

Interpreting Evaluation Data Practical Strategies



Performance Targets & Project Goals

What is it?

The assessment of a project's performance (e.g., deliverables, outputs, and outcomes) against its planned activities and impact.

Benefits of Use:

- Establishes a logical link between project activities and impact
- Demonstrates if the project did what it set out or planned to do
- Incorporates data that is often readily available to projects

ATE-Specific Sources

- Project Logic Model
- ATE Proposal
- Curriculum Learning Objectives



Pause & Consider:

- Does not provide relevant contextual information. Focus is on "if," not "why?"
- May not be sufficient on its own

Rubric

What is it?

The use of a framework that describes what performance looks like at various levels.

Benefits of Use:

- Allows for meaningful conclusions grounded in context
- Weaves qualitative and quantitative data
- Increases transparency in evaluative conclusions

ATE-Specific Sources

- Project leadership and staff
- Students or faculty served
- Business and industry partners



Pause & Consider:

- Carefully consider who is involved in the development of rubrics
- Can be time-consuming
- Some may not consider rigorous

Engagement through Participatory Sensemaking

What is it?

A collaborative process where people jointly make sense of information and develop a shared understanding of its meaning. This process creates space for dialogue between power holders, making evaluation more democratic.

Example of approaches include: *critical conversations*, *Most Significant Change* model, or *Data Parties*.

Benefits of Use:

- Increases buy-in and understanding of evaluative conclusions
- Encourages double-loop learning
- Democratic process that increases inclusiveness

ATE-Specific Sources

- Project leadership and staff
- Students or faculty served
- Business and industry partners



Pause & Consider:

- Carefully consider who is involved in the development
- Resource intensive
- Tension between rigor and context



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Comparative Analysis against Historical or Baseline Data

What is it?

The act of comparing project data at various intervals to make evaluative judgements. Often, this means comparing what was happening *before* the project to what happened *after*.

Benefits of Use:

- Situates data and findings in project context
- Easy to identify if change has occurred
- Doesn't get hung up on setting benchmarks

ATE-Specific Sources

- ATE Proposal Project Description
- Institutional Research Office
- Grants Management Office



Pause & Consider:

- Does not indicate if change was significant
- Requires planning and/or access to data
- Collection methods may vary over time

Comparison Groups

What is it?

Comparing project data against a similar group that was *not* involved in the project.

Benefits of Use:

- Supports the assertion that outcomes are associated with the project and to what extent

ATE-Specific Sources

- Institutional Research Office
- Grants Management Office



Pause & Consider:

- May be difficult to identify a comparison group
- May be difficult to access data
- Does not account for differences between groups

Similar Programs

What is it?

Comparing project data against a project with similar activities or intended outcomes.

Benefits of Use:

- Supports the assertion that outcomes are associated with the project and to what extent
- Comparisons to evidence-based programs supports project credibility

ATE-Specific Sources

- EvaluATE's ATE Survey Report
- ATE Central Archives
- Research articles or publications



Pause & Consider:

- May be difficult to identify a similar program and access its data
- Does not account for differences between programs
- Collection methods may vary
- Avoid tearing down another other projects

Benchmarking against National Data Sets

What is it?

Comparing project data against standardized data collected on a national landscape.

Benefits of Use:

- Provides a control group
- Relatively simple when data is available
- May provide common data collection tools

ATE-Specific Sources

- National Center for Education Statistics
- NSF INCLUDES Shared Measures Initiative
- Research articles or publications

Pause & Consider:

- National data sets may not exist or allow open access
- Collection methods may vary across contexts

