

Evaluation Is a Tool for Organizational Learning and Continuous Improvement *By Thomas Horwood*

We are committed to developing a culture of accountability and continuous improvement within the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center (ARCC). This will be accomplished by institutionalizing evaluation cycles and feedback loops into our work. Evaluation will ensure that the ARCC continuously improves so that state education agencies (SEAs) receive the highest-quality, most useful and most relevant technical assistance (TA) that will enable them to implement reforms with fidelity and effectiveness.

ARCC internal evaluation is designed to promote evaluative thinking throughout our work. As the internal evaluator serving this project, I will collaborate with TA staff to embed evaluative thinking into TA planning. As our work begins to progress, we also plan to involve SEA staff and other stakeholders in evaluation planning and implementation as appropriate.

The evaluation team will collaborate with ARCC staff during the entire program lifecycle to collect, analyze, and report findings on a regular basis to inform program improvement. Specifically, I will help in these ways throughout the TA process:

- **Assess Needs:** Collect data for needs assessments and determine evaluation implications for TA each year
- **Develop TA Plans:** Ensure evaluation data are used to inform planning and assist with TA planning and logic modeling
- **Deliver TA:** Participate as an observer and conduct hallway interviews and surveys; provide rapid response reports to TA staff; and provide staff with monthly summaries of findings
- **Benchmark Progress:** Assist with development of measurable benchmarks and conduct twice-yearly staff work sessions to review findings and discuss implications for improvement
- **Evaluate Outcomes:** Develop performance measures in collaboration with TA staff and collect, analyze, and report data in annual evaluation reports

Our internal evaluation will consist of *formative* and *summative* evaluation, as well as *meta-evaluation*. The purpose of formative evaluation is to determine if program processes, service delivery, and stakeholder perception of services are being implemented effectively. Thus, our formative focus is on measuring TA quality, stakeholder perspectives on TA delivery, and progress toward goals established with each SEA. The purpose of our summative evaluation is to determine the extent to which we have achieved key high-level outcomes aligned with ARCC TA initiatives. Here we will focus on measuring outcomes associated with various types of capacity

that we hope to help each SEA acquire. Lastly, our meta-evaluation will ensure data quality and impartial analysis to combat the actual or perceived compromise of neutrality in the internal evaluation. Our meta-evaluator will review evaluation plans and reports, and offer suggestions for improvement.

You may see members of the evaluation team at planning meetings or at key TA events. And you may be asked to participate in evaluation planning and use activities to provide the stakeholder perspective. We hope that you will participate by providing information throughout the course of your engagement with the ARCC—thereby allowing us to continuously improve our services to you. For more information about evaluation processes and procedures, please contact Thomas Horwood (Thomas.Horwood@icfi.com) or Caitlin Howley (Caitlin.Howley@icfi.com).