

# Implementation and Use of the AEA Electronic Network: AEANET

Panel Session:

AEANET: An Electronic Network Supporting  
Evaluation Theory and Practice

Stephen W. Hebbler

Evaluation and Assessment Laboratory  
The University of Alabama

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## Introduction

After consideration by the AEA Board of Directors and the Task Force on Computer Networking, it was decided to set up two internet mailing lists to serve the AEA membership and all other interested evaluation practitioners. The first list would be an open discussion list where theoretical and practical evaluation issues could be shared. This list was named EVALTALK and is referred to as the AEA discussion list. A second list would be a moderated, top-down list for use by the AEA leadership in providing information to AEA members and other interested parties. This list was named EVALINFO and is referred to as the AEA information list. While monthly message archives are available from both lists, EVALINFO also has a fileserver containing a variety of evaluation and AEA related files that can be downloaded via E-mail.

The initial approvals from the computer center at The University of Alabama for managing the lists on the IBM3090 mainframe computer (ua1vm) were obtained during December 1994. The list headers and various downloadable files for EVALINFO were prepared and ready to activate on January 31, 1995. Due to an on-line internet training program being conducted on the ua1vm LISTSERV, our node was swamped and the computer center decided to wait until the training was over to activate the AEA lists. The lists were activated on February 24, 1995 with eight local staff members from the Evaluation and Assessment Laboratory (EAL) subscribed. We sent separate E-mail messages to task force members and other members of the AEA leadership announcing that the lists were running in a test phase. Within a week, there were approximately 25 subscribers. Gene Glass announced the AEA discussion list on one or more of the AERA sponsored lists and we soon had about 200 subscribers. At about this time traffic on the list became significant. There were several interesting threads running related to the theory and practice of evaluation.

Although EVALTALK became active very quickly, the information list remained dormant since the AEA leadership was not yet using the list for distribution of AEA information and only a small number of AEA members were actually subscribed. During discussions with several members of the AEA leadership it was agreed that the information list would probably not be very useful until some guidelines were established for posting to the list and all AEA members had been made aware of the list and its use. A general announcement concerning EVALINFO was prepared and scheduled to be included in the next general mailing to the AEA membership. The announcement did not make it into the mailing that was sent during June, so we discussed and got approval to place a printed announcement in the registration packet for the 1995 International Evaluation Conference. When the general mailing to AEA members was being prepared, a sheet containing an announcement of the EVALINFO list was quickly typed for inclusion. The mailing, that was received by AEA members in August contained a typographical error in the name of the list that made it difficult for some members to get subscribed, but the subscriptions to

EVALINFO increased from 280 to over 350 during the week following the mailing. Apparently, the users were able to guess the list name in order to get subscribed. The separate announcement enclosed with the IEC95 registration packet is correct.

### Usage Statistics for the AEA Mailing Lists

Following a slow start, the subscriptions and messages on EVALTALK increased dramatically during late March and early April. On April 6, 1995 there were 200 EVALTALK subscribers. By July 18 the number had increased to 282; by October 9 there were 335 subscribers; and on October 31 the number had reached a frightening 366. Table 1 presents the number of EVALTALK subscribers on each of these dates by country. The United States accounts for the largest percentage of subscribers (approximately 69%). The next largest contingent of subscribers is located in Canada (10%), followed by Australia (7%). Between April 6 and October 31, 1995 EVALTALK has had subscribers from 28 countries around the world.

The subscription statistics for EVALINFO (the AEA information list) have closely paralleled those for EVALTALK. A statistics report distributed April 6, 1995 on EVALTALK noted that there were 200 EVALTALK and 184 EVALINFO subscribers. Interestingly, 154 subscribers appeared on both of the AEA lists. Table 1 presents the current number of EVALINFO subscribers by country. The distribution of subscribers on that list is very similar to that for EVALTALK both by country and in overall numbers. The number of subscribers on EVALINFO increased sharply after the announcement was mailed to AEA members in August.

Although both the AEA mailing lists contain over 350 subscribers, the level of traffic (messages posted) is vastly different. This was expected since the lists were set up for different purposes. EVALTALK is an open list to which anyone can post a message. Several interesting evaluation-related threads have resulted in periods of significant activity on the discussion list. Since the AEA leadership and the general membership of the organization are only now being made aware of EVALINFO and its uses, that list has been inactive with only a few announcements from the list manager. Hopefully, the activity level on EVALINFO will increase as the AEA leadership begin using the list as an official means of distributing information to the members.

The activity on EVALTALK varies from time to time depending on whether an interesting topic is under discussion. Another interesting statistic about the list is the number of messages posted by different subscribers. Some subscribers are very active while others have posted few or no messages. Table 2 presents a distribution of the number of messages posted by EVALTALK subscribers. From March 1995 through most of October there have been 671 postings. This averages approximately three messages per day over the 222-day period. While the largest percentage of active subscribers (about 50%) have each posted one message to the list, two subscribers have been very active posting 50 or more messages.

In addition to the message activity on the mailing lists, many people have downloaded files from the EVALINFO fileserver. There are no statistics available concerning the number of times users have requested files from the list. Several files were prepared before the list was activated and others were added after receiving additional recommendations from subscribers concerning the kinds of files they felt would be useful. The following files are currently available from the EVALINFO fileserver:

AEANET	NEWS	Latest information about AEANET (not very current)
EMAIL	AEA	E-mail addresses for a few AEA members
EVALINFO	WELCOME	EVALINFO usage guide and message for new subscribers
JOBANK	EVAL	Evaluation position listings
JOINAEA	FORM	An on-line AEA membership application form
IEC95	SUM	A summary of all the IEC95 concurrent sessions
MEETINGS	AEA	Future AEA meeting dates and sites
PROGEVAL	STDS	A Summary of the Program Evaluation Standards
PERSEVAL	STDS	A Summary of the Personnel Evaluation Standards
TIGLIST	AEA	List of AEA Topical Interest Groups

#### Instructions for Subscribing to and Using the Lists

Anyone with E-mail access on the internet can subscribe to and receive messages from the AEA mailing lists. Users can also post messages to EVALTALK using E-mail. The procedure for posting a message to the discussion list is extremely simple--address the message to EVALTALK@ua1vm.ua.edu with an appropriate subject line. The message will be received by the list and distributed to over 350 subscribers. To subscribe to the list, or to request other services from the program that manages the mailing lists, you have to send appropriate commands to the program itself, not to the actual list. For both the AEA mailing lists and the EVALINFO fileserver, the commands must be sent in the body of an E-mail message addressed to [LISTSERV@ua1vm.ua.edu](mailto:LISTSERV@ua1vm.ua.edu). A list of the most common commands with information on their use and some examples is attached to this paper (see [LISTSERV Command Quick Reference](#)). An example of the filelist (listing of available files) for EVALINFO is included following the Quick Reference. This is the file that you will receive if you use the INDEX command to determine the files that are available for downloading. A similar list can be obtained for EVALTALK. That filelist will contain a list of the EVALTALK monthly message archives only.

As of the end of October 1995 the AEANET mailing lists and fileserver are being run on the IBM3090 mainframe computer at The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Staff and graduate students in EAL have the responsibility for managing the lists and responding to user's problems and comments. If users encounter problems subscribing to or using the lists they can send E-mail to the list manager ([EAL@ua1vm.ua.edu](mailto:EAL@ua1vm.ua.edu)).

Table 1  
**Subscribers on EVALTALK during 1995**  
Includes EVALINFO on October 31, 1995

Country	April 6	July 18	October 9	October 31	EVALINFO
Australia	7	16	25	26	13
Austria	0	1	1	1	0
Brazil	0	0	1	1	0
Canada	12	20	32	36	22
Denmark	0	1	1	1	0
Egypt	0	1	1	1	1
Estonia	0	1	1	1	1
Finland	1	1	1	1	0
France	1	1	1	1	0
Germany	0	1	1	1	1
Great Britain	2	6	7	8	5
Hong Kong	0	2	1	1	0
Iran	0	0	0	0	2
Ireland	1	1	1	1	1
Isreal	0	1	1	1	1
Italy	0	1	1	1	0
Japan	1	1	1	1	0
Malaysia	0	1	1	0	0
Mexico	0	0	1	1	2
Netherlands	1	4	4	4	5
New Zealand	1	1	2	4	1
Norway	0	1	1	1	0
Poland	0	1	1	1	1
Singapore	2	1	1	1	2
South Africa	0	2	1	1	0
Spain	6	5	6	6	5
Sweden	2	1	1	1	1
Switzerland	1	1	2	2	0
Thailand	0	0	0	0	2
USA	159	201	231	254	281
Unknown/Other	4	8	6	7	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>355</b>

Table 2  
**Subscriber Activity Statistics for EVALTALK**  
**from March, 1995 through October, 1995**

Number of Messages Sent	Number of Subscribers
1	61
2	20
3	15
4	5
5	4
6	1
7	3
8	4
9	2
10-19	5
20-29	2
30-39	3
66	1
116	1