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Guiding Principles for Evaluators

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The American Evaluation Association (AEA) strives to promote ethical practice in the evaluation of programs, products, personnel, and policy. AEA has developed these Principles to guide evaluators in their professional practice.

These Guiding Principles are an abbreviated version of the full principles that were developed and endorsed by the American Evaluation Association in 1994 and reviewed and revised in 2004. A full text of the Guiding Principles is available online at www.eval.org.

PRINCIPLES

A. Systematic Inquiry: Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries, and thus should:

1. Adhere to the highest technical standards appropriate to the methods they use.
2. Explore with the client the shortcomings and strengths of evaluation questions and approaches.
3. Communicate the approaches, methods, and limitations of the evaluation accurately and in sufficient detail to allow others to understand, interpret, and critique their work.

B. Competence: Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders, and thus should:

1. Ensure that the evaluation team collectively possesses the education, abilities, skills, and experience appropriate to the evaluation.
2. Ensure that the evaluation team collectively demonstrates cultural competence and uses appropriate evaluation strategies and skills to work with culturally different groups.
3. Practice within the limits of their competence, decline to conduct evaluations that fall substantially outside those limits, and make clear any limitations on the evaluation that might result if declining is not feasible.
4. Seek to maintain and improve their competencies in order to provide the highest level of performance in their evaluations.

C. Integrity/Honesty: Evaluators display honesty and integrity in their own behavior, and attempt to ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process, and thus should:

1. Negotiate honestly with clients and relevant stakeholders concerning the costs, tasks, limitations of methodology, scope of results, and uses of data.

2. Disclose any roles or relationships that might pose a real or apparent conflict of interest prior to accepting an assignment.

3. Record and report all changes to the original negotiated project plans, and the reasons for them, including any possible impacts that could result.

4. Be explicit about their own, their clients', and other stakeholders' interests and values related to the evaluation.

5. Represent accurately their procedures, data, and findings, and attempt to prevent or correct misuse of their work by others.

6. Work to resolve any concerns related to procedures or activities likely to produce misleading evaluative information, decline to conduct the evaluation if concerns cannot be resolved, and consult colleagues or relevant stakeholders about other ways to proceed if declining is not feasible.

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

D. Respect for People: Evaluators respect the security, dignity, and self-worth of respondents, program participants, clients, and other evaluation stakeholders, and thus should:

1. Seek a comprehensive understanding of the contextual elements of the evaluation.

2. Abide by current professional ethics, standards, and regulations regarding confidentiality, informed consent, and potential risks or harms to participants.

3. Seek to maximize the benefits and reduce any unnecessary harms that might occur from an evaluation and carefully judge when the benefits from the evaluation or

procedure should be foregone because of potential risks.

4. Conduct the evaluation and communicate its results in a way that respects stakeholders' dignity and self-worth.

5. Foster social equity in evaluation, when feasible, so that those who give to the evaluation may benefit in return.

6. Understand, respect, and take into account differences among stakeholders such as culture, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation and ethnicity.

E. Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare:

Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of general and public interests and values, and thus should:

1. Include relevant perspectives and interests of the full range of stakeholders.

2. Consider not only immediate operations and outcomes of the evaluation, but also the broad assumptions, implications and potential side effects.

3. Allow stakeholders' access to, and actively disseminate, evaluative information, and present evaluation results in understandable forms that respect people and honor promises of confidentiality.

4. Maintain a balance between client and other stakeholder needs and interests.

5. Take into account the public interest and good, going beyond analysis of particular stakeholder interests to consider the welfare of society as a whole.