



# ACET, Inc.

## Action Consulting and Evaluation Team

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### ACET Service Highlight

In our continuing effort to provide clients with the most efficient and effective services, ACET has recently upgraded our SPSS software package to include Data Entry Builder™ 4.0.

This powerful software tool allows our consultants to design dynamic survey instruments that can be administered on paper or hosted on our internet server.

This further enhances ACET's ability to provide state-of-the-art survey services that produce both high rates of return and high levels of reliability.

### *Spring is in the air!*

For our readers who live in areas that observe daylight savings, don't forget to spring forward on April 3, 2005.



### Evaluation Ethics

Many professions have a set of ethics that they rely upon as a foundation for practice, and the field of evaluation is no different. In 1992, six years after the creation of the American Evaluation Association (AEA), a task force of evaluation experts was established to generate some general guiding principles for evaluators. This task force created five core ethical principles specific to the field of evaluation:

- ✓ **Systematic Inquiry:** A quality evaluation should be conducted systematically. In order to achieve this, evaluators should (1) be clear about how they are conducting the evaluation, (2) use the appropriate methods to collect data, and (3) be forthright with their clients regarding research limitations.
- ✓ **Competence:** Competent evaluators embrace the education, skills, and experience needed to perform evaluations. They should maintain and improve their competencies by engaging in on-going professional activities and learning new techniques to collect, analyze, and report data. For more information, see Stevahn and co-authors' recent publication highlighting the six essential competencies for program evaluators: professional practice, systematic inquiry, situational analysis, project management, reflective practice, and interpersonal competence.
- ✓ **Integrity/Honesty:** Evaluators must embody honesty and integrity throughout the evaluation process by presenting information, methods, and results in a clear manner that is reflective of the findings.
- ✓ **Respect for People:** Evaluators should respect all individuals involved in the evaluation process by demonstrating sensitivity to culture, language, gender, and diversity.
- ✓ **Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare:** Evaluators need to protect the stakeholders, as well as the general public, and keep them from harm during the evaluation process. It is the evaluator's responsibility to ensure confidentiality of sensitive information and anonymity of the stakeholders involved.

ACET strives to conduct high-quality evaluations. The aforementioned principles are embedded in our practices and documented in our *Philosophy and Policies and Procedures Manual*, to which all ACET employees and subcontractors are held accountable. Specifically, ACET adheres to the four evaluation standards as set forth by the Joint Committee of Standards for Educational Evaluation: **utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy** (<http://www.eval.org/EvaluationDocuments/progeval.html>).

For more information, check out the following sources:

- American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles for Evaluators. Retrieved from <http://www.eval.org/Guiding%20Principles.htm>.
- The Joint Committee of Standards for Educational Evaluation. (1994). *The program evaluation standards: How to assess evaluations of educational programs* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stevahn, L., King, J. A., Ghere, G., & Minnema, J. (2005). Establishing essential competencies for program evaluators. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 26, 49-51.

## Connecting Evaluation and Home Visiting Programs

By Amanda M. White, M.S.

ACET Spring 2005 Intern

Evaluating home visiting programs can be a challenge. The nature of delivering home-based services, together with the presence of confounding variables such as the impacts on recipients of alternative services received, presents several barriers. Service-delivery barriers include factors such as the number of home visits, the frequency and duration of visits, program intensity, program activities, and the type of staff training. Confounding variables that may influence results include low participation rates, participant demographics such as language skills and health status, and concurrent program effects.



Within this context, several researchers offer recommendations for improving the evaluation of home visiting programs (Baker, Piotrkowski, & Brooks-Gunn, 1999; Gomby, Culross, & Behrman, 1999; Weis, 1993). These recommendations include:

✓ **Clearly define expected program outcomes and evaluation questions.** Outcomes and expectations must be realistic, feasible, and measurable. For instance, if a program plan includes two or three visits per year, the program expectations must be feasibly met within that scope of service. In addition, evaluation questions should clearly measure progress toward stated outcomes.



✓ **Document the program and evaluation process.** It is critical to document all elements of service delivery as well as to identify and document all suspected confounding variables. Alternative services that relate directly to the anticipated change(s) need to be identified, if feasible, in order to estimate the results of any home visiting service. Even when it is impossible to separate out results attributable to these variables, they must be acknowledged. In particular, home visiting services may be influenced by the complex nature of families (i.e., including family size, living space, and behaviors).

✓ **Use both qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools.** A mixed-methods approach will often most effectively measure program outcomes and impact. Determine which design types would be most appropriate for your program participants (i.e., the number of families served, length of home visiting program, participation rates, and demographic factors). Qualitative measures tend to capture more descriptive data and may include focus groups or on-site interviews of various participants. Quantitative measures help to clearly categorize results and may include pre-tests and follow-up or post-tests; quasi-experimental designs with matched comparison groups; or randomized studies using treatment and control groups. If possible, a pre- and post-test with a follow-up should be conducted. For showing causal connections, a randomized study or a carefully designed quasi-experimental approach is most effective.

✓ **Evaluate measurement tools against program characteristics and stated outcomes.** The chosen tools should be able to realistically measure the outcomes as well as be feasible to administer given the barriers associated with service delivery and confounding variables.



Some helpful references include:

- Baker, A. J. L., Piotrkowski, C. S., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (1999). Home instruction program for pre-school youngsters (HIPPI). *The Future of Children*, 9, 116-133.
- Gomby, D. S., Culross, P. L., & Behrman, R. E. (1999). Home visiting: Recent program evaluations – analysis and recommendation. *The Future of Children*, 9, 4-26.
- Weiss, H. B. (1993). Home visits: Necessary but not sufficient. *The Future of Children*, 3, 113-128.