Evaluating Adult and Continuing Education

Information Series No. 375

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1998
Funding Information

Project Title: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

Contract Number: RR93002001

Act under Which Administered: 41 USC 252 (15) and P.L. 92-318

Source of Contract: Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, D.C. 20208

Contractor: Center on Education and Training for Employment
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio 43210-1090

Interim Executive Director: W. Michael Sherman

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## Contents

**Foreword** ................................................................. v

**Executive Summary** ............................................... vii

**Introduction** ......................................................... 1

**Theme and Variations** ............................................. 5

**Application of Guidelines** .......................................... 13

  - Purpose ............................................................ 13
  - Stakeholders ...................................................... 17
  - Planning ........................................................... 21
  - Coordination ....................................................... 26
  - Sources ............................................................ 32
  - Data Collection ................................................... 36
  - Analysis ............................................................ 42
  - Utilization ........................................................ 46
  - Conclusion ........................................................ 52

**References** ........................................................... 53
Foreword

The Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education (ERIC/ACVE) is 1 of 16 clearinghouses in a national information system that is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. This paper was developed to fulfill one of the functions of the clearinghouse—interpreting the literature in the ERIC database. This paper should be of interest to adult and continuing education teachers, program administrators, and students.

ERIC/ACVE would like to thank Alan B. Knox for his work in preparing this paper. Dr. Knox is a professor of continuing and vocational education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; he served as department chair from 1992-1996. He has written more than 100 articles, books, and monographs; served as consulting editor with Jossey-Bass for books on adult and continuing education; and was the first editor-in-chief of the New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education quarterly sourcebooks. Among his books are Developing, Administering, and Evaluating Adult Education and Strengthening Adult and Continuing Education: A Global Perspective on Synergistic Leadership.

The following people are acknowledged for their critical review of the manuscript prior to publication: Grover J. Andrews, interim director, University of Georgia, Center for Continuing Education; Larry Condelli, project director, American Institutes for Research, Pelavin Research Center; and Cynthia J. Zengler, program specialist, and Morgan V. Lewis, research scientist, Center on Education and Training for Employment. Susan Imel coordinated publication development, Sandra Kerka edited the manuscript, and Janet Ray served as word processor operator.

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Executive Summary

Planning and conducting effective educational programs for adults entail contributions by various stakeholders including participants, instructors, coordinators, policy makers, and funders. They each make informal evaluative judgments. Sometimes reliance on such informal evaluation is insufficient because judgments may be based on inadequate information and are not shared with people who might use them to plan, improve, or justify the programs.

This monograph reviews and synthesizes highlights from relevant writings on evaluation and suggests interpretations and applications for practitioners who plan and conduct various types of educational programs for adults.

In this monograph, concepts, procedures, and examples from evaluation reports have been selected to represent eight aspects: needs, context, goals, staffing, participation, programs, materials, and outcomes. Many evaluations focus on just one or two of these aspects. Conducting a program evaluation entails many decisions that can be grouped into eight broad action guidelines. The guidelines pertain to purpose, stakeholders, planning, coordination, sources, data collection, analysis, and utilization. Many examples contain enough detail to portray the actual evaluation project and not just illustrate a guideline.

Readers can use this overview to clarify basic evaluation concepts and procedures, locate publications likely to provide detailed assistance, and use suggested guidelines to conduct evaluations on selected program aspects of interest. Selecting a program on which to focus should entail selecting an issue of importance, being responsive to stakeholder interest, and considering available expertise and resources for evaluation.

Information on program evaluation in adult and continuing education may be found in the ERIC database by using the following descriptors: *Adult Education, *Continuing Education, Data Collection, Evaluation Criteria, *Evaluation Methods, Needs Assessment, *Program Evaluation, Staff Development. Asterisks indicate particularly relevant descriptors.