



# Teaching Evaluation to the Golden Girls: Coaching Novice Team Members

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The purpose of program evaluation is to gain knowledge about a program to determine its worth or value and to use that knowledge to inform decisions and future actions. Unfortunately, we often find that team members have conflicting interests and duties to the program that interfere with the collection of appropriate and valid program data. Even with the known benefits and necessity of program evaluation, our experience is that those novice to evaluation do not recognize the value of evaluation and will fail to provide the information necessary for program evaluation.

**Methods:** We developed a multifaceted approach to identify tools and resources to assist in even the most novice team members provide accurate program data for evaluation purposes.

**Results:** Diversifying the methods in which we explained the evaluation protocols resulted in more timely data entry with less errors or incorrect data entry.

## BACKGROUND



Ok, so perhaps it was really Indiana in 2011. Our federally funded health workforce program was due to submit an annual performance report required to outline all programmatic activities of our state for the year. On the given deadline for data submission – community partners from our different regions instead delivered hundreds of evaluation forms with a simple statement that they did not enter said data.

What followed is a familiar scene for those in the evaluation field – a mad dash to enter the data in order to meet all federal funding guidelines necessary to continue the statewide program.

The Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) is a national program designed to recruit and educate students to serve as practicing health care professionals in rural, primary care, and medically underserved communities. We work with individuals across the education and workforce pipeline spectrum with middle school students at one end and practicing health professionals on the other.

Like other social programs, evaluation of the AHEC program is dependent on assessing a multitude of interdependent components. What we found is that even with all the known benefits and necessity of program evaluation, those novice to evaluation or those who do not recognize the value of evaluation will fail to provide the key information necessary for program evaluation.

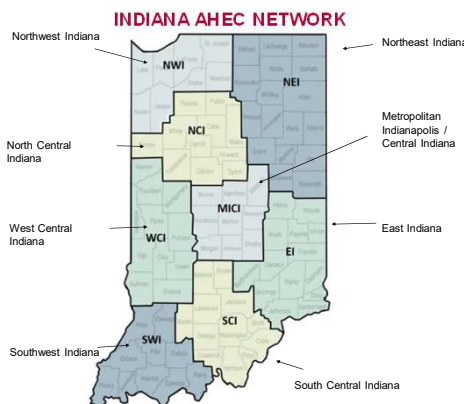
Gaps in the data or the inclusion of incorrect data can have long-lasting repercussions to the validity of our data warehouse and evaluation results. Examples include providing incomplete data collection forms, incorrect forms, or information filled with fictitious names and demographic data, or team members filling in the evaluation questions themselves rather than ask their questions.

In order to improve the validity of our data, it was necessary to teach a group of eight diverse individuals how to understand evaluation and how to accurately report and use the data.

## METHODS

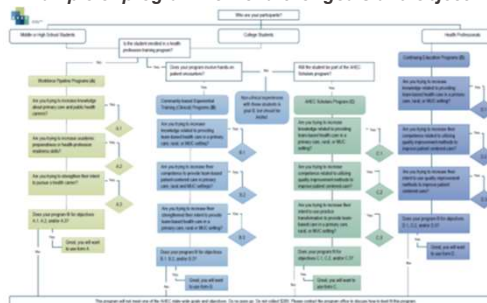
Because of the breadth of our program spectrum and the facts that our team members have different personalities, are from diverse backgrounds, have different learning styles, and are scattered across the state, it was vital that we develop a number of tools and resources in order to train all team members on how to follow the evaluation methods and protocols. In order to do so, we did the following:

- Moved our data warehouse to Salesforce (Salesforce.com, inc) and integrated FormAssembly (Veer West LLC) for easy data collection and entry.
- Integrated evaluation on the agenda for monthly team meetings.
- Developed short training videos on how to enter and view program data.
- Developed a training guide with step-by-step instructions (with screen shots) on how to use the data system.
- Created infographics and flow charts for quick reference on program goals/objectives.
- Developed data dashboards for real-time audit of program data.
- Planned quarterly meetings to go over program successes and challenges and included the data and budgeting as part of these meetings.
- Started conducting quarterly data audits.

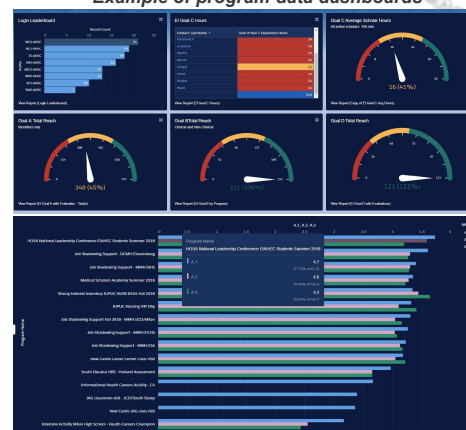


The Indiana AHEC Network is a state-wide network of eight independent regional offices covering the entire state of Indiana that work to serve the communities within their designated counties.

## Example of program flow chart for goals and objectives



## Example of program data dashboards



## RESULTS

Over the course of the last nine years, we have faced a lot of challenges with integrating evaluation into the culture of our program.

- We found there was a lot of adversity with valuing data collection. It was often viewed as just one more thing to do. For example, if a participant complained about entering in their birthdate, the team member was quick to request that we no longer collect any birthdates. We also found instances where team members would enter "dummy data" as a way to ensure positive results or to simply complete their data entry.
- We found that once we started providing timely feedback and additional methods of instruction, we had less instances of missing data and "dummy data".
- Timely reminders about ensuring evaluation data is entered in time for the quarterly meetings resulted in not only more accurate discussion of program outcomes at those meetings, but also reduced the lengthy gap between program and data entry (i.e. fewer instances of September programs being entered in January of the following year).
- Access to the dashboards and real-time data report generation for the partners resulted in their sharing the data with their stakeholders and community partners.
- An unexpected or unintended challenge was due to the statewide nature of our program, regional partners became competitive with each other in program recruitment and outcomes.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

It was important for us to recognize that many of our partners possess a wide range of education and experience levels in program evaluation. In utilizing a mix of education methodologies, we were able to meet the learning styles of each of our partners – no matter which Golden Girl they are most alike:

- Keep it simple for Rose, or as they say in St. Olaf, Helgenbargenflergenflurfernerfer.
- Keep it new and interesting for Blanche so that she doesn't skip additional trainings.
- Keep to the point for Dorothy, she won't accept any fluff or wasted time.
- Keep it simple so your team members (uh-hem we are looking at Sophia) do not recognize the value of evaluation. We cannot all love the data nor can we ship them to Shady Pines.

