Using and Promoting the Development of the Profession of Evaluation

Excerpt from *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation* (Sage, 2015)

pp. 26-27

As I work with key stakeholders toward a shared understanding of evaluation and a clear commitment to reality testing and evaluation use, I look for opportunities to review the development of program evaluation as a field of professional practice and present the standards for and principles of evaluation. See below . The *Standards* call for evaluations to be useful, practical, ethical, accurate, and accountable (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 2010). Sharing the standards

communicates to primary intended users that evaluation has developed into an established profession—and that those engaged in evaluation have an obligation to act in accordance with professional standards and principles, including priority attention to utility.

I always give participants in the evaluation launch meeting or workshop a copy of the standards and ask them for their reactions. What stands out to you? What comes across to you? I explain to them that these are the professional standards for which I am accountable. We begin with my accountability before dealing with theirs. We then discuss the implications of the standards for the particular evaluation we are working on.

Few nonevaluators are aware of the field's professional associations, conferences, journals, standards, and principles. By associating a particular evaluative effort with the larger profession, you can elevate the status, seriousness, and meaningfulness of the process you are facilitating, and help the primary intended users understand the sources of wisdom you are drawing on and applying as you urge them to attend carefully to utilization issues from the start.

Let me make special mention of what may well be the most challenging of all the standards: the cost-effectiveness standard. In opening this chapter, I offered caricatures of various stakeholder types one may encounter. One of those was *the offended,* people working very hard on difficult problems with limited resources. They question the value of spending scarce funds on evaluation when the resources to meet pressing human needs are so few. One of the original standards addressed this concern:

> *Cost Effectiveness*—The evaluation should be efficient and produce information of sufficient value, so that the resources expended can be justified. (Joint Committee, 1994, F3)

The justification is that the findings will be used to make improvements in programs and inform important decisions that will ultimately help more people. No standard is more important—or more challenging to meet.

Standards for Evaluation

The profession of evaluation has adopted standards to guide professional practice. Professional evaluators are challenged to take responsibility for use. If evaluations are ignored or misused, we have to look at where our own practices and processes may have been inadequate.

Utility

The Utility Standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will serve the information needs of intended users.

Feasibility

The Feasibility Standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal.

Propriety

The Propriety Standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will be conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results.

Accuracy

The Accuracy Standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will reveal and convey technically adequate information about the feature that determine worth or merit of the program being evaluated.

Accountability

The Accountability Standards aim to ensure that evaluations are conducted in accordance with standards of quality.

For the full set of detailed standards, see Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 2010.

Specific standards have also been adapted to various international contexts (Russon & Russon, 2004) and reviewed through the lens of cultural diversity (AEA Diversity Committee, 2004). See also the *Guiding Principles for Evaluators* (AEA, 2004).