Reviewer's report

Title: A scoping review about conference objectives and evaluative practices: How do we get more out of them?

Version: 1 Date: 16 March 2012

Reviewer: LAETITIA LIENART

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions

1. I am concerned about the methodology: nature of papers reviewed & very small/unbalanced sample of interviewed people. Concerning the nature of papers, my impression is that only “articles” were reviewed and that the team did not look at all at conference websites (which usually describe well the objectives of the conference and may also contain an evaluation report) or at conference evaluation reports (e.g., those published on the LIFT conference and the International AIDS Conference: http://www.iasociety.org/Default.aspx?pageld=562 ). Also, I am not sure if the team considered journals focusing on Evaluation such as the American Journal of Evaluation and The International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice.

2. In the section “evaluation methods”, it is surprising that action plans and follow-up surveys are not mentioned (this is something I have practiced as conference evaluator and that allowed be to collect a substantial amount of qualitative feedback from participants about the long-term influences/impacts of the conference on their work, their organization’s work and impact on policy at national and international level).

3. The section on theories/models is very technical and it’s really hard to understand how this could be applied. I would simplify it and add a short description for the other ones (right now, the text only describes 2 of them).

4. Page 12 (2nd paragraph): it is said that a response rate of 30% to 40% is mediocre. This really depends on the sample size: a sample of 3,000 respondents out of 9,000 delegates is likely to be representative of the total delegate population while a sample of 60 respondents out of 100 participants might not be representative. So, the response rate is not always a valid indicator of the evaluation quality and usefulness.

Minor essential revisions

5. In the introduction, I would further highlight the fact that very few conference organizers do evaluate their conference in a systematic way and only a minority publishes evaluation reports.

6. In the introduction, one gets the impression the team focuses on conference impact evaluation rather than on evaluation as a whole. This should be corrected.

7. Tables and figures should be part of the core text, have an accurate title and
contain a clear legend.

8. Figure 2 is really hard to understand. I would split it in several parts and replace the tables with horizontal bar charts. In addition, the abbreviation NR should be spelled out at least once.

9. Headers in italics are not visible at all (remove italics and bold or underline them instead).

10. Page 4 (2nd Paragraph, 1st sentence): the term “participating” is not accurate because the definition of stakeholders adopted in the review included organizers.

11. Page 7 (2nd Paragraph): it is said that 45 publications were included while the rest of the document says 44.

12. The term “conference evaluation framework” does not reflect very well the content of the framework which is also capturing the conference objectives. I would reformulate it as: conference objectives & evaluation framework.

13. Harmonize language/check consistency throughout the manuscript for the terms: conferences vs. meetings; evaluation vs. impact evaluation.

14. Although the language is correct, the document should be reviewed by an editor. Some sentences are a bit too long and technical.

Discretionary revisions

15. I would add in Appendix the list of the 44 papers that were reviewed.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'