

Background

The client for this evaluation is Evalua|t|e, the evaluation resource center for the National Science Foundation's Advanced Technological Education program. Evalua|t|e is operated by The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University, a leader in developing the evaluation discipline and a long-time contributor to the improvement of NSF evaluations.

Evalua|t|e's mission is to promote the goals of the ATE program by partnering with ATE projects and centers to strengthen the program's evaluation knowledge base, expand the use of exemplary evaluation practices, and support the continuous improvement of technician education throughout the nation.

Evalua|t|e is midway through its four-year grant cycle. Evalua|t|e's current evaluator desires to retire at the end of this project year, June 30. We plan for the new evaluation to begin July 1, the start of Evalua|t|e's third year.

Object of the evaluation

As an ATE resource center, Evalua|t|e brings evaluation information and materials to ATE projects and centers and to NSF's ATE program officers. Evalua|t|e's main activities include conducting webinars, publishing a quarterly newsletter, conducting an annual survey of program grantees, maintaining a Web site, and developing and disseminating resources to assist grantees in their evaluation work. The evaluation of the resource center should assess the quality of these activities and products/services and the extent to which they addressed the need(s) of the target audience effectively.

The main objectives of the evaluation will be to determine Evalua|t|e's value to the ATE program, the extent to which it has achieved its mission, and the specific nature of its contributions to the ATE program as well as to the fields of STEM education and evaluation practice. To this end, the evaluation should develop criteria against which the center's performance will be assessed. Proposers should familiarize themselves with NSF's expectations for ATE resource centers outlined in the program solicitation, which is available from www.nsf.gov/ate.

Additional information about Evalua|t|e is available at <http://evalu-ate.org>.

Our evaluation needs

Evalua|t|e staff require ongoing feedback pertaining to development and use of materials, resources, and delivery techniques to determine their quality, usefulness, and effectiveness in serving its ATE program constituents. Both feedback and evaluative judgments are required to assist this center in making its case for overall effectiveness in improving the ATE program's use of evaluation. Evaluation findings also will be used as guidance in determining next steps for building on and improving Evalua|t|e through future funded proposals.

Timelines and deliverables

Evaluation work is expected to begin on July 1, 2010. The evaluator must plan to provide verbal and written—interim and annual—reports to Evalua|t|e. All written reports must be directed to Evalua|t|e’s principal investigator.

The evaluator is expected to participate in and give verbal reports at Evalua|t|e’s quarterly National Visiting Committee meetings, three of which are conducted via telephone/webinar (typically in June, September, and December) and the fourth held in person (in March or April).

Quarterly interim reports will be due on September 1, December 1, and June 1. An annual report is due on March 1. Interim reports should be brief and focused on developments since the prior report. The annual report should be a comprehensive, stand-alone document.

Budget

Seven percent (\$24,000 annually) of Evalua|t|e’s direct costs has been set aside for this evaluation. All costs for the evaluation should be included within this dollar amount, including the evaluator’s time and effort, travel and lodging (including costs for attending the annual ATE Principal Investigators conference and annual in-person NVC meeting—approximately \$2,000 total), supplies and equipment, and communications costs. Because the evaluation itself will be subject to metaevaluation, the evaluator should budget up to one day of staff time for responding to metaevaluation questions (interviews, etc.).

Selection process and criteria

Persons interested in serving as Evalua|t|e’s evaluator should send a letter of interest and resume to Patti Negrevski at patricia.negrevski@wmich.edu. The letter of interest should describe the evaluator’s capacity to conduct the evaluation and provide an overview of the key features of the anticipated evaluation. The Evalua|t|e team will conduct a credentials review and then schedule an initial phone interview with selected candidates. This interview process will provide candidates the opportunity to request information, identify evaluation priorities, and suggest potential evaluation strategies. Candidates also will be asked to respond to the selection committee’s questions. From these initial interviews one to two persons will be invited to complete a full proposal for conducting the evaluation, as described below.

Proposal components and format

The proposal should include the following components:

1. The evaluator’s understanding of the ATE program, Evalua|t|e, and the evaluation tasks to be conducted
2. Description of the key elements (objects) to be evaluated, key questions related to them, and delineation of the overall design for the evaluation
3. Description of data collection procedures
4. Description of planned reporting processes, to whom, when, and in what ways reports will be provided.
5. Evaluation budget. This budget should be linked to evaluation tasks and personnel so that anticipated costs are justified by planned work. (Payment procedures will be established as part of the formal contract if the proposal is accepted.)

Deadline

Letters of interest will be accepted until May 15, 2010, and an evaluator will be selected by early June so that a contract can be completed and work can commence on July 1.

Contact information

Letters of interest should be directed to Patti Negrevski as indicated above. Questions related to this RFP's content or expectations for the evaluation should be directed to Arlen Gullickson at (269) 387-5895 or arlen.gullickson@wmich.edu.

All documents stemming from the evaluation work effort, including the initial evaluation proposal, become the property of Evalua|t|e. Western Michigan University has set forward policies governing the conduct of research efforts and grant-funded products (see <http://www.wmich.edu/research/tools/policies.html>). Evalua|t|e complies with those policies.