

Working With an External Evaluator: The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program

Tip Sheet

Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation

October 2018

An evaluation is an opportunity to learn more about your home visiting program and use the information to make positive changes. Below are key factors to consider before working with an external evaluator to plan, carry out, and report on an evaluation.

Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program awardees should work with their evaluator to make sure their evaluation and reports meet federal requirements and their organization's needs. Awardees are responsible for oversight and management of the evaluation and ensuring the timeliness and quality of all deliverables. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Project Officers (POs) and technical assistance (TA) providers can help.



1. What kind of evaluation do you want and how will you use the results?

- What are the priority topic areas or needs for your service population?
- What kind of information could inform program improvement?
- What kind of information could help home visitors do their job better?
- How will you report and use the evaluation findings within your organization?
- Which stakeholders should receive evaluation findings and prepublication releases (e.g., program staff, home visiting models, and community partners)?
- How will your evaluation fit into your organization's learning agenda?

A successful evaluation can help you make positive changes in your program. The first step is finding an objective evaluator with the expertise you need.





2. What kind of evaluator do you need?

- Does the evaluator have the necessary technical skills (e.g., ability to analyze survey data vs. focus group data)?
- Does the evaluator have experience with the topic areas you want to explore?
- Does the evaluator's cost fit your budget?
- Has the evaluator successfully completed evaluations of a similar type and scope?
- Does the evaluator have the staff and time necessary to carry out the work?
- Does the evaluator have references and a published track record?
- Does the evaluator have a history of collaboration and partnership with programs?



3. How can you find and select an evaluator?

- What evaluators are available through local colleges, universities, or nonprofits?
- Do colleagues within and outside your organization have recommendations?
- Are there evaluators who have published research on the topic areas you want to explore?



4. How can you define the evaluator's roles and responsibilities?

- Does your contract with the evaluator address the scope of work, timeline, progress reports, deliverables, cost, resumes for key personnel, and your role overseeing the contract?
- Does the contract support your need to meet federal requirements?
 - Will the evaluator work with your PO and TA provider to develop the evaluation plan and revise it as necessary to meet HRSA approval?
 - Will the evaluator engage in regular updates on evaluation progress with your PO and TA provider and make course corrections as necessary?
 - Will the evaluator work with you and your stakeholders (e.g., families, program staff, and home visiting models) to help interpret the findings and make recommendations for the summary evaluation report for HRSA?
 - Will the evaluator work with you, your PO, and your TA provider to develop the summary evaluation report for HRSA and revise it as necessary? Are meeting these federal expectations built into the evaluation timeline? Will the report include sufficient information on the evaluation question(s), design, implementation, results, and limitations to inform dissemination of findings and to allow HRSA to describe results across projects? (See [*Final Report with Evaluation Checklist for Awardees.*](#))

- Does the contract align with your organization’s plans?
 - Which activities are priorities for the evaluator to take on, and which ones can your organization handle?
 - Who will obtain institutional review board (IRB) approval?
 - Will the evaluator have contact with local implementing agencies or program participants?
 - How will ethical evaluation practices and proper informed consent be ensured?
 - Will the evaluator develop evaluation measures or use existing measures?
 - What data analysis will the evaluator be responsible for?
 - Will the evaluator provide your organization all the data collected through the evaluation upon completion of the evaluation contract?
 - Who is responsible for preparing internal and external evaluation reports?
- Does the contract specify government ownership of the data and ensure your organization will receive data collected during the contract period?
- Will the evaluator share publications and presentations with your organization prior to sharing information related to the evaluation externally?



5. How can you create a realistic evaluation timeline?

Here are some sample time estimates to consider. Yours may vary.

Month 1–3:

- Find and selecting an evaluator (up to 3 months)
- Finalize evaluator contract (1–3 months)
- Work with evaluator to develop an evaluation plan (1-2 months)

Month 4–7:

- Evaluation plan due to HRSA: Month 4
- Work with your TA providers and PO to refine your evaluation plan (1 month)
- Obtain HRSA approval (1 month)
- Obtain IRB approval (1–3 months)
- Begin evaluation after HRSA approval (month 7)

Month 8–24:

- Conduct evaluation

Month 25–27:

- Submit final evaluation report and HRSA summary evaluation report (90 days after grant ends)

Month 28–30:

- Revise and finalize your HRSA summary evaluation report as needed

For more information about working with an evaluator, contact the DOHVE team: Susan Zaid, M.A., Deputy Project Director, James Bell Associates, szaid@jbassoc.com.

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