

## **AEA Conference Proposal**

### **Navigating complexity: Crafting relevant stories through pragmatism and adapting to the unexpected**

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The field of program evaluation demands a nimble, adaptive approach when working within complex partnerships and underserved contexts. This paper aims to share a narrative on how the process of evaluation is influenced through the stories gathered from one such partnership. The partnership between Purdue University and Indianapolis Public school district sought to improve the academic outcomes of students within the largest urban school district in Indiana by preparing culturally competent, highly qualified career teachers to elevate student achievement in middle and high school STEM subjects. As with many programs operating in complex multi-partner settings, unexpected events led to changes in program implementation that necessitated adaptations in the evaluation approach. To meet dynamic program needs, the evaluation employed a pragmatic approach that leveraged collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders (community members, program administrators, and other partners) to identify research questions, modify evaluation plans, collect and analyze data, and disseminate findings in ways that were relevant and useful to the program and the various stakeholder groups. This paper highlights the critical importance of adaptability and collaboration in program evaluation within complex partnerships and underserved contexts. The pragmatic approach provides a framework for achieving this goal, which can facilitate a comprehensive understanding of program outcomes and foster collaboration between diverse partners, ultimately leading to a more effective response to community needs. This paper holds relevance to evaluators who work in unpredictable and complex contexts, especially those in underserved communities.