❖ Preface ❖

*T*he *Program Evaluation Standards,* Third Edition, provides an integrated guide for evaluating programs that foster human learning and performance across the life span. These standards apply to a wide variety of settings in which learning takes place: schools, universities, communities, governmental organizations, medical and health-care organizations, the military, private sector enterprises, and nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations.

These 30 standards are organized into five groups corresponding to five key attributes of evaluation quality: *utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability.* Parts I through V of the text are each devoted to one attribute. Each begins with a section introducing the key concepts related to that attribute, and subsequent chapters provide individual standard names, short standard statements, clarifications, rationales, implementation suggestions, and lists of hazards to avoid. Embedded case narratives illustrate the standards, individually and in concert. References provide documentation and opportunities for further reading.

This book addresses a wide variety of needs experienced by those who commission, conduct, or use program and project evaluations. It provides guidance and encourages reflective practice related to

- whether and when to evaluate,
- how to select evaluators and other experts,
- the impact of cultures, contexts, and politics,
- communication and stakeholder engagement,
- technical issues in planning, designing, and managing evaluations,
- uses and misuses of evaluations,
- other issues related to evaluation quality, improvement, and accountability.

In general, this third edition followed a development process very similar to that of other editions, characterized by transparency and a strong

commitment to stakeholders' input. The process began in 2004 with a national survey of the membership of the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation sponsoring organizations (JCSEE member list on page vii) to help identify features and content that needed attention. More than 300 stakeholders provided comments and suggestions. A subsequent survey sent to selected stakeholders investigated possible formats for the standard statements. Reviews of the scholarship and practice literature from the last four decades provided perspectives on substantive issues. Numerous formal and informal presentations and discussions at national meetings and other venues helped to provide broad and specific perspectives on what the third edition should accomplish. The four-member task force, appointed and supervised by the full Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE), reviewed this input and prepared successive drafts. At each annual meeting of the JCSEE, members reviewed task force work and provided guidance. As drafts were ready, more than 75 national and international reviewers provided comments and suggestions in an open review process. Participants at six national hearings discussed the contents and overall quality. More than 50 practitioners and other users tried out these standards and provided comments prior to final editing and approval. Then, after favorable review by an independent validation panel in 2008, the JCSEE approved the standards for finalization. Following a 45-day comment period in 2009 and thorough review by the JCSEE, these standards were readied for final certification as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) program evaluation standards.

For readers who are new to *The Program Evaluation Standards,* we have tried to make your introduction to and subsequent use of the standards as valuable and enjoyable as possible. For those of you who have worked extensively with earlier editions, you will find much that is familiar and some important changes. The utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy standards retain their core importance. Case applications continue to be important for demonstrating how to apply the standards. However, in our surveys and reviews, we found that many stakeholders reported concerns about the individual cases at the end of each standard. These stakeholders asked for more integration of the standards into recommendations for reflective practice, taking into account the necessary trade-offs and compromises made necessary by limited resources and other features of evaluation settings. In order to create greater integration, this third edition provides a scenario for each attribute with applications spread across all the standards related to that scenario.

In addition, significant integrating themes, such as the roles of culture and context in evaluation, connect the attributes and standards with one another. For example, cultures and contexts have profound influences on

how evaluators attend to and increase utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability. These influences are enumerated and illustrated in ways that bridge the various attributes and individual standards. Similarly, a recurring theme in high-quality evaluations is stakeholder involvement, not just because it is the proper thing to do and leads to more useful evaluations, but also because of its impact on feasibility and accuracy and its essential role in evaluation accountability. A third theme, high-quality communication and the need for communication planning, is addressed repeatedly throughout the attributes and standards. The concern is not just that formal and informal reports need to be accurate, or that communication needs to be timely in order for evaluations to be useful. High-quality communication is required to deal with conflicts of interests, with human rights, with many feasibility issues, with data selection and collection, and with quality planning and implementation. This third edition pays consistent attention to building these thematic bridges across the attributes and standards, even as it maintains the unique focus required by the individual standards.

A third significant change in this third edition is increased emphasis on the need to improve and hold evaluations accountable through systematic metaevaluation. In this revision, a new attribute, *evaluation accountability*, has been added to the previous core attributes. It is presented in Part V of this volume. Evaluation accountability is supported by three standards calling for rigorous documentation of evaluations, and their internal and external metaevaluation for formative and summative purposes. The standards call explicitly for all evaluations to be systematically metaevaluated for improvement and accountability purposes.

A number of smaller changes responding to stakeholders' concerns and suggestions have been incorporated into this book. For example, the discussion of each attribute begins with an overview that clarifies and describes its importance in evaluation. The standard names and statements have been revised to make the language clearer and more concise. The rationales for the individual standards have been removed from the standard statements and explicated more thoroughly in the following text. Suggestions for implementation and lists of hazards guide the reader in applying the standards.

The processes leading to this third edition have taken place in a period of rapid change in knowledge development and dissemination. Currently, the printed book as we have known it is being transformed by delivery systems that can augment and even replace physical pages bound together in a single volume. Electronic reading and other computing devices and worldwide networks are making it easier to transport, store, and access highly dynamic and interactive libraries. These electronic files also encourage and facilitate new search procedures and interaction with the contents of documents. The JCSEE continues to work on techniques for making *The Program Evaluation*

Standards and its supporting materials more user-friendly and accessible. Please visit our website at http://www.jcsee.com to read ongoing updates about new developments.

Our Web site will also inform interested stakeholders about the JCSEE and how to become involved in standards use and development. The members of the JCSEE are devoted to and passionate about evaluation quality and the contributions that evaluation standards can make to evaluation practice. We are committed to the development, revision, dissemination, and use of high-quality, useful evaluation standards. However, these evaluation standards can remain vital only with stakeholder input. Please use these standards and report your experiences to us. Once a volume of standards is completed, JCSEE procedures require review and possible updating no less frequently than every five years, and thorough review and revision no less frequently than every 10 years.

Consider being part of this development process, which begins immediately and will lead to a fourth edition in due course. Most of all, please view these standards as your standards, and visit our website for additional information and to volunteer. We need your ideas and contributions.

All of us thank you for your interest in and continued use of *The Program Evaluation Standards.*