

EVALUATION BRIEF

Locating and Hiring an Evaluator for Your Grant

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The evaluation is a team effort and the evaluator should serve as the team leader. Typically, the evaluator works with the team, which includes project staff, to develop the research questions, logic model, evaluation design and plan, data collection instruments, sampling plan, analysis plan, and final report.

Options

There are three general options regarding the type of evaluator you may consider for your project.

- The first is an outside evaluator, or third-party evaluator, who serves as a team leader and is supported by in-house staff.
- The second is an in-house evaluator who serves as the team leader and is supported by program staff and an outside consultant who assists with some of the evaluation tasks.
- The third is an in-house evaluator who serves as the team leader and is supported by program staff.

Issues to Consider

Grantees need to decide on the resources to be committed to program evaluation. When making decisions about your evaluation, you may want to consider the following:

- How much money can you devote to the evaluation? Your program's resources and capabilities are factors to consider when making decisions about hiring an evaluator and determining the evaluator's role. Think about how much of your agency's resources can be devoted to in-house staff conducting evaluation activities such as data collection.
- In general, when resources are limited, use an evaluator's time to provide guidance on design, to help with data analysis, and to write the final report. (If you have someone outside of the project write the report, this lends greater objectivity).
- Decide whether, and to what extent, the evaluator you hire needs to have substantive knowledge of your project's content area. For example, if evaluating the effectiveness of a substance abuse treatment program, does the evaluator need to have a background in substance abuse research?
- It is most important that your evaluator has experience in research and program evaluation. You will need to decide on how to strike a balance between the



evaluator's experience with the subject matter and the evaluator's experience in program evaluation.

Suggestions for Finding an Evaluator

- Prepare a job description for the evaluator that clearly specifies the tasks to be performed, expectations, and includes a checklist with the necessary skills and knowledge you are seeking in an evaluator.
- Consider looking at colleges and universities as well as private research firms.
- A good strategy for locating an evaluator is to network with other grantees and discuss their experiences. Who have they found to conduct evaluations in the past? What has been their experience working with various evaluators?
- National Resource Centers sometimes can help you to find local evaluators. Resource Centers can provide you with a list they maintain of outside consultants or their own staff who may be qualified. Examples include the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement; the Muskie School of Public Service; and the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues.
- Consider the issue of the evaluator's proximity to your agency. How easily can your evaluator conduct face-to-face meetings with staff and clients? If you think this is necessary for your evaluation, this may be a factor you will want to consider. Also, consider your resources for supporting a long distance evaluator to travel to your site, if necessary.
- When funds are very limited, consider finding qualified graduate students at nearby colleges or universities to assist with evaluation tasks. In lieu of being able to pay students a salary, some grantees have worked out internship opportunities with the university or will provide the university with access to their data for research.

Source: Adapted from DeSantis, J. & Kaye, E. (2004). Technical Assistance on Evaluation. Presentation at the Children's Bureau Grantees Meeting. March 2004. Washington, D.C.