

A developmental evaluator can be an external consultant, a trusted peer or an internal team member assigned to the role. Each choice has advantages and disadvantages. It's important to consider the degree to which the evaluator understands the domain in which the organization works, their familiarity with the organization's culture and, if internal, whether they also have functional or decision-making responsibilities in implementing the project or initiative. The way in which a developmental evaluator role is filled can evolve over time so different combinations of the above traits can be used during developmental evaluation.

### Key considerations for choosing a Developmental Evaluator

#### Credibility

Developmental evaluators need to have the trust of key people involved with the innovative initiative. At the same time, the developmental evaluator's proximity to action may reduce credibility in the eyes of some funders or other stakeholders. Evaluators must balance being both sufficiently close and independent. Experience and expertise in evaluation methods can enhance credibility, but it's vitally important that evaluators are flexible and not overly attached to specific evaluation approaches.

#### Domain expertise & content knowledge

Knowledge of the subject matter is an advantage in the developmental evaluation process. It can also enhance credibility with internal and external stakeholders. Having a current understanding of the field enables a deeper level of inquiry and can assist the evaluator in framing the discussion more appropriately.

#### External vs. internal

An external evaluator can bring fresh and candid perspective as well as needed focus to the evaluation. The flexible time frame of innovation, however, means the duration of relationship with a developmental evaluator may be unpredictable.

A full-time staff person in the DE role may mean better access and greater likelihood of capturing important lessons as they emerge. The primary risk is that their DE role becomes secondary to other responsibilities.

While the DE role could be played by someone with leadership responsibilities, the general experience is that innovative leaders are so focused on development that trying to play the DE role is a distraction.

If organizational issues are impacting the development initiative, then the perspective of someone external is an advantage.

### Skills of a Developmental Evaluator

Developmental evaluators are often generalists – able to assess what is needed and draw upon an array of skills and competencies. Particularly useful are skills in synthesis, listening and asking difficult questions in a non-judgmental way. The developmental evaluator is a “critical friend” who can challenge assumptions while drawing upon best practices and research, as well as understanding the implications of intervention from a social and political perspective.

While it's important that any evaluator have good methodological skills, they must have strong conceptual and pattern recognition abilities as well as skills in both process facilitation and communication. It's also helpful for an evaluator to have some familiarity with organizational change and strategy.

#### Truth to power

A developmental evaluator needs to be able to give both positive and negative feedback in ways that can be heard and acted upon. While an evaluator may facilitate the search for a solution, or may even offer a solution, their primary responsibility is to call attention to the developing situation through empirical feedback based on data, observations, experience and judgment.

DE is a much more embedded process than a traditional external evaluation. As a result, negotiating with people about expectations, roles and process is even more important. The evaluator may see issues that, if left unaddressed, would have implications for the long-term health of the initiative. Because questioning and challenging is an accepted part of their role, there is a certain freedom to articulate observations in a way that is less likely to be seen as personal

#### Process facilitation

As developmental evaluation is more team-oriented, the evaluator must have an ability to facilitate team interactions and to effectively insert questions, observations and synthesis into meetings. The evaluator has to make judgments about when to play a more proactive role in facilitating and when to let others (internal or external) animate a process.

There are two important elements of the developmental evaluator's work: process and content. They can remind people when important process needs are being circumvented or, conversely, overdone. They also help people follow up on processes and bring a level of accountability to a group. Actions may be abandoned along the way but within the frame of a developmental evaluation process, such decisions are intentional.

#### Pattern recognition

In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, expertise is defined less by having answers and more by the ability to recognize situations and patterns. A developmental evaluator needs strong perceptual skills and must be able to identify and name what's going on: *“What does it mean to go to the next level? What is the ‘it’ being developed? How is this situation or result unique?”* The developmental role is highly synthetic – it involves being able to extract common themes and learnings from an array of information sources in a way that does not oversimplify important nuances and differences



### Peel Region Evaluation Platform

#### Listening and communicating

A developmental evaluator must be an active listener; someone who is able to attend to the said and the unsaid. This makes it possible to ask the pointed questions that expose implicit assumptions. It's also important to know when to speak up and when to let an issue take its natural course within a group's discussion.

#### Tolerance for ambiguity

Not only must the developmental evaluator be personally comfortable with ambiguity, part of the role is to help others to deal with uncertainty. Ambiguities can drive people crazy. The developmental evaluator helps people deal with uncertainty and take action without prematurely clarifying or reducing it.

Checklist for assessing who might be an appropriate developmental evaluator

Y / N	Question	Rationale
Y / N	Does the evaluator have enough time available to commit to the DE role?	Developmental evaluation, like any evaluation, requires being systematic and thorough.
Y / N	Is the evaluator in a position to speak candidly?	Interpersonal communication tends to present different challenges for internal and external evaluators.
Y / N	Will the evaluator be able to get enough perspective on the innovation?	Evaluator need to be both close enough and removed enough to see changes even if they are subtle or incremental.
Y / N	Is this evaluator sufficiently familiar with the issues and/or the domain area of our nonprofit organization?	Familiarity can help an evaluator know where to look and can give their perspective credibility
Y / N	Is it critical that the evaluator understand our organization's culture?	Understanding the culture may help to interpret cues and to navigate the politics of an organization.
Y / N	Does the evaluator share the values our innovation is built on?	Trusting an evaluator's guidance and interpretations will be difficult if values are not shared.
Y / N	Is the individual comfortable dealing with uncertainty and rapid change?	Developmental evaluators must be able to support others in moving forward even while things are unclear

**Adapted from:**

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