



The system you see is bigger than it appears....

Richard Brynteson

SETIG Newsletter

August 2015

IN THIS ISSUE

SETIG Leadership Team Notes

by Meg Hargreaves

At last year's AEA conference, **Bob Williams**, our past SETIG chair, received the **2014 AEA Lazarsfeld award** for his contributions to the theory and practice of evaluation. In his acceptance speech, he asked the attendees in the hall to stand up. After everyone was standing, he invited those who were using systems ideas in their evaluation work to remain standing, and for the rest to sit down. To his and our surprise, almost everyone in the hall remained standing!

There are several possible interpretations to this event, all of which may be true:

- All of Bob's evaluation friends and systems colleagues were in the audience.
- The meaning of "systems ideas" may have been somewhat subjective and open to interpretation.
- The use of systems ideas in evaluation had reached a "tipping point" of social acceptability, where it seemed easier or better to remain standing than to sit down.

To explore this intriguing issue of the use of systems concepts in evaluation, the SETIG is polling its members to learn:

- (1) *Are you using systems concepts in your evaluation work?*
- (2) *What does that mean to you?*
- (3) *What does that practice look like?*

Please take a few minutes to answer these questions in our online survey, which you can reach by clicking on the attached link ([SETIG Survey](#)). Your answers are confidential. We will analyze the results and present the information in several venues at the 2015 AEA conference, including the SETIG's annual business meeting. The information will help to shape the SETIG's future work, and will provide valuable insights into what it currently means to use systems concepts in evaluation. Thank you for your help in this endeavor!

The SETIG leadership: Meg Hargreaves, Erin Watson, Ginger Fitzhugh, and Jan Noga

SETIG Leadership Team
Notes

Systems Learning Network
Update

Update on Exemplar Project

SETIG Elections

Systems Learning Network

At the AEA Systems TIG Business meeting this past fall in Denver we brainstormed a broad spectrum of ideas to support a vibrant learning network among systems thinking evaluators. The goal of this member-driven, TIG supported learning network is to provide a safe and energizing platform for individuals to exchange ideas, support, and connections promoting our continued learning and evaluation work.

The following are some learning network developments since last October:

First Systems in Evaluation (Un)Conference

Save the Date!

The SETIG Leadership Team is pleased to announce the first *Systems in Evaluation (Un)Conference to be held Oct. 13 -15th.*



What is an Unconference?

An unconference is a loosely structured conference that emphasizes the informal, emergent exchange of ideas between participants, rather than following a conventionally structured program of speakers and presenters. Join us online daily on October 13, 14, and 15 from 3 – 4:30 pm ET to learn and share with your colleagues in an informal virtual environment. Build your knowledge and skills in systems evaluation without ever leaving the office!

How Will the Unconference Work?

Participants will log on at the indicated time each day and, following a short welcome and orientation, either join a specific discussion topic or create their own breakout group. Each breakout room is limited to 10 people total, including a facilitator, to enhance deep dives and engaged learning. Participants must have a reliable internet connection and microphone; a webcam is strongly suggested. ***The initial discussion topics will include:***

- Incorporating a Systems Approach into Evaluation: Challenges and Strategies
- Using a Soft Systems Approach in Systems Evaluation: Real-life Examples
- Using a Developmental Evaluation Approach in Systems Evaluation: Real-life Examples
- Using a Complex Adaptive Systems Approach in Systems Evaluation: Real-life Examples
- Support for a Systems Approach in Systems Evaluation: Strategies for Promoting Buy-in
- Defining and Distinguishing Systems Evaluation in Systems Evaluation: Where are the Boundaries?
- Visualizing Complex Systems: Tools and Strategies
- Approaches for Capturing High-level Systems Patterns and Outcomes
- Identifying System Leverage Points: Helpful Approaches
- Defining System Boundaries: Building Stakeholder Consensus
- Addressing Causation in Systems Evaluation
- The Role of Accountability in Systems Evaluation

Different sets of topics from the list above will be offered each day of the Unconference. Participants have the option of attending one, two, or all three days. Registration is free but space will be limited. More details including the schedule of session topics and registration process will be posted at <http://www.systemsinevaluation.com/systems-unconference/systems-unconference-details/> as they become available. For more information [contact us](mailto:systemsunconference@gmail.com) at (systemsunconference@gmail.com)

Systems in Evaluation Website

We have launched our new website (<http://www.systemsinevaluation.com/>). The site has been constructed using WordPress to provide greater flexibility and functionality for TIG members and others interested in systems and evaluation. It's easy to become a member of the site – you'll find a registration box on the right side of the home page under News and Announcements. You may use the site without registering, but, if you wish to post comments, resources, or other materials to the site, you will need to register as a member. If you have any questions or run into problems, feel free to contact our webmaster [Jan Noga](#).

We envision the site as an evolving home on the web for those of us with an interest in systems, evaluation, and the intersection of the two. Many of our plans for the site revolve around supporting the Systems TIG and helping TIG members stay connected between annual meetings. Current and upcoming features include:

Systems Marketplace – The TIG will provide an online forum for individuals to propose and connect with new opportunities for learning and practice. Like a systems "Craigslist," this marketplace could help members:

- Coordinate book clubs, think tanks, virtual coffee breaks, and communities of practice around relevant topics.
- Develop joint conference proposals
- Co-design or improve systems tools
- Exchange mentorship and "evaluation therapy" to trouble-shoot issues and improve practice
- Jointly pursue new evaluation and/or consulting projects
- Provide feedback through a Review Time Bank

Event Calendar – The TIG will host a community calendar so members can keep each other up to date on upcoming events related to Systems in Evaluation.

Systems Updates – TIG can coordinate updates on upcoming events and opportunities relevant to systems in evaluation such as:

- Regional affiliate meetings
- New resources to support our work

Interested in joining the Network?

We are building a feature into the SETIG website that will allow TIG members to join our Learning Network and enroll for updates that come out between newsletters. Keep an eye on our site at: www.systemsinevaluation.com for this and other opportunities as they are built in!

UPDATE: Systems TIG Design Charrette Follow-up

Following the annual meeting, we initiated discussions with the AEA Board regarding the possibility of the SETIG continuing the work of the design charrette teams by engaging in a systems study of AEA. We started with conversation around continuing the initial focus of conducting a systems study of the annual meeting with a focus on future purpose, utility, growth, and sustainability. During this past year, the Board has been engaged in defining and clarifying ends goals for AEA. As we have continued to talk with Aimee White, members of the Board and one of the coordinators of the Board's Evaluation Task Force, the focus for our proposed study has shifted from the annual meeting to AEA in the context of its ends goals and future directions. We are still working with Aimee to further refine a focus and structure a more formalized study protocol. We will keep you posted on progress as things begin to jell.

AEA Exemplar Project

In conjunction with the 2015 annual meeting theme set by Stewart Donaldson, AEA launched the 2015 AEA Exemplar Project. The project will use this year's annual meeting as a forum for highlighting exemplary evaluations conducted throughout the world that had an impact or that used exemplary practices or methodologies. A primary purpose of the project will be to bring AEA members together in exploring what facilitates exemplary evaluation and better understanding the enabling factors, actions, and drivers of success that mark exemplary evaluation.

Each TIG was asked to solicit submissions in their area and select one project to submit to the AEA Exemplar Project committee for consideration. The committee is still working to determine which nominations will be highlighted during the meeting. Announcements are likely to be made closer to the annual meeting and we will keep you notified as to whether our TIG's nomination was one of the ones chosen.

Systems TIG Elections

The Systems in Evaluation TIG is seeking nominations and self-nominations for the position of TIG Chair and TIG program co-chair for a term of three years.



- The **TIG Chair** is responsible for convening the TIG Business Meeting at the annual conference. This meeting will be scheduled in consultation with the TIG Program Chair as part of the conference program. The TIG Chair is also responsible for overseeing the planning and development of any TIG activities outside of the annual meeting.
- The **TIG Program Co-Chair** is responsible for working with the Lead Program Co-Chair to manage the submission and review process each spring and for working in consultation with the TIG leadership team to plan the TIG's business meeting during the annual conference.

New chairs take office on January 1, 2016. If you would like to submit either a nomination or self-nomination, please send an email to Erin Watson (droegeer@msu.edu) by **Friday, September 11th**. Please include the following with your email:

- Name
- Address
- Email address
- Phone number
- Position(s) nominated for (see positions descriptions below)
- A brief statement (150 words or less) on what you, or the candidate you are nominating, would bring to the role and to leadership of the TIG. This statement will be included in the ballot that will be emailed to TIG members.

All nominations and self-nominations will receive a follow-up email confirming willingness to have their name placed on the ballot. The **election** will be held via online survey towards the end of September (TIG members will receive an election notice that will include a link to the ballot). This announcement, as well as the link to the ballot, will also be posted on the TIG's website (<http://www.systemsinevaluation.com/>). The results of the election will be announced during our business meeting at this year's conference in Chicago.