



## Evaluation Collaboration: Who Can Help? How Can We Work Together?

Evaluation is a mindful and planned effort to capture the meaning and impact of our work; our results can help future practitioners in their efforts to prevent sexual violence and support survivors' healing. Evaluation also helps keep us ethical and accountable to the communities and programs we serve. The tips within this resource are meant as a starting place to begin creating an intentional evaluative practice within your coalition and while working with local community-based sexual violence programs. As part of a three-part toolkit, this resource will focus on working with individuals and organizations outside the organization: professional evaluators and funders.

### **Working with Professional Evaluators:**

In some cases, programs may have the opportunity to work with a professional evaluator to develop evaluation resources or conduct assessments. Professional evaluators may be associated with universities, with private evaluation firms, or may be independent contractors with expertise in the field. You may find evaluators by seeking referrals from colleagues, by reaching out to local academic institutions, or simply by conducting an online search ("evaluation and research firms in [state/territory]"). For most funding sources, including OVW (as allowable), it is important to put out an RFP for an evaluator; however, programs can make a selection based on *value* and not necessarily by the lowest price. Many funding streams at the federal, state, and local level may be used, in part, to support program evaluation (some have restrictions on research, but still allow program evaluation). Foundations and other private entities often have small grants available to support program evaluation.

Consider the following when developing a request for proposals and the eventual contract:

- Will the researcher need to be familiar and/or have a background in anti-violence efforts or related work?
- How will the final products (e.g. report, presentation, resource) be copyrighted and attributed? Who will be the "publisher," "author," and/or "owner" of the tangible products?

- Who will own and/or have access to the data?
- How will the collected data be stored and kept confidential? For example, will SPSS, Excel, or database files be sent securely to the organization? Or will the consultant evaluator sign an agreement to keep the data secure and ask permission to use it for other research or evaluation efforts?
- How much input will program staffers or other individuals from the field have? For example, will the evaluator be required to work with an advisory committee? If so, make that note in the RFP.
- Request references from similar projects. The similarity may not be sexual assault related – rather, if seeking someone to conduct a needs assessment, request experience and references from other needs assessment projects. Follow up on references before contracting.
- Ensure that the final product and timelines are detailed in both the RFP and the contract.
- Remember to focus the intended product– and allow the bidding researchers to develop their own methodology. They may have creative ways to gather data that you might not have considered.

When possible, find someone who understands both worlds – traditional evaluation and the sexual assault field or similar advocacy work. They are going to be more familiar with victim sensitivity and empowerment, creative ways to evaluate our services, and may be more flexible in their designs. If it's not possible to find an evaluator who understands both worlds, pair the evaluator with someone who has extensive or in-depth knowledge of advocacy and clinical processes. Collaboration works best when the evaluator values program input just as much as coalitions and programs value evaluator input.

Rape crisis advocacy and professional research evaluation sometimes have similar goals but differing ideas about how to achieve them. A possible alternative to working with an evaluator consultant would be to partner with a local researcher or evaluator to build internal skills and readiness for evaluation. These capacity-building efforts should seek to be long-term and sustainable; the focus being staff learning and skill-building, as opposed to a single project or resource list. Often an intern or consultant leaves a binder of something that looks great and is well thought out, but is not useful or replicable after their departure. Invest in building evaluation skills as an agency and the results will work, local programs, and the survivors served.

### **Working with Funders**

While many organizations implement evaluation because it is valuable and necessary for our work, we may also come to evaluation at the request of the agencies which fund us. In many cases, this can lead to a fruitful partnership between funder and agency, but it can also be complicated to work effectively with funders on evaluation efforts.

As with all evaluation, it's important to determine the ultimate goal. Funders may have the same relationship with evaluation that many practitioners do: that is, they know it's important, but they don't always know how to implement it or what it would mean to do so. They may not really know what they want to find out. When working with funders, especially local or state funders with whom there is an established or burgeoning relationship, it's important to begin with a fact-finding mission. If possible, have a meeting or find a way to determine:

- What is it the funder really wants to know? They themselves may not know the answer to that question – it could be helpful to prepare information already available.
- Does the funder truly understand program objectives? It will be easier to help steer them toward meaningful measures when intended changes and goals are clear and focused.
- Is the funder familiar with the literature? Many funders don't realize that sexual assault intervention and prevention are both in an evidence-gathering phase, and that 'evidence based practices' are still largely being developed in the field. Be sure to have high-quality resources that demonstrate this reality.
- Is the funder flexible? In some cases, funders may be willing to share measures that you are already using for another application (so as to streamline your collection and reporting efforts). If you can demonstrate that you have related measures in place, or could do so with some ease, they may accept different measures than initially proposed. Be prepared to demonstrate your willingness to be flexible, while showing how shared measures or tools across funding sources or program areas is an efficient use of their resources.
- What resources is the funder willing to provide in support of evaluation? Does the funder have expertise in certain kinds of evaluation, consultation or technical assistance available, or additional funds to support the effort? Will they provide funds to the coalition to develop evaluation tools and to local programs to ensure

they have adequate technological capacity and evaluation training?

Understanding what the impact of the evaluation itself may be on the agency or program can help to illustrate the need for support, and asking these questions can help you gather those resources needed to conduct the work.

Many state- or community-level funders are also new to evaluation, or at least to the evaluation of sexual violence prevention and response. If funders are convinced of a program's commitment to using their resources effectively, and if the evaluation is approached as a team effort, funders may prove to be key partners in growing a mutually satisfactory evaluation program.

### **Evaluation Resource Roundup**

*Guiding Principles from the American Evaluation Association*

American Evaluation Association

<http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=51>

Full and abbreviated versions are available here.

*Choosing Evaluators*

Community Toolbox

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/evaluate/evaluation/choose-evaluators/main>

You may be able to hire evaluators, or you may be choosing volunteers from your staff or the community you serve. Or you may simply be choosing a planning team that will go on to select evaluators. In any of these cases, the particular individuals you select will influence the shape of the evaluation you get, and what kinds of results you get from it.

*Conducting Research With and within LGBTQI+ Communities: We Don't Know Exactly What Works, but We Have a Pretty Good Sense of What Doesn't*

Jen Przewoznik , North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault

<http://aea365.org/blog/jen-przewoznik-on-conducting-research-with-and-within-lgbtqi-communities-we-dont-know-exactly-what-works-but-we-have-a-pretty-good-sense-of-what-doesnt/>

Friends don't let friends conflate sexual orientation and gender identity. I know you wouldn't do this, but if you see a researcher doing this, please tell them to stop.

### **About this Resource**

This publication is a collaborative project of the Resource Sharing Project Evaluation Workgroup. It is for coalitions who know service evaluation is important and struggle with the daunting task of designing and sustaining evaluation of their own efforts, as well as rape crisis systems and services. These collective thoughts aim to focus on how we can collect and showcase the great work of the anti-sexual violence movement.

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