

SESSION 3E

EVALUATIONS: THE HARM THEY DO?

Moderator: Bobbi Tannenbaum, BTan Consulting

PANELISTS:

Carmen Best, California Public Utilities Commission
Carol White, National Grid
Bob Wirtshafter, Wirtshafter Associates

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION:

Funding for energy efficiency programs have increased substantially in the last decade as the additional benefits of energy efficiency in addressing global warming and system reliability are more widely recognized. The energy programs are receiving substantial scrutiny and evaluations are subject to more protocols and standards than ever before.

This panel will address three provocative questions posed by energy program evaluation professionals. First, are current evaluation practices killing good energy programs? This question addresses the difference between evaluation theory and practice. Do short time frames, limited perspectives, and focused study approaches bury programs in short term data collection efforts that preclude long-term program development? Are standards and protocols helping or hurting?

Second, are ambitious goals leading to pressure on evaluators to find programs more successful than they are? This question addresses potential “capture” of evaluators by their clients, whether they are Program Administrators (PAs) or regulators. Firms and individuals hired to independently evaluate the programs may be inclined to step lightly because they are reliant on clients for work. Historically, when PAs controlled evaluations, there was concern that the, long-standing relationships between evaluators and PAs made them sympathetic to PA issues. Does the shift to regulatory control in some jurisdictions alleviate this issue? Third, how does the personal commitment to energy efficiency programs by the majority of evaluators affect results? Can personal integrity, regulatory oversight, and protocols minimize this bias?

The answers to these questions likely vary, depending upon circumstances. The real issue is how to prevent either of the extremes – the demise of good programs due to evaluation practices, or the continuation of ineffective programs due to rosy evaluation findings.

The three panelists will discuss these issues from their varied vantage points. Carmen Best is the Demand Side Evaluation Supervisor for the Energy Division of the California Public Utilities Commission. Carol White is the Director of Program Strategy for National Grid in Massachusetts. Bob Wirtshafter of Wirtshafter Associates is an independent evaluator.