

Audio Podcast Script

Evaluations of Performance Incentive Programs: TIF Local Evaluations

Peter Witham and Chris Thorn

Interviewer: This is Courtney Rowland with the Center for Educator Compensation Reform and I'm joined now by Peter Witham from the Wisconsin Center for Education Research. Peter is part of the Technical Assistance team for CECR. Thanks for joining us today.

Interviewer: Peter, you just finished presenting your session on Evaluations of Performance Incentive Programs where you discussed a comprehensive approach to conducting local evaluations. Can you start off by talking a bit about the purpose and function of a local evaluation?

Peter: Absolutely Courtney. Federal regulations require each TIF Grant to conduct both a Formative Evaluation (annually) and Summative Evaluation (at the end of 5 years). These evaluations are meant to ensure that grantees are following all federal regulations and guidelines and to determine the grants progress towards program objectives are being met. The focus of the Formative Evaluations is to provide information about progress towards grant objectives for ongoing program improvement, and the Summative Evaluation is meant to provide information about the grants overall impact and effect.

Interviewer: From your experience as a Technical Assistance Provider, how are grantees currently fulfilling this requirement?

Peter: Throughout the technical assistance process we have received a number of requests from states and districts about both partnering with external evaluators, and conducting external evaluations.

So in preparation for this conference, Chris Thorn and myself decided to take a step back and look at the external evaluations that have been conducted to this point and see how Technical Assistance could best help grantees and their external evaluators. What we found is that many grantees had not conducted evaluations, and those that were conducted often did not have a comprehensive and systematic approach to evaluation.

Interviewer: Can you explain in more detail what you mean by a comprehensive approach to evaluation would be?

Peter: By comprehensive we mean an evaluation that is systematic and carefully examines not only program outcomes, such as student achievement, but also factors such as context, where the program is being implemented, the specific inputs (program that is selected to meet the grant objectives), and the implementation process.

More specifically these components include: 1) The contextual environment of the program: The political, social, and economic factors in the state or district that could be beneficial or detrimental to a performance incentive program, 2) The inputs of the program: The specific performance incentive program, its accompanying theory of action, and the feasibility of the

programs success given lessons learned from other similar programs and the contextual environment where it is being implemented. 3) The process of program implementation: The implementation of the program and any unforeseen issues or costs that could be associated with implementation. Finally, 4) The products of the program: The outcomes and impacts of the program relative to the original program objectives.

Interviewer: Peter, in the session you discuss using the CIPP model to measure TIF programs. Can you describe what CIPP is?

Peter: Correct, the CIPP Model is a well-known and used evaluation framework that is organized to meet the evaluation profession's standards for conducting formative and summative evaluations. It also represents a systematic and comprehensive approach to evaluation. The four letters of the acronym CIPP stand for context (what needs to be done), input (how should it be done), process (is it being done), and product (is it succeeding). The model includes specific questions within each of these CIPP categories which can assist the grantee and evaluator in conducting a thorough and comprehensive evaluation.

Interviewer: Can you explain some of the advantages of using a comprehensive approach to evaluation, specifically the CIPP Model?

Peter: Absolutely. What we have done in preparation for this meeting and our presentation is to apply the CIPP Framework to a representative sample of TIF evaluations. Our objective in this process was to determine two things: A) How well existing evaluations aligned with the CIPP Framework, and B) What the effect of alignment or misalignment of the evaluation with the CIPP Framework was for the evaluation. Overall we found that the evaluations did address each of the CIPP categories of context, input, process, and product, but there was great variability in addressing the specific questions within each category.

For instance, one grantee conducted a context evaluation but did not answer the question of "Were the proposed objectives responsive to identified needs?" By not answering this question the evaluator did not provide information for the grantee about whether the program objectives were a good match for the contextual environment. Without this information the grantee would be unable to modify the key objectives, which guided the entire project. By not answering this question within the CIPP framework, the evaluator did not provide information for the grantee about whether the program objectives were a good match for the contextual environment where the grant was occurring.

Another example would be Input Evaluation where many of the evaluators reported general findings from the Literature on Performance Incentives to compare to the selected program, but they did not compare programs to the findings from the literature. Consequently the evaluation did not provide information to the grantee about whether the selected program was appropriate or feasible. Again, without this information the grantee was unable to make program modifications that would lead to the desired outcomes.

Interviewer: Thanks so much Peter for joining me today. You can find the complete PowerPoint presentation from Peter's session "Evaluations of Performance Incentive Programs:

TIF Local Evaluations” on the CECR website under the Events section. Select the 2009 Annual Grantee Meeting.

This is Courtney Rowland for CECR.