

# Evaluation at the Service of the Legislative: The American Experience

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# Serving the U.S. Congress

- In 1981, the U. S. Congress authorized the creation of the Program Evaluation and Methodology Division (PEMD) within the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO).
- The mandate was to serve as the center of evaluation work for the Congress.

# Five Groups were Identified to Focus the Work

- Defense and National Security
- Health, Education, and Welfare
- Environment and Natural Resources
- General Government (post office, taxes, etc.)
- Technical Assistance and Methodology

# Work for the Congress was done in Two Ways

- Formal requests were submitted from either the House of Representatives or from the Senate—and from either the majority or minority party. (80% of all studies)
- The PEMD could undertake self initiated work at its own discretion and without a request. (20% of all studies)

# Reporting

- The head of the PEMD reported directly to the Comptroller General (Head of GAO).
- There was no intermediate/outside review of draft reports. PEMD issued its reports directly to the Congressional requester(s) or to relevant committees.

# National Defense and Security Work

- PEMD staff had security clearances appropriate to staff rank and area of work.
- PEMD issued reports with appropriate security classifications. Some reports were thus never made public.

# FOR PEMD, Three Key Questions

- 1) Are we Doing the Right Things?  
Rationale; Theory of Change
- 2) Are we Doing Things Right?  
Effectiveness; Efficiency
- 3) Are There Better Ways of Doing It?  
Good Practice; lessons Learned

# Matters for Consideration by the Senate of the Republic

- 1) How will studies be initiated? Who will have the authority to begin a study?
- 2) Who will have authority to release a completed study? Will there be constraints on to whom a study can be released? Will there be reasons for restriction of a report besides national defense/security?



# Matters for Consideration (cont.)

- 3) What will be the considerations and procedures for staffing? Civil service staff, consultants, private organizations, etc. Term or open ended appointments?
- How will Promotions and dismissals be addressed? How will new leadership be identified and appointed?

# Matters for Consideration (cont)

- 4. What will be the level of political protection for staff when they conduct their studies. Will they be vulnerable to political or professional reprisals? Will they be able to speak “truth to power” or must they write comfortable reports?

# Matters for Consideration (cont)

- 5) What will be the level of access to government information that the office will have, both classified and non-classified?
- GAO has access to ALL government data and reports, except those within the CIA and the personal Office of the President.

# Matters for Consideration (cont)

- 6) Will the office be limited to producing reports, or will it also have responsibility for knowledge management? Will it be able to conduct evaluation syntheses, or is it restricted to primary data collection? Will it be asked to verify data from other studies or other offices, or is verification outside its purview?

# If you want to sustain this office

- If you want to sustain this office, you will need:
  - -Demand for and use of data/analyses
  - -Clear Roles and Responsibilities
  - -Trustworthy and credible information
  - -Accountability
  - -Capacity
  - -Incentives

# In Conclusion.....

- Knowledge is a form of power and evaluations are a form of knowledge.
- Expect folks to be both pleased and upset. It is the nature of the work. Don't expect to be loved because you do evaluations.

# In Conclusion....

- The Demand for Capacity Building never Ends!!
- The only way an organization can coast is downhill.
- Good evaluation offices/systems need sustained resources.

Thank You!!