

SESSION 7E

“REAL TIME” EVALUATION: BENEFITS, DRAWBACKS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Moderator: Jennifer Meissner, NYSERDA

PANELISTS:

Phil Degens, Evaluation Manager, Oregon Energy Trust
Jon Maxwell, Vice President of Engineering and Evaluation, ERS
Marjorie McRae, Principal, Research Into Action
Douglas Paschall, Program Manager, Lockheed Martin Energy Solutions

PANEL SUMMARY:

Informing program operations and helping to enhance program efficiency and effectiveness are among the most important goals for evaluation. When designing studies to meet these goals, evaluators have to weigh the sometimes competing objectives of providing timely information versus robust and complete information. To make evaluation as responsive and timely as possible, organizations are finding novel ways to include more “real time” information gathering in their strategic evaluation plans. This panel will discuss research issues that can be addressed in real time, debate the benefits and drawbacks of such an approach, and suggest how obstacles to implementing real time evaluation can be overcome.

Collectively, the panelists represent or have worked in a variety of jurisdictions and bring a range of perspectives to the discussion including that of program administrator, evaluation consultant and program implementation contractor. Panelists will discuss their interactions with regulators and other important evaluation stakeholders surrounding real time evaluation, as well as evaluator conduct in a real time evaluation setting.

Several examples of implementing real time evaluation will be covered including process surveys, freeridership inquiries and pre-retrofit measurement and verification. While real time evaluation cannot fulfill all evaluation needs, there can be great value to using such an approach for certain evaluation elements and research questions. Effectively deploying real time evaluation requires careful planning to avoid disrupting program processes, to align the method with appropriate inquiries and to ensure proper use of the results.

This panel is expected to generate debate through discussion of different perspectives among the members about experiences with real time evaluation that worked well, and those that met with significant challenges. Discussion will identify aspects of successful real time evaluation deployment that can be replicated. The panel will also provide lessons learned for evaluators who might be considering adding this type of activity to their overall strategic plans.