

National Education Council



Education Evaluation Coordination Team

Servicewide Interpretation and Education Evaluation Strategy

Executive Summary

A U G U S T 2 0 0 6



**NATIONAL
PARK
SERVICE**

Enjoyment and stewardship of resources and values are fundamental purposes of parks, and are integral to the NPS mission. The National Education Council (NEC), established in 2004, helps renew and encourage the National Park Service's education mission. In order to build and sustain high-quality educational work, the NEC assigned the task of developing an evaluation strategy to its Education Evaluation Coordination Team (EECT). The following is an Executive Summary of the EECT's proposed strategy. Implementation will result in an Interpretation and Education (I & E) Renaissance with the approaching centennial of the National Park System.

The programs addressed in this strategy encompass a wide variety of place-based learning techniques including interpretation, curriculum-based education, and information delivered through personal services and media.

What is the Servicewide Interpretation and Education Evaluation Strategy?

As part of the focus on renewing and fulfilling the education mission of the NPS, the EECT developed the Servicewide Interpretation and Education Evaluation Strategy (SIEES), which recognize the importance of using evaluation throughout the NPS. Encompassing a wide range of I & E programs, the strategy uses evaluation as a tool to ensure programs are continuously effective. Outlined within the strategy are a series of action steps designed to

achieve four identified objectives. Thus, when implemented, improvements in communication, training, knowledge, and information management will strengthen evaluation practices at all levels of the NPS. The strategy incorporates substantial input from education, interpretation, and evaluation experts and practitioners and is based on a review of current practices, evaluation literature, and case studies.

Why should the NPS do evaluation?

Vision

Resource stewardship and visitor enjoyment are enhanced by the NPS embracing evaluation.

Evaluation at all levels of the NPS leads to sound decision making that ensures cost effectiveness, financial accountability, and interpretation and education that meet or exceed rigorous standards.

Within a culture of evaluation, compelling evidence is used to continually improve programming and demonstrate that programs are relevant, engaging, and effective.

There is clearly a “call to action” for evaluation. The Legacy Goal for 21st Century Relevancy, the Renewing our Education Mission document, and the National Education Council's Interpretation and Education Business Plan and Action Plan identify a need to evaluate interpretation and education programs.

Furthermore, NPS policies assert the need to evaluate the effectiveness and success of programs. In particular, the policies state that levels of visitor satisfaction, understanding, and appreciation will be measured in order to assess the quality of the visitor experience and to comply with requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). Evaluation is also required if the NPS is to achieve greater success as measured by

the OMB's Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART). PART assesses the effectiveness of federal programs and helps inform management actions, budget requests, and legislative proposals for achieving results. It requires that conclusions about effectiveness be explained and substantiated with evidence.

However, the motivation to develop and implement a SIEES is not driven solely by the need to comply with statutory or regulatory requirements. More importantly, a systematic evaluation process simply makes sense in the face of ever-increasing fiscal challenges. Evaluation is an important strategy of successful organizations because it delivers sound feedback on effectiveness. Evaluation builds organizational capacity to make decisions based on systematic data collection and analysis. As such, it is a valuable tool for ensuring accountability, conducting performance assessments, evaluating budget prioritization, and strategic planning. In summary, evaluation is a tool for achieving management excellence and relevancy.

Evaluation can help NPS staff at all levels:

- Field staff gain access to valuable tools to help them identify and share best practices, including mechanisms for the

21st Century Relevancy - The NPS mission will be relevant to contemporary Americans through engaging the public, developing a seamless network of parks, and protecting America's cultural heritage.

- NPS Legacy Goals 2005

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Are independent evaluations of sufficient scope and quality conducted on a regular basis or as needed to support program improvements and evaluate effectiveness and relevance to the problem, interest, or need?

— Question 2.6, OMB's Program Assessment Rating Tool

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study of current and potential audiences and innovative use of technology to maximize visitor experience and employee effectiveness.

- Managers learn how best to invest funds and to apply rigorous accountability measures that support continual program improvement.

- Internal and external stakeholders develop an enriched understanding of the impact of I & E in achieving the NPS mission, thus helping to advance the work of the NPS on the local, regional, and national level.

What are the goals and objectives of the evaluation strategy?

Goals

In order to realize this vision, the NPS must accomplish two goals:

1. The NPS will have a servicewide commitment to evaluation that facilitates coordination, fosters information exchange, and supports application of results.
2. The NPS workforce will have the motivation, knowledge, ability, and tools to thoroughly integrate evaluation practices into their daily work.

1. Establish a means for ongoing coordination of I & E evaluation processes and support for the application of results.
2. Develop an I & E evaluation information management system.
3. Use evaluation results to identify and disseminate best practices in evaluation and in I & E.
4. Develop tools and products to support evaluation and ensure that employees have the ability to integrate evaluation practices into daily work. Provide training to motivate employees and enhance the agency's evaluation capacity.

Objectives

These goals can be achieved through the following objectives:



NPS Servicewide I & E Evaluation Strategy

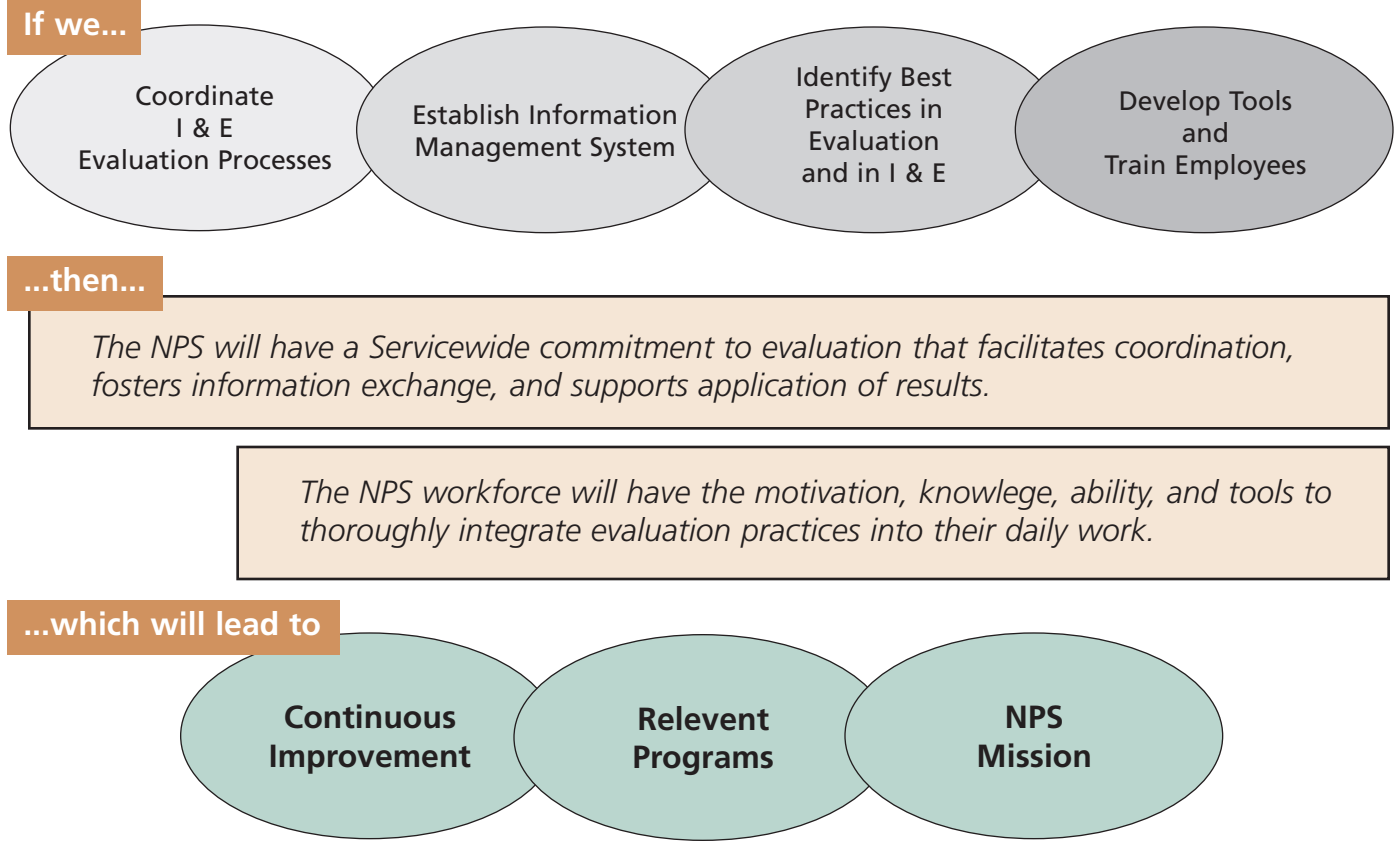


Figure 1: Objectives, Goals, and Vision of SIEES

How will the strategy work?

In order to achieve the objectives, key action steps have been identified. These include:

Coordinate I&E evaluation processes:

Action: Establish and support an I & E Evaluation Coordinator and National Evaluation Facilitation Team to coordinate functions and sustain communication with other NPS offices.

Action: Engage the I & E networks at the park, regional, and national levels to implement the SIEES.

Establish an evaluation information management system:

Action: Create an online evaluation library.

Action: Inventory and catalogue existing evaluations and visitor research.

Identify best practices in evaluation and in I&E:

Action: Identify and support a range of effective pilot evaluation projects.

Action: Review existing research to identify lessons learned, best practices, gaps, and evaluation needs.

Develop evaluation tools and provide training:

Action: Create an interpreters' and managers' toolkit of evaluation materials.

Action: Link professional development opportunities (e.g. IDP, Tel Net, and symposia) and reward systems to evaluation best practices.

The development and implementation of the strategy has been organized into three phases:

Phase I: Foundation - The EECT's work on the first phase has built a foundation for the strategy. Phase I is intended to be completed by December 2006 when the SIEES will be finalized.

Phase II: Integration - The second phase implements the strategy and establishes effective systems that support this work. Ideally, this phase will be complete by September 2007.

Phase III: Utilization - This phase is the ongoing application of the evaluation strategy. Ideally this would be in place by September 2008 and would

continue into the future.

Over the course of implementing the three phases, each of the action steps will be achieved, leading to the desired outcome of the objectives. This process is outlined in Figure 2 (Phased Implementation Matrix). This will result in goals being met, and ultimately, the realization of the vision.

Figure 2: Phased Implementation Matrix

Objective	Phase I Foundation	Phase II Integration	Phase III Utilization
Coordinate I&E Evaluation Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solicit input from a variety of NPS stakeholders Convene with the NPSAB an Evaluation Summit to guide and verify the SIEES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an I&E Evaluation Coordinator and Team at the national level Identify and tap into existing evaluation mechanisms and offices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage the I&E networks at the park, regional, and national levels to implement the SIEES Link on-going evaluation efforts with other assessment tools and requirements Review the SIEES annually
Establish Information Management System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compile NPS evaluation case studies Review related literature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inventory and catalogue existing evaluation efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an online evaluation library
Establish Best Practices in Evaluation and in I&E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a comprehensive program model for Interpretation and Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify pilot evaluation projects Review existing research to identify lessons learned, best practices, gaps, and evaluation needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support pilot evaluation projects to establish best practices; conduct evaluation Design mechanisms to track utilization of results, and develop guidelines for generalizable results Establish criteria to assess condition of media
Train Employees and Develop Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop Vision, Goals, Objectives, and Actions for the SIEES Seek employee feedback on SIEES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roll out SIEES in the context of other NEC efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link professional development opportunities and reward systems to evaluation best practices Create an interpreters' and managers' toolkit of evaluation materials

Service-wide Education Evaluation Strategy document completed December 2006