

Candidate Name: [Esther C. Nolton](#), PhD, MEd, CDMP (she/her)

Board Position Candidacy: AEA President-Elect

Titles/Affiliations: *Principal Consultant & Founder, [Everstead Strategies](#)
Applied Research Methods Expert, Liberty University
Faculty and Coach, [Illuminate Learning Center](#)*

Disciplines: Research and evaluation methodology; health and education policy; organizational culture and capacity building; sociolinguistics

Practitioner and/or Academic Focus: Organizational strategy, learning, and evaluation; community engagement; human-centered decision making; cultural responsiveness, equitable evaluation, and liberatory leadership; evaluation and data strategy and policy; facilitation; strategic management; nonprofit board governance and effectiveness

Geographic Representation: Washington, DC metropolitan area (USA)

Area(s) of Work Application: Nonprofits and (US) Federal, State, and Local Governments

AEA Member Since: 2018

AEA Positions Held: *Scholar, AEA Graduate Education Diversity Internship (2018-2019)
Program Chair, AEA Evaluation Policy TIG (2019-2023)
Member, AEA Website Committee (2020-2021)
Chair, Washington Evaluators Program Committee (2021)
Member, AEA DEI Working Group (2021-2023)
Member, AEA Local Affiliate Collaborative (2021-2023)
President, Washington Evaluators Board of Directors (2022)
Chair, AEA Research on Evaluation TIG (2022-2023)
Member, New Directions for Evaluation Editorial Advisory Board (2023-Present)
Member, American Journal of Evaluation Editorial Advisory Board (2023-Present)
Judge, AEA Student Case Competition (2023, 2024, 2025, 2026)
Member, AEA Presidential Conference Committee (2023)
Board Liaison, AEA Local Affiliates Collaborative (2023-Present)
Member and Board Liaison, AEA Evaluation Policy Task Force (2023-Present)
Member-at-Large, AEA Board of Directors (2024-Present)
Founding Member/Chair, AEA Responding to Emerging Demands Team (2025-Present)
Member, AEA Policies & Procedures Working Group (2025-Present)
Member, AEA Financial Vitality Task Force (2026-Present)*

The field of evaluation and, therefore, AEA are at a tipping point. Large-scale shifts are happening *to, in, and around* our field with enormous implications for evaluation theory and practice. This moment demands both strategic vision and steady governance. I see this tipping point not as a crisis to survive, but as an opportunity to evolve deliberately. As **AEA President-Elect**, I would be honored to help AEA lead through the transition.

I have nearly 20 years of diverse experiences in research and evaluation, beginning as a clinician and [clinical researcher](#) before becoming an "accidental evaluator". I hold a PhD in Education with specializations in Research & Evaluation Methods and Health & Education Policy, and I have taught research and evaluation courses over the last 15 years across seven universities.

My doctoral studies and the [AEA GEDI program](#) grounded me formally in the theory and practice of evaluation and positioned me at the forefront of the [Evidence Act](#)'s passage, which deepened my commitment to advancing the field. I am a methodologist by training, and I credit incredible mentors for teaching me to apply a culturally responsive lens and show up in every role with integrity and humility.

I am both a skilled evaluator and demonstrated leader. As [Program Chair](#) and then [President](#) of Washington Evaluators, I emphasized community engagement and grew membership by over 60% in one year. In my eight years of AEA service, I have contributed meaningfully to numerous working groups, TIGs, both of AEA's flagship journals, conference planning, and [student development](#), including through my current role on the [AEA Board](#). As Principal Consultant & Founder of [Everstead Strategies](#), I have also built a thriving evaluation firm, managed financial vitality, and made strategic decisions that balance mission with operational reality. I hold credentials in leadership and management (UVA Darden School of Business), change management (Prosci), and nonprofit board governance (BoardSource) with expertise in servant leadership, financial management, and organizational effectiveness and change.

As a Board member, I have served on multiple committees and strategic initiatives, including as Board Liaison to the [AEA Evaluation Policy Task Force](#) and a founding member and now Chair of the [Responding to Emerging Demands](#) team. These roles have prepared me well to serve as AEA President and given me a clear sense of what our priorities need to be the next three years. We are facing real headwinds as a field, and the ripple effects have touched nearly every AEA member in some way. Our job now is to be a steadying, credible voice precisely when evidence itself is being questioned. I am prepared to bring my expertise in strategic change management, nonprofit governance, and community [engagement](#) to help us do exactly that.

My vision for AEA is centered on four interconnected goals: *Elevate. Cultivate. Collaborate. Regenerate.*

Elevate AEA as the authoritative voice on evaluation. In 2024, I led the development of AEA's "[Thought Leadership](#)" strategic goal, which positions AEA as the leading authority on evaluation and premier association for evaluation in the US. This is not a goal we simply achieve—it requires continued strategic effort. I will work to build member capacity to track and influence decisions about what evaluation is, how it is practiced, and how it is used across sectors.

Cultivate expertise and enthusiasm from across our membership. AEA's voice is not its staff or Board, it is our members. Our 50+ TIGs are an enormous, and largely untapped, source of depth, energy, and innovation. I am committed to creating integrated mechanisms for member engagement and leveraging that collective expertise to drive real change.

Collaborate through strategic partnerships. We cannot advance evaluation's influence alone. I have and will continue to deepen relationships with adjacent organizations, local affiliates, and international VOPEs to amplify our collective impact and bolster evaluation as a global discipline.

Regenerate AEA's financial vitality. Everything we hope to accomplish depends on this. Through my work with the [AEA Financial Vitality Task Force](#), I will continue working toward long-term financial health by managing costs, diversifying revenue, and exploring new models for generating value that align with our mission.

Some have called me an "Evaluation Evangelist" and it is a moniker I own with pride because of how deeply I love this field. I believe deeply in AEA and am prepared to lead through complexity with vision, humility, and operational excellence. Please feel free to [read more](#) or [book a time](#) to chat. I hope to earn the opportunity to keep serving AEA as your next President-Elect!