

Partnering with an Evaluator

Sections that are highlighted and italicized support equity-driven decisions.

What is evaluation? Evaluation involves making judgments about something (e.g., a program, a person's performance, a product) based on valid data collected from reliable sources (e.g., assessments and other data collection tools). The evaluation judgments or conclusions should align with the program goals and inform potential improvements and future program decisions.

The purpose of this document is to identify the necessary skills of an effective evaluator. This document is for those who would like this information as they interview and hire an Evaluator.

Background information. Designing and managing successful public programs is no easy task, especially if many people and organizations are involved in a program's funding and implementation. Professional evaluators contribute to this important work in a variety of ways.

If you or your organization are considering hiring an evaluator, *it is best to hire that person as soon as possible and involve the evaluator in developing the program to be evaluated.* Involving an evaluator after the program is implemented and data needs are high often results in inadequate data collection, frustration, and disappointment.

Evaluations prepared by professional, independent evaluators help prevent information gaps by

- Improving knowledge and understanding of how programs work
- Strengthening public accountability
- Assessing program effectiveness and efficiency
- Identifying opportunities and pathways to achieving objectives, outcomes, and efficiencies.

Key Considerations When Partnering with an Evaluator

❑ Evaluation is an interdisciplinary field that encompasses many areas of expertise.

Many evaluators have advanced degrees and often work collaboratively with colleagues in allied fields, including

- Public Administration
- Applied Social Research
- Policy Analysis
- Public Health and Translation Research
- Psychology
- Educational Research
- Economics
- Political science
- Sociology
- Performance Auditing
- Statistics
- Operations Research

❑ Qualities of a highly skilled evaluator include

Systematic Inquiry. Evaluators develop evaluation plans and models of the evaluation process that link program goals to data collection and performance benchmarks.

Competence. Evaluators are highly trained and skilled in aspects of implementing an evaluation plan, including developing data collection tools.

Integrity/Honesty. Evaluators display honesty and integrity in their own behavior and attempt to ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.

Respect for People. Evaluators respect the security, dignity, and self-worth of respondents, program participants, clients, and all impacted or involved in the evaluation.

Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare. Evaluators consider the diversity of general and public interests and values that may be related to the evaluation.

□ An extensive array of evaluation methods can be applied and adapted to various types of programs, depending upon the circumstances and stages of the program's implementation. Fundamentally, *all evaluation methods should be context-sensitive, culturally relevant, and methodologically sound.* Common evaluation methods include

- Evaluation Plans
- Logic models and program theories
- Need Assessments
- Early implementation reviews
- Sampling methodology
- Compliance reviews
- Performance reviews
- Qualitative and quantitative designs
- Case studies
- Quasi-experimental design
- Randomized field experiments
- Special focus studies addressing emerging issues
- Performance measurement systems
- Cost-benefit / cost-effectiveness analysis
- Meta-analysis
- Client and participant satisfaction surveys

□ Best practices in evaluation include the following. These practices help ensure evaluations provide valuable and reliable information to program managers, policymakers, and stakeholders.

Consultation. Consult with all major stakeholders in the design of evaluations.

Evaluation in Program Design. When feasible, use evaluation principles in the initial design of programs through program logic models and broader analysis of environmental systems, setting the stage for evaluating the program throughout its life cycle.

Multiple Methods of Data Collection. Use multiple data collection methods whenever appropriate, offsetting the shortcoming of any one method with the strengths of another, and ensure that the chosen methods are methodologically sound, contextually, and culturally sensitive.

Evaluation Use. Identify stakeholder information needs and timelines, meet those needs via timed reporting cycles and clear reporting mechanisms, and build stakeholder capacity to understand and use evaluation results.

Collaborative Evaluation Teams. Promote the formation of evaluation teams, including representatives from allied fields with rich and appropriate mixes of capabilities to follow programs' emergence, implementation, and effectiveness. Stress the importance of relevant education and experience in evaluation while recognizing that evaluation is a complex multidisciplinary endeavor.

Culturally Competent Evaluation Practices. Use appropriate evaluation strategies and skills in working with culturally diverse groups. Seek self-awareness of culturally based assumptions and the understanding of the worldviews of culturally diverse participants and stakeholders. Diversity may be in terms of race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, socioeconomics, or other factors pertinent to the evaluation context.

Effective Reporting. Write reports to fit the needs of program decision-makers and stakeholders. Develop evaluation reports covering evaluative information, including accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness for a target audience.

Independence. While seeking advice from all sides, retain control of the evaluation design, performance, and reporting. Evaluative independence is necessary for credibility and success.

Determine what needs to be evaluated and when the evaluator can be hired based on funding or other important factors.

Determine how critical to your project the evaluation findings will be. The more critical the evaluation findings will determine how knowledgeable you need your evaluator to be.

Determine how much you can pay the evaluator. An evaluator is highly educated, and their experience level can increase what they will bill for their services and the competitiveness of their salary.