Regardless of the format, you must have created and/or have permission to use all content, including video, still imagery, words, music, etc. We recommend using Creative Commons licensed material to avoid issues with copyright, and providing attribution as required.

Submission Instructions for All Formats

Teams will be asked to submit a single file to the designated Dropbox file request folder shared with teams. Save your file as **[your team name].ext, e.g., A1Consultants.pdf or A1Consultants.ppt or A1Consultants.mp4**. If you upload your video presentation to another service or if your submission is larger than 2GB, then please submit a one-page document in which you provide a link to wherever it has been stored on the web.

If you submit within the time that a member of the SCC working group is in the Zoom, we can verify that your submission has been received. Otherwise, you will receive a confirmation email within 72 hours.

Judging Criteria

Your proposal will be judged on the following criteria. After the competition, all teams will receive feedback from the judges on their submission.

Criteria <i>(aligned with proposal requirements above)</i>	Weight
1. Overview of the program, evaluation requirements, and context	15%
2. Logic model and narrative	15%
3. Partner analysis	15%
4. Evaluation matrix and narrative	20%
5. Equity, cultural responsiveness, ethics	15%
6. Anticipated challenges	10%
7. Overall quality and cohesion of proposal and presentation <i>(not included as a specific required component above, but rather looks across the full proposal)</i>	10%

Sample Resources to Consult

The following materials may be helpful as you prepare for the competition day, when the full case, organization, and program will be revealed. These resources are not exhaustive but may help teams shape ideas for the evaluation approach and methods they choose to adopt, in conjunction with other related resources teams might identify on your own.

Guidance for advancing racial equity within libraries:

- Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race & Equity's [Advancing Racial Equity in Public Libraries: Case Studies from the Field](#) (April 2018)
- Public Library Association's [Advancing Racial Equity in Your Library](#) (October 2018)

Practical guides for incorporating equity and cultural competence into a program evaluation:

- Aspen Institute's [Constructing A Racial Equity Theory of Change](#) (September 2009)
- WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center's [Reflections on Applying Principles of Equitable Evaluation](#) (May 2019)

Sample indicators and assessments of racial equity at the organizational and community levels:

- Just Capital's [2022 Corporate Racial Equity Tracker](#) (May 2022)
- Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race & Equity's [Racial Equity Toolkit](#) (December 2016)
- National Equity Atlas's [Racial Equity Index](#) (July 2020)

References

American Evaluation Association [AEA]. (2018). *Guiding Principles*. AEA.

<https://www.eval.org/About/Guiding-Principles>.

Caldwell, L.D., & Bledsoe, K.L. (2019). Can social justice live in a house of structural racism? A question for the field of evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 40(1), 6-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214018815772>.

Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment. (2023). *Homepage*. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign College of Education. <https://crea.education.illinois.edu/>.

Equitable Evaluation Initiative. (2022). *Homepage*. e+e ventures. <https://www.equitableeval.org/>.

Savage, B., Daniels, C., Borger, M., & Kim, P. (2022, September). *Racial equity and philanthropy: Unlocking social progress by addressing structural racism*. The Bridgespan Group. <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/unlocking-social-progress-by-addressing-structural-racism-groundwater>.

Wright, J.E., & Merritt, C.C. (2020). Social equity and COVID-19: The case of African Americans. *Public Administration Review*, 80(5), 820-826. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13251>.