

SESSION 8D

ESL–EVALUATION AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (OR HOW TO TRANSLATE THE VALUE OF EVALUATION RESULTS TO A DIVERSE AUDIENCE)

Moderator: Kathleen Gaffney, KEMA

PANELISTS:

Mike Sherman, Massachusetts Division of Energy Resources
Charley Budd, KEMA (formerly Exelon)
Monica Nevus, Consortium for Energy Efficiency (CEE)
Carol Mullholland, PA Consulting

SESSION SUMMARY:

The idea for this panel formed while attending a panel at the 2006 ACEEE Summer Study. The panel was discussing the need for energy efficiency program evaluation results that were less focused on “widget counting” and more focused on understanding why consumers act the way they do. Panelists agreed that program designers and policy makers need evaluation results that help them predict and influence these actions.

As the panel discussion continued, it occurred to some of us in the audience that what we really have here is a “foreign language problem” – that is, over-specialized evaluators may not be aware they speak a different language than the majority of the users of their evaluation results. For example, program designers want research that helps them understand key customer segments and preferences. Of course, some of our evaluations provide this but more often this type of insight gets buried in text and tables drawing on complex analysis that program designers may not be able to comprehend (or willing to read).

Another example of our foreign language problem relates to need for evaluation results that give regulators specific answers to a specific policy question. How can a Commissioner get value from a 500-page, comprehensive report addressing a wide range of important issues? How can we “sum it all up” in five bullets or less, in language that a non-technical audience can understand and that signals action for community leaders and policy makers? (Think elevator pitch.)

Yet another example involves the media. First question: does the media at large even know our evaluation community exists? With so much coverage of energy and environmental issues in the mainstream media today, how can we ensure that journalists have access to evaluation results that are credible, independent, reliable, and responsible?

A final thought – are we even hitting the target? Are our evaluations even addressing the key issues of interest to a specific state or region? For example, if demand response is the most effective solution to a local or regional problem, are there evaluation results available or studies underway? If smart metering or real-time pricing are key components to the next generation of demand response programs, are there evaluation results or research being conducted to assess the potential for different technology and rate options? The same statements could be made for renewable programs, distributed generation technologies, climate change initiatives, and sustainable development plans.

This panel, “Evaluation as a Second Language,” reflects the potentially wide array of needs our evaluations can address and the importance of working closely with those outside our community to help translate the value of our work in helping bring informed energy policy decisions. The structure of the panel will involve a brief role playing exercise to illustrate some of the “foreign language problems” described above, followed a more indepth discussion from each of the panelists:

- Moderator **Kathleen Gaffney** will introduce the purpose of the panel, highlighting some of the key challenges evaluators may face in communicating results within today's broader and more diverse energy policy and market context. Her discussion will set the stage for the "role playing exercise," where our panel of industry experts will act out a scene that illustrates the challenges we face as evaluators when we try to make others outside our industry aware of our results, including the methodological and other important caveats that are often riddled with "evaluation speak." Kathleen is a Director in KEMA's Sustainable Market Strategies business practice.
- **Mike Sherman** will present a case study where, in Massachusetts, annual evaluation reports submitted to the Legislature, which were previously never read, are now having a real impact on the political discussion around increasing energy efficiency. The presentation of the cost of saved energy against the cost of generation in a tight generation market has proved very powerful. Mike is the Energy Efficiency Group Manager with the Massachusetts Division of Energy Resources.
- **Charley Budd** will focus his presentation from the perspective of senior utility management. He will discuss key areas where evaluation results can aid decision-makers in assessing risk and informing program design. Charley will draw on his 27 years of experience as a senior utility demand-side management program strategist with Consumers Energy in Michigan and Exelon in Illinois. Charley recently joined KEMA, as a Senior Principal in its Sustainable Market Strategies business practice.
- **Monica Nevius** will draw on illustrations from recent research conducted by the Consortium for Energy Efficiency (CEE) and discuss the importance of clear, consistent evaluation terms and definitions to communicating evaluation results and incorporating program impacts into resource planning. Monica is Manager of Research and Evaluation for the CEE, which is a nonprofit organization of administrators of publicly funded energy efficiency programs in North America.
- **Carol Mulholland** will summarize results from an ongoing AESP Evaluation Committee research project, *"Best Practices in Communicating Evaluation and Market Research Results Effectively To Decision-Makers and Media."* Carol will present best practices in communicating complex energy-related messages and evaluation results to busy decision-makers and the media based on her recent interviews with communications experts in various organizations (e.g., government/regulatory affairs, utility management, public relations, media departments). Carol is a Principal Consultant with PA Consulting.