



NATIONAL LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE'S TOOLKIT 2005 PROGRAM EVALUATION

Chapter Summary

Objective

- To establish a collection of questions and critical issues for framing and building capacity for successful eLearning evaluations.
- To include within this framework: eLearning categories; goals; indicators; measures; lessons learned; models; and state eLearning initiatives.

Key Questions

- What are the effective models for evaluation of eLearning programs?
 - ◆ What are characteristics of these evaluations (e.g. benchmarks, criteria, approach, considerations)?
 - ◆ What are the lessons learned?
 - ◆ What are the pitfalls?
 - ◆ What can we learn from the federal evaluation grants and the approaches the states are taking to program evaluation?
- How do Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) build capacity to facilitate and maintain project evaluation?
- How do states fund their evaluations?

NLI Work Group Process

Addressing core goals outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the Program Evaluation Work Group collaborated during the State Educational Technology Directors Association's (SETDA) 2004 National Leadership Institute (NLI) to determine how to support and guide states in conducting successful eLearning evaluations.

The Program Evaluation Work Group was firm in the notion that evaluation is not research. The purpose of an evaluation is to find out how a program is working and to make decisions about improvement and continuation. Therefore, the group reached consensus that the purpose for the Program Evaluation section of the toolkit was not to provide a “how-to guide” for evaluation, because there are numerous high-quality and respectable guides that currently exist. Instead, the goal of the NLI work group was to provide states with a set of questions and critical issues to consider when describing and defining the components of a successful eLearning program. These critical questions and issues can be seen as a framework that can be used when: 1) developing RFPs; 2) working with school district grant awardees; 3) providing projects with criteria to consider in hiring outside evaluators; and 4) identifying and collecting project data elements that could be aggregated and used in a statewide evaluation.

During the 2004 NLI, Program Evaluation Work Group members participated in a consensus-building process which was fueled by sophisticated discussions centered on the complex issues that surround eLearning program evaluation. Participants began by sharing ideas that informed the final toolkit efforts. Early discussions included:

- Making a distinction between program and project evaluation according to the National Science Foundation definitions;
- Developing a common ground on how to evaluate programs from different funding sources;
- Establishing parameters for program evaluation;
- Producing different criteria for evaluating various eLearning programs (e.g. resources, online courses, virtual schools, professional development, distance learning); and
- Recognizing the need to identify the consumer/audience of an evaluation.

The Work Group decided to establish broad components that transcend all possible definitions of eLearning and to develop a framework for eLearning evaluation centered on program goals and objectives. The resulting product balances the overall umbrella evaluation approach versus state-specific projects. Subsequently, participants categorized types of eLearning programs into three areas: 1. Student-centered projects; 2. Educator-centered projects; and 3. Resource-centered projects.

The Work Group then considered technical, implementation, educational, and institutional aspects for each of the three eLearning categories and identified the following primary outcomes associated with these types of programs:

- Increase equity and access;
- Increase and improve teaching and learning;

- Increase community and collegial collaboration as well as parent involvement;
- Increase efficiency;
- Increase choice and the opportunity to learn; and
- Capitalize on any positive unintended outcomes.

In addition, resource specialists in the group created a list of guiding questions for states to consider before engaging in program evaluation.

SETDA Tool Developed to Assist States

- **ELearning Evaluation Lens:** a progressive way to consider critical issues and questions that frame successful eLearning program evaluations including components such as categories, goals, indicators, measures, lessons learned, models, and state eLearning initiatives.

Possible Next Steps and Recommendations

- Continue to collect case studies to add to the eLearning Evaluation Lens;
- Identify additional models, examples, and resources to add to the eLearning Evaluation Lens;
- Develop a matrix that displays funding models currently in use by states that includes examples of states using the various models presented as well as a collection of supporting documents that states use in connection with funding including tools such as outlines and templates;
- Explore all resources and create an annotated bibliography of solid scientifically-based resources;
- Conduct self-studies utilizing the tools created during the NLI; and
- Brainstorm strategies to utilize when presenting a multitude of data to various stakeholders and clients (i.e. in terms that are easy to understand and digest).