

Evaluation as an Integral Component of the Research Development Process

Katie Allen & Cynthia Shuman, Office of Educational Innovation and Evaluation, Kansas State University
<https://www.k-state.edu/oeie>

Benefits of Project Evaluation

Improvement

Evaluation can assess how well programs are working

- Estimate the extent to which desired outcomes are being achieved
- Use data to inform decision-making
- Identify whether improvements are needed to increase effectiveness with respect to objectives
- Proactively optimize program performance

Accountability

Evaluations demonstrate internal and external accountability for the use of public resources

- Demonstrate fiscally responsible management
- Establish evidence that goals are being met or services are being delivered as promised
- Quantify “realized” impacts of the program

Results

- Find out “what works” within the context of the project
- Build knowledge for the field
- Improve staff’s frontline practice with participants
- Increase capacity to conduct a critical self-assessment and plan for the future

Unintended Benefits

- Participants feel listened to
- Facilitates reflection to review systems and processes
- New networks and connections can be formed
- Increased awareness of the program/project



How to Plan for a Project Evaluation

Setting Realistic Expectations

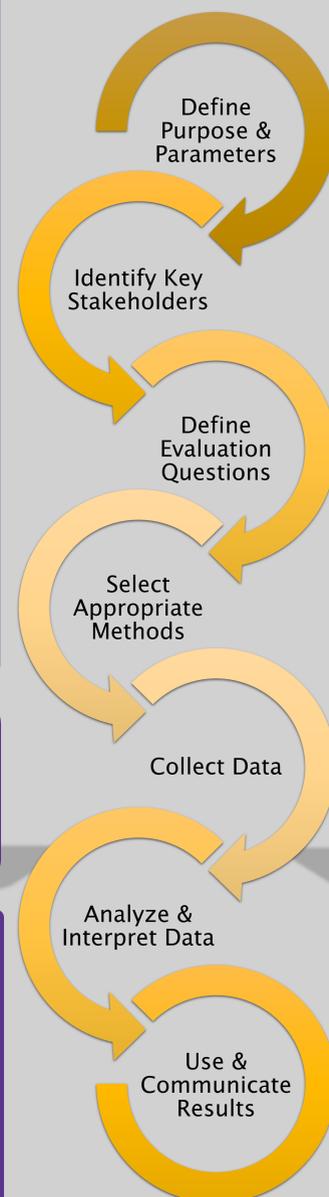
- Review the funder’s evaluation expectations
 - Purpose / Preliminary plan for using the evaluation results
 - Key questions
 - Format of evaluation results
- Plan your evaluation as you develop your program, this includes the grant proposal stage
- Share program information with the evaluator and talk about your project’s evaluation needs and questions
- Incorporate intermediate milestones into the evaluation plan
- Keep Intended outcomes and evaluation report use in mind as you plan the evaluation

Program and Contract Requirements

- Understand evaluation requirements for your program and funder
- When developing an evaluation contract, consult with your agency contract staff as well as the appropriate staff in collaborating institutions
- Set clear expectations up front
- Incorporate interim reporting
- Monitor contract expenditures
- Review evaluation timelines

Considering Cost

- Time is money
- Distinguish the “must know” vs. the “nice to know”
- Beware of “project creep” or “scope creep”
- Consider a fixed-cost contract rather than a time plus fixed fee
- Take time to plan – It often saves money in the long run



How to Locate an Evaluator

American Evaluation Association

“find an evaluator” tool <https://eval.org>

Your Institution

There may be someone on faculty/staff who does evaluation work

Word of Mouth

Ask colleagues or others in your discipline for evaluators they would recommend

Key Criteria when Selecting An Evaluator

Step 1: Identify a pool of candidates with experience conducting evaluation

Step 2: Review information or websites from candidates

- Do they have formal academic preparation or specialized training?
- Do they have evaluation expertise and experience?
- What is their evaluation philosophy or approach?
- Are they familiar with the program area or funding agency?
- Do they have sufficient time and resources (including staff) to do the work?
- Consider geography: Will you need in-person service? If this is needed frequently, may want to consider using a local evaluator rather than one at a distance.
- Personal style: Can you work with this evaluator/group?
- Cost: Is the cost reasonable for the scope of the project and/or competitive?
- Check references and ask to see samples of work products

Characteristics to Look for in an Evaluator

Good evaluation requires a combination of skills that are rarely found in one person.

Good evaluators

- Have experience in the type of evaluation needed
- Are comfortable with both quantitative and qualitative data sources and analysis
- Able to work with a wide variety of stakeholders, including representatives of target populations
- Can develop innovative approaches to evaluation while considering the realities affecting a program (e.g., a small budget)
- Incorporate evaluation into all program activities
- Understand both the potential benefits and risks of evaluations
- Educate program personnel in designing and conducting the evaluation
- Will give staff the full findings (i.e., will not gloss over or fail to report certain findings)
- Able to clearly present findings orally and in writing appropriate for the intended audience
- Able to communicate with a wide variety of individuals

References

- Chappelle, E. F., MPH. (2011, January 11). *CDC Coffee Break: How Do I Work with an Internal Evaluator or External Evaluation Contractor?* [PDF]. Center for Disease Control and Prevention.
- *Find an Evaluator*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <https://nrepp-learning.samhsa.gov/find-evaluator>
- *Finding and Choosing an External Evaluator* [PDF]. (n.d.). New York, NY: New York State Health Foundation.
- *How to Find a Capable Evaluator to Conduct a Rigorous Evaluation of an Educational Program or Practice: A Brief Guide*. (2007, June). Retrieved April 16, 2018, from https://cyfar.org/sites/default/files/Child_Trends-2007_10_01_RB_WhyProgEval.pdf
- Metz, A. J., Ph.D. (2007, October). *Why Conduct a Program Evaluation? Five Reasons why Evaluation Can Help an Out-of-School Time Program*. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/Child_Trends-2007_10_01_RB_WhyProgEval.pdf
- *Program Evaluation: Why, What, and When to Evaluate*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <https://www.nrcsp.org/research-evaluation/overview/evaluation/identifying-recruiting-evaluator>
- *Selecting the Evaluation Team*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <https://www.nrcsp.org/research-evaluation/overview/evaluation/identifying-recruiting-evaluator>
- Thesing, J. (2000, September). *Traits of an Outstanding Program Evaluator*. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <http://www.ncsl.org/legislators-staff/legislative-staff/program-evaluation/traits-of-an-outstanding-program-evaluator.aspx>
- Unintended benefits of program evaluation. (n.d.). Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <http://nsticonsulting.com.au/unintended-benefits-of-program-evaluation/>