Building the Capacity of the Capacity Builders:

Lessons from the Internal Evaluation of a Multistate Technical Assistance Program

Prepared for:

American Evaluation Association

Presented by:

Thomas J. Horwood

Friday, November 13, 2015

About the Program

- **Technical assistance (TA) center serving state education agencies (SEAs) in four states for five years**

- **Two lead TA providers (State Coordinators) assigned to each SEA**

- **Other TA providers assigned to specific initiatives (n~20) within & across SEAs**

- **Uses a capacity-building framework that guides TA providers in working "shoulder-to-shoulder" with SEA staff members to:**

  - determine the capacity SEAs need to implement system transformations and pursue continuous improvement

  - develop customized solutions that build SEA capacity to pinpoint, implement, and sustain targeted change

- **Goal is to enhance specific capacities of SEAs to implement education reform initiatives successfully in support of districts and schools**
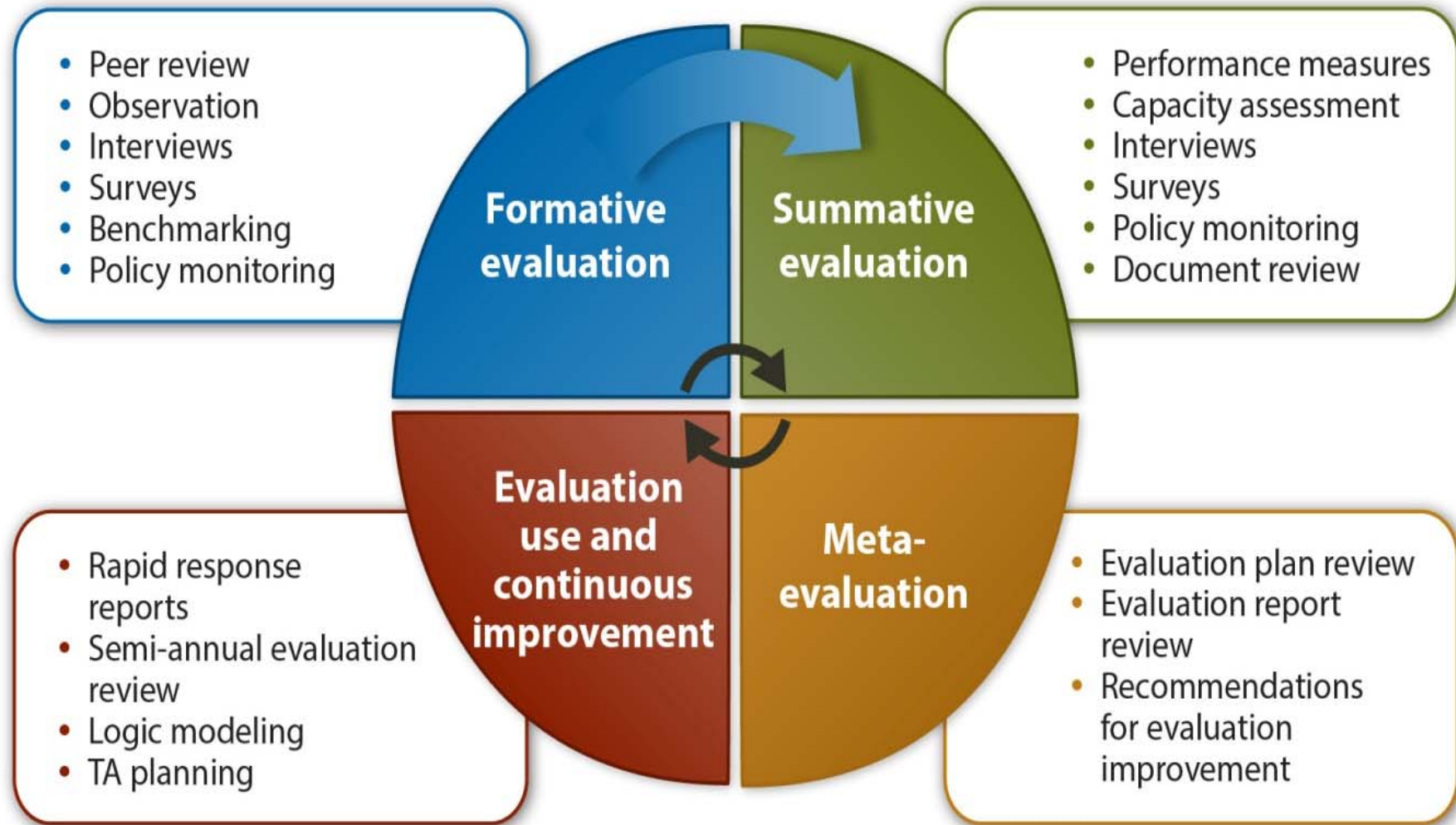
Multistate Context (Each SEA…)

- **Has unique organizational structures and systems**

- **Takes its own approach to providing support to schools and districts**

- **Is influenced by Federal policy and program guidelines, as well as their own state policy and rules**

- **Brings historical experiences to working with the previous iteration of the TA center program**

- **Receives other support from state and national organizations**

- **Has a unique way of doing business**

- **Utilizes the TA center in its own way**

- **Chooses initiatives on which to work annually**

Evaluation Approach

- **Mixed method evaluation**

- **Data from SEA staff members and TA providers**

- **Report on outcomes and processes for the funding agency**

- **Provide user-friendly, relevant information that TA providers can use to make mid-course changes and plan annual activities**

Evaluation Components

Formative evaluation
- Peer review
- Observation
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Benchmarking
- Policy monitoring

Summative evaluation
- Performance measures
- Capacity assessment
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Policy monitoring
- Document review

Evaluation use and continuous improvement
- Rapid response reports
- Semi-annual evaluation review
- Logic modeling
- TA planning

Meta-evaluation
- Evaluation plan review
- Evaluation report review
- Recommendations for evaluation improvement

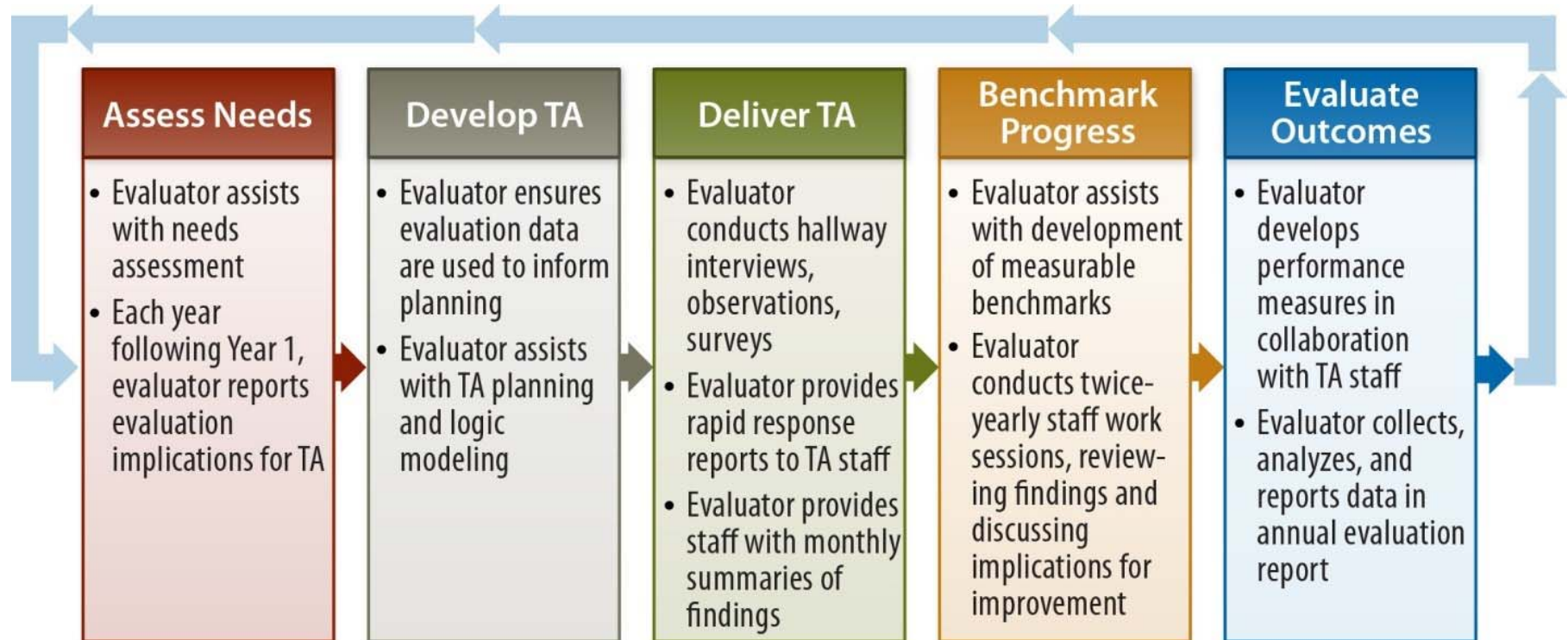# Responsive Evaluation Used to Engage Stakeholders

- **Process is based on responsive evaluation (Stake, 1983)**
  - uses available data and information
  - relies on the expertise of the internal evaluation team

- **Focus of the process is to engage TA providers using multiple strategies**
  - building relationships with TA providers to identify needs
  - embedding evaluation in TA activities
  - institutionalizing evaluation cycles and feedback loops
  - facilitating periodic consultations with state teams
  - developing and analyzing annual initiative workplans
  - conducting annual interviews with TA providers (metaevaluator)

Stake, R. E. 1983. "Program evaluation, particularly responsive evaluation". In Madaus, G. F.; Scriven, M.; and Stufflebeam, D. L. (eds.). Evaluation Models: Viewpoints on Educational and Human Services Evaluation. Norwell, Massachusetts: Kluwer. pp. 287-310.

Building relationships with TA providers to identify needs

- Assigning one member of the internal evaluation team to each state team

- Participating in monthly state team meetings

- Developing an understanding of the nuances of each state

- Empathizing with state teams about the challenges they face

- Offering suggestions for continuous improvement

Embedding evaluation in TA activities

Assess Needs
- Evaluator assists with needs assessment
- Each year following Year 1, evaluator reports evaluation implications for TA

Develop TA
- Evaluator ensures evaluation data are used to inform planning
- Evaluator assists with TA planning and logic modeling

Deliver TA
- Evaluator conducts hallway interviews, observations, surveys
- Evaluator provides rapid response reports to TA staff
- Evaluator provides staff with monthly summaries of findings

Benchmark Progress
- Evaluator assists with development of measurable benchmarks
- Evaluator conducts twice-yearly staff work sessions, reviewing findings and discussing implications for improvement

Evaluate Outcomes
- Evaluator develops performance measures in collaboration with TA staff
- Evaluator collects, analyzes, and reports data in annual evaluation report

Institutionalizing evaluation cycles and feedback loops

- **Ensuring that TA providers receive summaries of evaluation findings from the analysis of data in a timely fashion**

- **Making linkages between the capacity builders and the evaluation through regular communication with the program leadership team**

- **Discussing implications of results for decisions and refinements to TA plan components and service delivery**

Facilitating periodic consultations with state teams

- **Planning and implementing a multi-part evaluation capacity building series to improve the quality and usefulness of the formative evaluation**

- **Educating state teams about the value and usefulness of the internal program evaluation's formative component**

- **Helping to improve the state teams' data collection and documentation for their own use and bolster data quality for the internal evaluation**

- **Encouraging state teams to independently, and in collaboration with evaluators, continuously review, analyze, and document evidence aligned to capacity building outcomes**

Developing and analyzing annual initiative workplans

- **Aligning the capacity building model and the funding agency requirements for planning work of all initiatives each year using logic modeling**

- **Facilitating evaluative thinking through development and use of a capacity assessment tool, a rubric against which each initiative can be assessed**

- **Aggregating and reporting out on the various components of the initiative workplans to describe the collective focus and anticipated outcomes of the TA center each year**

Conducting annual interviews with TA providers

- Providing an opportunity for TA providers to safely share their knowledge about, experiences with, and suggestions for improving the internal evaluation's relevance, utilizability, and credibility

- Helping internal evaluators improve their practice

- Making sure TA providers are sufficiently educated about the evaluation to make well-informed programmatic and practice decisions

- Equipping internal evaluators with feedback, suggestions, and knowledge of real or potential issues

Lessons Learned and Suggestions

- **No matter what, program staff will always view you as an evaluator**
  - Establish and nurture relationships with stakeholders

- **Capacity building work does not necessarily follow a linear path**
  - Avoid getting frustrated when the program is messy

- **TA providers do not always see the usefulness of TA Tracker for program management; rather it has been viewed as an "evaluation thing"**
  - Educate and be collaborative in your approach to your work

- **More often than not, program staff will see the value of evaluation**
  - Encourage and model evaluative thinking through meetings and individual chats

- **Program staff provide useful feedback about the evaluation**
  - If you do not have a metaevaluator, find a way to collect feedback from program staff

Thank You

Contact Info:

Thomas J. Horwood, Principal

Thomas.Horwood@icfi.com

Phone: 202-494-6843

For more information on ICF's evaluation services, visit:

http://www.icfi.com/markets/education/research-and-evaluation-services-for-effective-education-programs

For more information on ICF's services on Building Capacity for Education Improvement, visit:

http://www.icfi.com/markets/education/campaigns/building-capacity-for-educational-improvement