

How Can an Evaluation Advisory Committee Benefit a Project?

The NISE Network Example

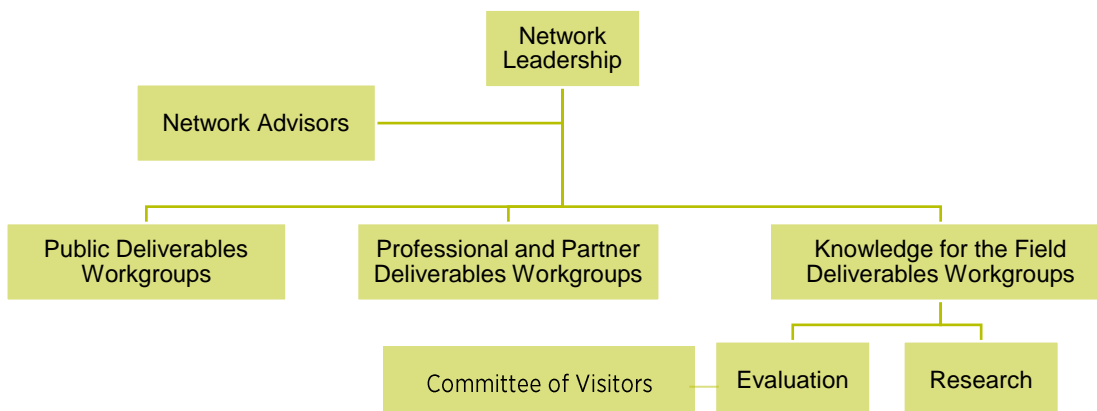
If your project, large or small, needs an external review panel or evaluation advisory committee to help oversee the extent to which project impacts were achieved, one option is to create an *Evaluation Committee of Visitors* (COV). A COV is commonly used when a project team wants to ensure a consistent outsider lens and broader perspective. As an external group, the COV reviews work and provides recommendations to improve project performance. In this example from the NISE Network, a COV was designated for evaluation efforts. Depending on how the evaluation activities are situated in your project, this role could be adapted as an evaluation oversight committee, advisory group, or advisor.

The NISE Network Example

The Nanoscale Informal Science Education Network (NISE Network) was a national community of researchers and informal science educators dedicated to fostering public awareness, engagement, and understanding of nanoscale science, engineering, and technology (www.nisenet.org). To measure the success of its efforts, NISE Network used a team of evaluators internal to the project community. Evaluation activities included various front-end, formative, and summative studies, including the facilitation of team-based inquiry, from 2008 to 2017.

A three-person COV was appointed to support and oversee the internal Evaluation workgroup. The COV ensured the workgroup: (1) maintained field-wide perspective, (2) remained accountable, and (3) received opportunities for professional mentoring. As illustrated in the figure below, the NISE Network had several workgroups. The COV advised only the Evaluation workgroup. COV members worked with Evaluation workgroup members to build a constructive, long-term relationship where team members' perspectives and experience were mutually heard and valued.

NISE Network structure showing how the External Committee of Visitors worked with the Evaluation workgroup.



Benefits of an Advisory Committee



Contributes field-wide perspective



Ensures accountability



Affords professional mentoring

The NISE Network COV in Practice

Across the entirety of the oversight period, the COV and Evaluation workgroup were in regular communication about methods, analyses, and interpretations. This took the form of regular email exchanges and in-person or virtual meetings about two times a year. The primary focus of COV activities was to encourage the Evaluation workgroup to think deeply about evaluation intent, questions, utility, and methods. The COV provided an annual memo to the National Science Foundation reporting their observations of the Evaluation workgroup's efforts and progress.

Future Considerations

Project planners, directors, and evaluators may see the need for an external review panel or evaluation advisory committee. NISE Network chose to use a COV as described above, though other evaluation oversight structures could have been applied. You may choose to have a COV advise an entire project rather than one part of it; to have an advisory team for both evaluation and research; or, to appoint a single consultant, rather than a committee, to oversee the project's evaluation activities.

Learn more details in *Evaluating the NISE Network: Reflections from the Evaluation Workgroup*.
<http://www.nisenet.org/catalog/evaluating-nise-network-reflections-evaluation-workgroup>