SESSION 8A

PROCESS EVALUATION: REAL TIME STRATEGIES THAT WORK

Moderator: Iris M. Sulyma

PAPERS:

Maximizing Usefulness of Process Evaluations
Steve Hastie, Navigant Consulting, Inc.
Steven Mysholowsky, Con Edison, New York

Putting Your Best Foot Forward: A Model for Using Best Practices in Process Evaluations
Hope Lobkowicz , The Cadmus Group, Inc.
Cameron Ramey, The Cadmus Group, Inc.

200 Programs, One Evaluation Budget, One New Approach: A Recounting of the Great "Program Assessments" Experiment
Christina Torok, Evergreen Economics
Michael Rovito, Energy and Resource Solutions
Jennifer Fagan, Itron

Increasingly utilities are asking that process evaluations include comparative reviews of cross-jurisdictional achievements, impacts and processes so that lessons learned from past experience can guide program revisions and inform new program features and ideas, while programs and/or large program portfolios are being implemented. The three papers in this session present useful frameworks and approaches for timely portfolio level, process evaluations of energy efficiency program design and implementation activities according to established best practices for key program processes.

Steve Hastie and Steven Mysholowsky present the approach developed by Con Edison and the Navigant consultant team to conduct process evaluations in a way that facilitated quick feedback on Fast Track programs and maximized the usefulness of all program evaluation results in additional ways. The goal was to identify and address program issues as the programs and their evaluations were being implemented rather than after evaluations were completed.

Three key elements of this approach included a 6-week "Red Flag" assessment of each program, organization of the evaluation effort under six specific research areas, and close cooperation between internal utility and evaluation consultant teams. For each of the six research areas, the research from all research tasks – from review of program documentation to program staff interviews to customer surveys to data base analysis – were synthesized to characterize the program in terms of that area. In practice this resulted in a more structured, targeted and thoughtful analysis, which enabled more specific and actionable recommendations to be made. Key results were available to the utility program managers more quickly, reasons for process issues that arose were able to be discerned, and the overall evaluation effort was able to go deeper into the workings of the program, both from a practical viewpoint (e.g., through the use of site visits to test hypotheses generated by unexpected savings claims) and from a conceptual viewpoint (e.g., through review of contract terms to determine where the self-interest of contractors/vendors lay). Application of the Red Flag analysis approach appears to have significant value in assessing new programs, in particular.

Hope Lobkowicz and Cameron Ramey present a framework for evaluating energy-efficiency program design and delivery according to established best practices. The model is based on a comparative review of six North American utility energy-efficiency portfolios and on an analysis of their alignment with 24 industry-wide best practices in demand-side management programs. This framework

offers a methodology to score various program processes based on: 1) conformity with best practices; and 2) performance when compared to similar activities by other utilities. The methodology moves beyond a simple metric comparison by providing an opportunity for in-depth assessments of how well energy-efficiency programs align with exemplary industry practices.

First, a simple sliding scale scoring methodology was used to analyze and present results for each utility. Such scoring offers these core benefits: 1) it distills complex ideas into a recognizable format that the audience can easily understand; 2) it establishes a common metric to compare utilities to one another; and 3) it offers a means for providing a utility with recommendations, which can be framed in the context of achieving a higher score. The second scoring method simply documents whether or not the utility has best practices in place. This high-level approach can provide simplified and unambiguous results, and it largely eliminates the need to create criteria within each best practice category or to assess the superiority of some approaches over others and may prove appropriate when conducting best practice research for a particular DSM program, as opposed to a portfolio- or sector-wide approach. However, simply documenting the existence of practice or activity without explaining its function does not facilitate the development of recommendations to improve program performance.

Christina Torok, Michael Rovito and Jennifer Fagan present the "Program Assessments" (or "PA") approach drawing on techniques and findings developed for the California Best Practices Study. The purpose of the California 2010-2012 nonresidential portfolio Program Assessment approach is to review the relationship of program design and implementation to the achievement of portfolio goals, within the context of markets, policy, economy and technology. The approach is grounded in contextual research: reviews of program design documents, previous evaluations, industry papers, economic and technical trends, and policy features, reviews of quantitative data, and a large number of in-depth interviews.

Two project methodologies were 'road tested' in the 2010-2012 program cycle: "Program Assessments" and "Lower Rigor Assessments". The study approach is wide ranging in its inputs and objective; it requires a documentation of the design of programs and an understanding of their target markets, technologies used, objective outcomes, and the underlying program theories. It examines qualitative program elements and characteristics (marketing, quality control, audits, technical assistance, innovation / adaptability) and factors in quantitative program achievements using savings, TRC, NTG, and other data from the impact evaluations. Moreover, it considers the context of program objectives – the particular features of the markets and/or technologies targeted by the program. It compares program implementation processes to known Best Practices, and it seeks to leverage findings to understand strengths and develop new Best Practices by "model" (e.g., core deemed vs. third-party calculated) and desired outcomes (long term market effects, comprehensive retrofit, hard-to-reach, cost effective savings).

The California nonresidential portfolio is so tightly bound together that for some issues the "program" can't be understood or interpreted without equal consideration for the guidelines that comprise the framework within which that program operates. This iteration of the PA study focused on measuring individual program performance against the best-practices measuring stick, but the PA method could be improved with more of a structural emphasis on understanding and documenting the governing framework.