



When planning for a *summative evaluation*, it's important we select someone who brings the capacity to understand our program as well as the skills and experience needed to conduct a proper evaluation. Evaluators can come from an external source (a consulting firm) or an internal source (a program staff member).

Using an internally-sourced evaluator may be less costly and more effective in soliciting staff input. However, it also adds to staff workload. This person should have experience in evaluation, collecting and working with data, and analyzing information. Additionally, the staff member will need resources to track participant data (e.g. participation and progress in the program, etc.).

If there isn't enough technical expertise within our organization, an external evaluator can be engaged. This may be costlier but less time consuming for current staff. A disadvantage to this approach is the lack of staff engagement and input in the process. However, continually working with an external evaluator can help build long-term evaluation capacity within our organization.

Another alternative would be to contract with an evaluation expert to provide support in the more technical aspect of the evaluation. This may be a happy medium because it may thwart unneeded costs and ensures program staff will be actively involved in the process.

Below is an assessment that will help determine which evaluation scenario best fits our needs:

1. **Mostly Relying on External Evaluators** – The external evaluator may be an individual, research institute, or consulting firm and serves as the team leader supported by in-house staff.
2. **Relying on Internal Evaluators and Working with an External Consultant** – An internal evaluator serves as the team leader and is supported by an outside consultant.
3. **Relying on Internal Evaluators** – An in-house evaluator serves as the team leader and is supported by program staff.

Resources for Appropriate Team Selection	Yes	No
Does our program have funds designated for evaluation purposes?		
Have we successfully conducted previous evaluations of similar programs or services?		
Are existing program practices and information collection forms useful for evaluation purposes?		
Can we collect evaluation information as part of our regular program operations?		
Is there program staff that has training and experience in evaluation-related tasks?		
Are there advisory board members who have training and experience in evaluation-related tasks?		



Interpreting the results:

- If the answer to all the resource questions is “no,” it’s worth thinking about postponing an evaluation until funds can be obtained to hire an outside evaluator, at least on a consultancy basis. Funds for evaluation purposes may need to be budgeted to support future program planning efforts.
- If the answer to question 1 is “yes,” but “no” to all other questions, maximum evaluation assistance will be needed and an outside evaluator with in-house support is probably the best choice.
- If the answer is “no” to question 1, but “yes” to most of the other resource questions, then using in-house staff only may be an appropriate choice. If there is a plan to use evaluation findings to seek program funding, we should consider using an in-house evaluation team with an outside consultant. It may be worth looking to other areas of the agency’s budget for some evaluation funds.
- If the answer to question 1 is “yes” and the remainder of the answers are mixed (some “yes” and some “no”), we need to think about the extent to which the evaluation should rely on external evaluators.

Tips on Engaging a Professional Evaluator

When hiring an external evaluator, here are some key steps to follow:

1. Determine who is qualified
2. Divide responsibilities
3. Create a contract

1. Determine who is qualified

Finding a qualified evaluator who understands our programs can be challenging. Research organizations, consulting firms, and universities are potential places for finding a qualified evaluator. Before interviewing prospective evaluators, determine which qualifications are most important. We may need evaluators who know our program or the target population, or it may be more important that evaluators have specific technical expertise.

At the very least, evaluators should possess formal training in evaluation, professional orientation, previous performance of evaluation tasks, and personal styles that fit with our organization.



Assessing Evaluator Qualifications

Use the checklist that follows to determine whether the evaluator meets the determined criteria.

	Well Qualified	Not Well Qualified	Cannot Determine if Qualified
To what extent does the formal training of the potential evaluator qualify them to conduct evaluation? (Consider major or minor degree specializations; specific courses in evaluation methodology; whether the potential evaluator has conducted applied research in a human service setting, etc.)			
To what extent does the previous evaluation experience of the potential evaluator qualify them to conduct evaluation studies? (Consider length and relevance of experience.)			
	Acceptable Match	Unacceptable Match	Cannot Determine Match
To what extent is the professional orientation of the potential evaluator a good match for the evaluation approach required? (Consider philosophical and methodological orientations.)			
	Well Qualified	Not Well Qualified	Cannot Determine if Qualified
To what extent does the previous performance of the potential evaluator qualify them to conduct evaluation studies for our project? What prior experience do they have in similar settings? (Look at work samples or contact references.)			
	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Cannot Determine Acceptability
To what extent are the personal styles and characteristics of the potential evaluator acceptable? (Consider items such as honesty, character,			



interpersonal communication skills, personal mannerisms, ability to resolve conflicts, etc.)			
	Well Qualified and Acceptable	Not Well Qualified and/or Unacceptable	Cannot Determine if Qualified or Acceptable
Based on the questions above, to what extent is the potential evaluator qualified and acceptable to conduct the evaluation?			

2. Dividing Up Responsibilities

When hiring an external organization or consultant, we'll need to think about how evaluation tasks should be divided. The input of an evaluation expert at the planning stage is important to ensure that the evaluation design is appropriate for answering the evaluation questions.

Program staff need to be involved in the evaluation process, too. The involvement of program leaders and staff in making key evaluation decisions is essential, so that the evaluation doesn't become a process that only the evaluator understands.

POTENTIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EVALUATION CONTRACTOR

- ✓ *Develop an evaluation plan, in conjunction with program staff.*
- ✓ *Provide monthly or quarterly progress reports to staff (written or in person).*
- ✓ *Train project staff. Training topics could include: using evaluation instruments, information collection activities, or participant/case selection for sampling purposes.*
- ✓ *Design information collection instruments or select standardized instruments or inventories*
- ✓ *Implementing information collection procedures such as: interviews with project staff or coordinating/ collaborating agency staff; focus groups; service delivery observation; case record review; coding, entering and cleaning data; data analysis*
- ✓ *Establish and oversee procedures ensuring confidentiality during all phases of the evaluation.*
- ✓ *Write interim (quarterly, biannual, yearly) evaluation reports and the final evaluation report.*
- ✓ *Attend project staff meetings, advisory board or interagency coordinating committee meetings, and grantee meetings sponsored by the funding agency.*

POTENTIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PROGRAM MANAGER

- ✓ *Educate the evaluator about the program's operations and objectives, characteristics of the participant population, and the benefits that program staff expect from the evaluation.*
- ✓ *Provide feedback to the evaluator on whether instruments are appropriate for the target population and provide input during the evaluation plan phase.*
- ✓ *Keep the outside evaluator informed about changes in the program's operations.*
- ✓ *Specify information the evaluator should include in the report.*
- ✓ *Assist in interpreting evaluation findings.*
- ✓ *Provide information to all staff about the evaluation process.*
- ✓ *Monitor the evaluation contract and completion of work products (such as reports).*
- ✓ *Ensure that program staff is fulfilling their responsibilities (such as data collection).*
- ✓ *Supervise in-house evaluation activities, such as completion of data collection instruments and data entry.*

Below is an example of division evaluation responsibilities successfully utilized by an outreach program:

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EVALUATION CONTRACTOR

- Designing the evaluation process and writing up the evaluation plan
- Developing the evaluation instruments and forms
- Designing the database used for tracking ongoing information
- Analyzing the information collected
- Compiling the information into yearly reports
- Possibly continuing to support the staff to maintain and further develop the tracking system after the evaluation is completed

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PROGRAM STAFF

- Printing, tracking, and administering surveys and staff evaluation forms
- Entering the survey and staff evaluation data into the tracking system
- Entering student and staff information into the tracking system
- Providing the data for analysis and reporting to the evaluation contractor

3. Create a Contract

The contract spells out the division of evaluation responsibilities between the evaluator and the program staff and the level of contact between the two. Some program managers have found that outside evaluators, after they are hired, delegate many of their responsibilities to less experienced staff and have little contact with the program managers or the staff. To some extent, a contract can protect from this type of situation.

The following are some of the questions that should be discussed and clarified when negotiating a contract with evaluators.

- What resources are available for this evaluation? What cost estimates can be made (e.g. in money, staff time, program disruption)?
- What's the work history and working style of the prospective evaluators? Do they have a portfolio of reports and artifacts from completed studies?
- What will be the primary sources of data? What arrangements would be necessary to gain access to these sources? Are rules of access needed? Where and how would the data be kept?
- What would be a suitable plan for reporting the findings? Informal feedback? Progress reports? Final presentations? Are the evaluators free to publish findings in professional journals? What checks will be made on the effectiveness of the evaluation feedback?
- What will be the response to unexpected changes in program? How will conflict be resolved?
- What more needs to be said about the purposes and expectations for the evaluation study

Adapted from: <http://toolkit.pellinstitute.org/evaluation-guide/plan-budget/select-an-evaluator/>