

EPTF and PEPFAR

Evaluating the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief: What a Difference A Word Makes

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The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program seeks to help prevent 7 million HIV infections, treat 2 million people with HIV/AIDS with antiretroviral therapy, and care for 10 million people with HIV/AIDS. Its legislative authority expires this year and AEA is working to ensure that the PEPFAR reauthorization documents incorporate thorough and thoughtful program evaluation.

In March, Victor Dukay of the Lundy Foundation contacted AEA member Jody Fitzpatrick requesting help in convincing Congress to include evaluation funding in the reauthorization of PEPFAR. Jody relayed the request to the Evaluation Policy Task Force (EPTF) Chair, and the EPTF went to work through its policy consultant, George Grob. While working on the evaluation funding issue, we also discovered significant problems involving evaluation nomenclature.

Lawmakers had previously emphasized that PEPFAR's funds (\$6 billion this year) be used for services and prevention activities, but not specifically for evaluation. However, they did require the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to conduct an evaluation of PEPFAR's early implementation. IOM's report, *PEPFAR Implementation: Progress and Promise*, (http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=11905) makes a compelling case for ongoing evaluation of the program.

Perhaps because of the IOM report, both the House and Senate reauthorization bills authorize "program monitoring, impact evaluation research, and operations research" for PEPFAR. This is good news. However, while these terms are defined in the proposed legislation, they are in themselves confusing and possible impediments to program evaluation.

For example, while the definition of operations research may suggest evaluation, there is a good chance that program implementers would look for operations research analysts to do this work rather than evaluators. This would change the focus of the studies and diminish opportunities for evaluators to contribute to the improvement of PEPFAR. It is also possible that the original drafters of this language intended not the traditional field of operations research but the more relevant idea of research on operations, an interpretation much more consonant with evaluation. Conversely, "impact evaluation research" sounds a lot more like research than impact evaluation, a problem that is not resolved by its definition.

These are just a few examples of how nuances in legislative phrasing can have significant ramifications. Other language in these bills also affects the budget issues raised by the Lundy Foundation. Furthermore, this legislation may reach well beyond the PEPFAR program. It could, for example, be used as a precedent for incorporating evaluation funding requirements into other authorization bills, especially for international development programs.

Currently, AEA is working in concert with the Lundy team to clarify and improve the language in the budget implementation reports that accompany this legislation. Our experience with the PEPFAR reauthorization is laying a foundation for future work in the policy arena.