

WORKING WITH AN OUTSIDE EVALUATOR

TIP SHEET

Do I really need an outside evaluator?

Most programs continually undergo their own internal evaluation, usually occurring in an informal, unstructured basis making it difficult to identify necessary changes. There are a number of occasions when the help of external evaluator is needed. For example (adapted from the WestCAPT site):

- › You don't have time or staff to do the evaluation properly.
- › Your program is coming under scrutiny and you need input from an impartial outside party.
- › You need expert help in designing a data collection instrument such as a survey, or in analyzing data.

How do I select a good outside evaluator?

The quality of your evaluation depends on selecting the right person for the job. The following are questions consider when hiring an evaluator :

Education, Knowledge & Experience

- › What is the individual's educational/experiential background?
- › Is he or she familiar with prevention? (Does the evaluator have experience evaluating substance abuse prevention programs? School and community-based programs? Do they have a of state and national prevention trends?)
- › Does the evaluator have a broad range of evaluation methods and tools? (Qualitative vs. quantitative methods, instrument design etc.)
- › Does this evaluator belong to any related professional associations? Has anyone I know ever used their services? Can I talk to any references?
- › Does the evaluator have experience working on a project like this?
- › Is the evaluator culturally competent?

Access and Availability Issues:

- › What specific services will the evaluator provide?
- › How much will those services cost? Can we afford it?
- › What is our time line? Can the evaluator meet our time requirements given their current work load?
- › How will I communicate with the evaluator? (e-mail, phone, in-person. Will this evaluator be available if unexpected issues arise?)

Specific Skill Sets:

- › Can he or she communicate clearly and effectively to a variety of audiences? More importantly, can my staff and I work effectively with this person?
- › Does the evaluator have public presentation skills? Is the evaluator able to facilitate different points of view?
- › Is he or she able to learn quickly? Does he or she understand our program goals?
- › Is her or she able to remain neutral and objective?

Contract Considerations:

- › Negotiate time lines and deliverables up front.
- › Is compensation on 1) an hourly basis; 2) fixed cost on entire project; or 3) project milestones?
- › Scrutinize the evaluator's overhead.
- › Negotiate authorship for any publications based upon the evaluation.
- › Negotiate ownership for any data generated for the evaluation.

References

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