

# SUMMARY REPORT

## American Evaluation Association Systems in Evaluation Topical Interest Group (SETIG) Member Feedback Survey

*Prepared by: Larry Kaplan & Emily Gates, Boston College*

### Background

Systems in Evaluation TIG (SETIG) leadership team includes co-chairs, Emily Gates and Marah Moore, and program co-chairs, Jeneen Garcia, and Pablo Vidueira. The leadership team created and administered a survey to current members to gather their feedback on SETIG activities. This document summarizes the results. At the SETIG meeting at AEA 2019, the leadership team will invite attendees to discuss the results and identify next steps.

### Methods

The survey was developed in a short time period to gather feedback from members. No prior SETIG survey (or other TIG feedback survey) was available, so the team put this together. The survey was administered online using Qualtrics during October 2019. AEA provided the latest contact list of current members' emails. 370 initial emails were sent to the SETIG membership on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Three reminder emails were sent out, for those who had not completed the survey, on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and 28<sup>th</sup>. The survey closed on October 31<sup>st</sup>. After the survey was closed, there were 81 recorded responses – a 22% response rate.

### Organization of the Report

This summary report begins with overarching findings, recommendations, and questions for discussion at the SETIG meeting at AEA 2019. Following this, results are presented in four sections: Membership; Communication; Learning; and Additional Suggestions.

### Overarching Findings & Recommendations

Overarching findings (numbered) and recommendations (in italics) are briefly summarized here.

#### Membership

1. Most SETIG members (82%) don't know each other or just know a few other members.

*Consider ways to welcome new members and facilitate networking between members.*

## Communication

1. When asked about prior SETIG activities (e.g., charrette, unconference, principles project) about half didn't know about the activities and between 12-24% participated.
2. Members' first choice for communication updates from SETIG leadership is to continue the current newsletter and/or to have email updates more often than quarterly. Members indicated occasionally or often reading the newsletter and rarely accessing the website.

- Keep the quarterly newsletter or switch to e-mail updates sent more often than quarterly.*
- Consider whether to maintain the website. If opting to maintain it, identify ways to make it more useful to members and ways to promote it so that it's accessed.*
- Consider whether to establish and maintain social media accounts for SETIG (e.g., Twitter, LinkedIn group).*

## Learning

1. Some members (about 30) indicated willingness to lead an event or share their expertise in some way.
2. A majority of members (75-80%) are very interested in learning more about systems theory/theories and complexity theory/theories. A minority (15%) of members said they have a lot of expertise in these theories.
3. Most members prefer webinars that are posted online and/or archived for later viewing as a mode for SETIG to facilitate learning. Additional preferences include updates on systems/complexity tools and publications and blogposts to stimulate discussions.

- Identify priority areas for the upcoming year. Focus on responding to members' interests and building on members' expertise. Consider organizing a group of volunteer members to coordinate a process for developing and archiving webinars on key topics. This format was preferred by most members.*

## Additional Suggestions

1. Additional input from members to the SETIG leadership include the following: 1) promoting systems methods and thinking; 2) engaging in outreach to other TIGs; 3) increasing SETIG communication & networking; and 4) more sharing and learning.

## Questions for AEA SETIG Meeting Discussion

1. What are some ways we can facilitate more connection between members?
2. What should be the priority learning areas for the upcoming year? Ideas for formats and/or processes to facilitate learning?
3. For regular communication, what kinds of updates are members looking for?
4. Are there other priorities or activities SETIG should prioritize?

## Results

Results are presented in four sections: Membership; Communication; Learning; and Additional Suggestions.

### Membership

**Who Are SETIG Members.** About half of members work as consultants (52%). Other members work as university faculty (15%), government employees (11%), graduate students (7%), educators or administrators (6%), and other (9%). A majority of members (82%) don't really know others in the SETIG or just know a few members. See table below for results regarding how well members know each other.

**Table 1. How Well Members Know Each Other (mode in bold)**

	%	n
Pretty well - I know most members	5.41	4
Sort of well - I know some members, but not most	12.16	9
Not so well - I don't know most members, but do know a few	31.08	23
Not well at all - I'm new and/or don't really know others in SETIG	<b>51.35</b>	38
I'm not sure	0.00	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>74</b>

**Members' Involvement in SETIG.** About half or more of members did not know about prior SETIG activities. Out of prior activities, the unconference involved the most members (23%) followed by the principles project (19%) and then the charrette (12%).

**Table 2. Members’ Participation in Three Prior SETIG Activities (modes in bold)**

	<b>Did/do not know about</b>	<b>Did not join</b>	<b>Joined/ participated</b>	<b>Helped organize/lead</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Charette	<b>69.86% (51)</b>	16.44% (12)	12.33% (9)	1.37% (1)	73
Unconference	<b>49.32% (36)</b>	20.55% (15)	23.29% (17)	6.85% (5)	73
Principles project	<b>48.61% (35)</b>	26.39% (19)	19.44% (14)	5.56% (4)	72

Note: n for each response category is in parentheses

About half of members indicated willingness to lead/help organize SETIG initiatives (53%) and share their expertise and skills (47%).

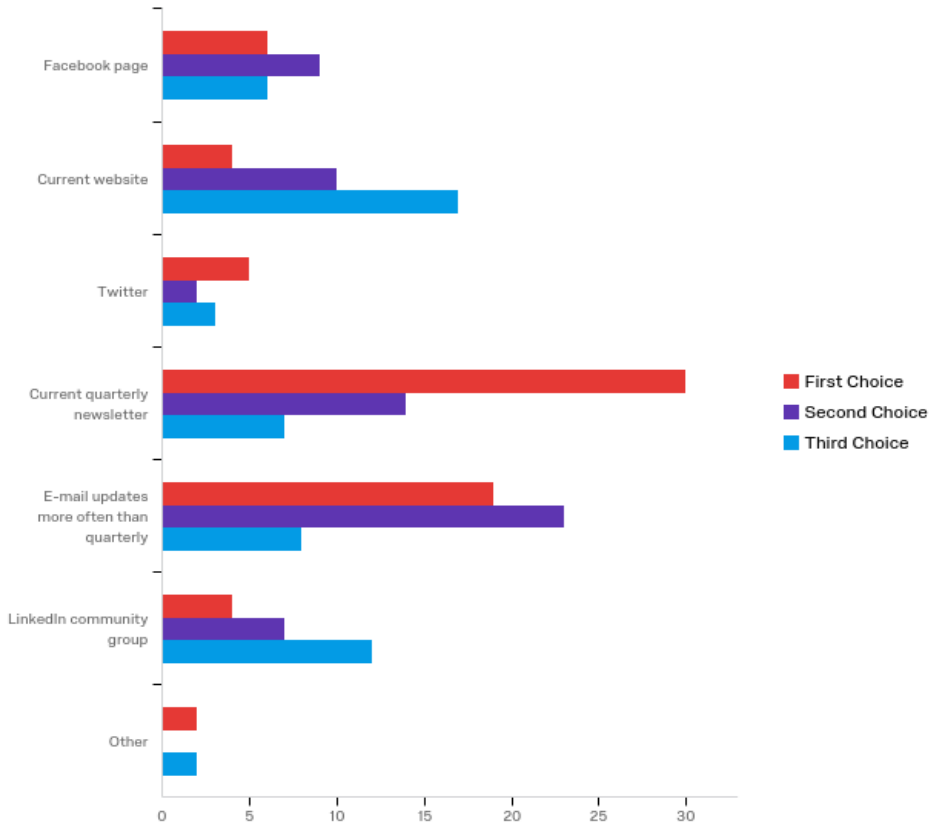
**Table 3. Members’ Interest in Contributing to SETIG Initiatives (mode in bold)**

	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>
I am interested in leading / helping organize SETIG initiatives	53.33	16
I am interested in sharing my expertise and skills as a resource in SETIG initiatives	46.67	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>30</b>

## Communication

**Formats for SETIG Updates.** First choice of formats for SETIG updates ranked by members are quarterly newsletters (43%) followed by e-mail updates (27%). Second choices include email updates (35%) and the quarterly newsletter (22%). Third choices include the current website (30%) followed by LinkedIn (22%). Approximately 75% of respondents said that they occasionally or often read the newsletter. Over 80% said that they rarely or never visit the website.

**Figure 1. Members’ Preferred Communication Channels by Ranking**



**Table 4. Members’ Frequency of Accessing the Newsletter & Website**

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Total
Quarterly newsletters sent by email	10.96% (8)	12.33% (9)	34.25% (25)	42.47% (31)	73
Website	34.25% (25)	47.95% (35)	17.81% (13)	0.00% (0)	73

## Learning

**Topics Members Want to Learn More About.** ‘Very interested’ was the most frequent response to every topic listed in this question. The three topics that received the highest levels of ‘very interested’ responses are systems theory/theories (80%), complexity theory/theories (74%), and evaluation practice (59%). Responses to the open-ended question about additional topics, skills, or resources included topics related to systems thinking and design, as well as a mixture of topics.

- Systems thinking/design (8 responses). Some of the responses within this theme included: applied systems case studies; examples of quality systems approaches like Beverly Parsons’ presentation; Fritjof Capra’s theories; design thinking; global systems transformation; and direct methods for implementing systems related concepts.
- Other Topics (9 responses). This group of responses represents multiple interests: contribution analysis; foresight evaluation; Rasch scaling; approaches to address syndemics (intersection of multiple epidemics); path analysis/modeling; organizational theory; and influence modeling.

**Topics Members Have Expertise In.** Almost all (97%) members indicated having some (39%) or a lot (60%) of expertise in evaluation practice. Most (83%) members reported having some (49%) or a lot (34%) of expertise in evaluation theory. Most (78%) members also reported having some (60%) or a lot (18%) of expertise in systems theory/theories. Several additional topics or skills for which members have expertise were identified in the open-ended question.

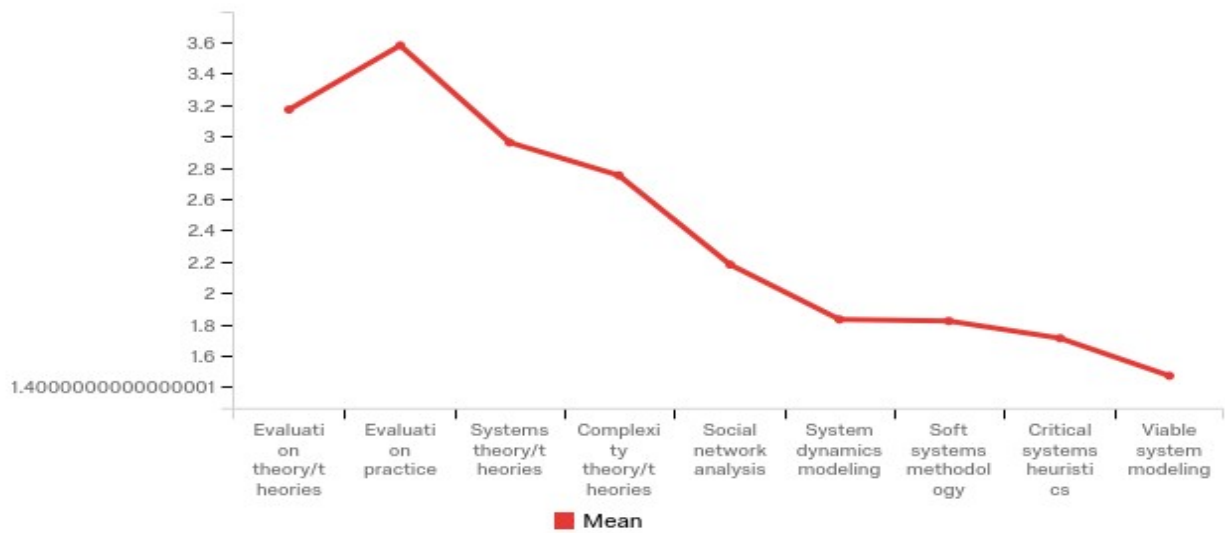
- Specific types of evaluation (10 responses). 4 responses focused on health: public health & community interventions, healthcare, health equity, and behavioral health. 6 responses included developmental evaluation, impact evaluation, early childhood evaluation, and special education evaluations.
- Theory/Theories (6 responses). Responses included: social-ecological systems theory, complexity, critical theory, and multi-cultural theory.
- Technical Skills (6 responses). Responses included: data visualization, linear modeling, agent-based modeling, simulation, network analysis, and Plectica – a visual mapping software.
- Organizational Leadership (5 responses). Responses included: large group facilitation, capacity building, organizational development, and organizational change.

**Preferred Formats for Learning.** Less than half (45%) of members indicated webinars as their first choice for a format for learning. The next first choice rated by several members (15%) was email updates on evaluation relevant resources for systems/complexity. Second choices include email updates by about one-third of members (30%) and webinars by one-fifth of members (22%). Third choices include email updates (28%) and blog posts/discussions (23%).

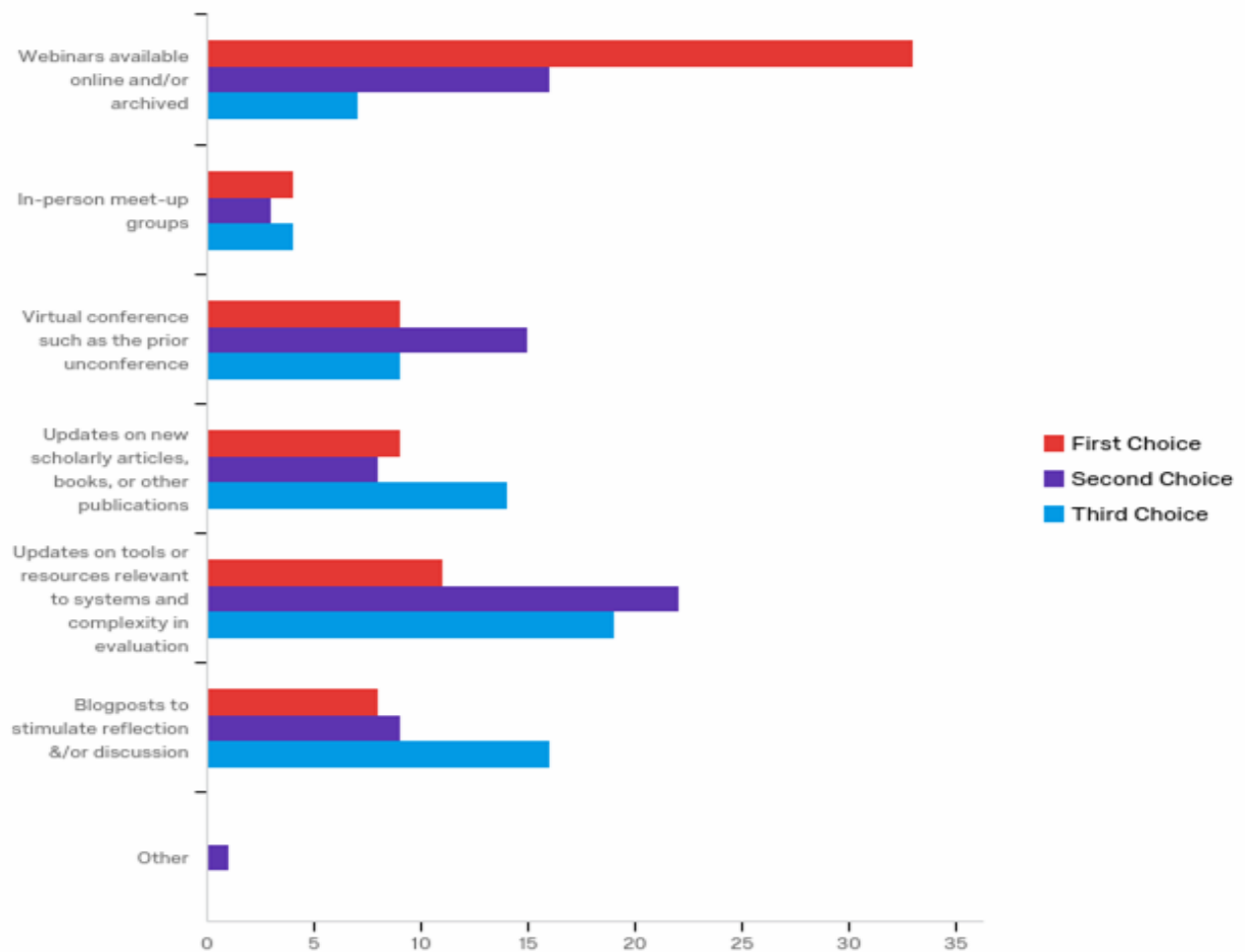
**Table 5. Topics Members Want to Learn More About (mode in bold)**

	Not interested	A little interested	Somewhat interested	Very interested	Not sure/I don't know	Mean (SD)
Evaluation theory/theories (69)	2.9% (2)	18.8% (13)	23.2% (16)	<b>55.1%</b> <b>(38)</b>	0.0%	3.31 (0.87)
Evaluation practice (68)	5.9% (4)	10.3% (7)	23.5% (16)	<b>58.8%</b> <b>(40)</b>	1.5% (1)	3.41 (0.91)
Systems theory/theories (69)	0.0% (0)	4.4% (3)	14.5% (10)	<b>79.7%</b> <b>(55)</b>	1.5% (1)	3.79 (0.53)
Complexity theory/theories (69)	0.0% (0)	5.8% (4)	17.4% (12)	<b>73.9%</b> <b>(51)</b>	2.9% (2)	3.74 (0.61)
Social network analysis (72)	4.2% (3)	22.2% (16)	19.4% (14)	<b>51.4%</b> <b>(37)</b>	2.8% (2)	3.27 (0.97)
System dynamics modeling (71)	1.4% (1)	14.1% (10)	32.4% (23)	<b>42.3%</b> <b>(30)</b>	9.9% (7)	3.45 (0.90)
Soft systems methodology (71)	4.2% (3)	16.9% (12)	23.9% (17)	<b>39.4%</b> <b>(28)</b>	15.5% (11)	3.46 (1.07)
Critical systems heuristics (69)	2.9% (2)	17.4% (12)	21.7% (15)	<b>46.4%</b> <b>(32)</b>	11.6% (8)	3.46 (1.00)
Viable system modeling (70)	5.7% (4)	12.9% (9)	21.4% (15)	<b>41.4%</b> <b>(29)</b>	18.6% (13)	3.54 (1.10)

**Figure 2. Members’ Levels of Expertise by Area (From 1=a little to 4=A lot)**



**Figure 3. Members’ Preferred Formats for Learning**





## Additional Suggestions

This section summarizes themes from the two open-ended questions about priorities and additional ideas and/or suggestions.

### ***What should be the SETIG priorities for the next few years?***

- Promoting a systems approach (8 responses). Typical statements within this theme are: the promotion of systems ideas; evaluation methods that use a systems approach; discussing how to implement a systems approach in graduate student curriculum; and case examples of systems evaluations.
- Sharing & Learning in general (7 responses). Typical statements within this theme are: learning from and about different aspects of evaluation; offering development opportunities; sharing tools and resources; education of members; and getting feedback from “the field.”
- Networking & communication (6 responses). Typical statements within this theme are: more frequent communication to build more of a community; engaging members throughout the year; making sure members are connected and in conversation; building continuity and community between annual meetings; and increase the sense of general belonging.
- Outreach (9 responses). There seems to be a significant desire to make connections across TIGs and beyond. These responses include the following: social outreach to members and non-members; engage with other TIGs, especially with multi-cultural and indigenous peoples in mind; expand the network and elevate marginalized voices; partner with other organizations with systems expertise; and going out and trying to increase the diversity and professional backgrounds of SETIG members.

### ***Other ideas and/or suggestions for the SETIG leadership?***

- Communications (5 responses). Some suggestions were: using a listserv; a SETIG calendar with webinars and events on it; developing a better introduction process for new members that includes clear information about who, what, where, when, and how; and, in general, more frequent communication.
- Aspirations (4 responses). Let’s take systems evaluation to the next level! Let’s also try to bring together research and practice; open up our community; collaborate with other TIGs; keep having fun; and more deliberate infiltration of other TIGs.
- Questions (2 responses). Two people took the opportunity of this open-ended question to pose their own questions. “I know a lot about systems theory and modeling but have never used this knowledge in my evaluation career, why?” “My first language is French, can I communicate in French?”