

Chapter 3: The Evaluation Team

The most effective evaluations obtain input from a variety of sources (e.g., clients, staff, administrators), and this variety of input should be reflected in the diversity of the assembled evaluation team (Burt et al. 1997). An evaluation team should be formed prior to beginning an evaluation.

“The way the information was revealed didn’t empower anyone; people got defensive. I would do things differently next time by convening an Evaluation Advisory Committee.”

Evaluation teams consist of individuals who will assist in planning and carrying out the evaluation and are involved in determining the following:

- What the purpose is of the evaluation.
- What type of evaluation will be conducted.
- Who will participate.
- When to conduct the evaluation.
- Where to conduct the evaluation.
- How to implement the evaluation.
- How to analyze and interpret results.
- How to produce evaluation reports.

“Our staff has been cooperative because the clinical supervisor walked through the proposal with everyone and addressed their concerns right away.”

Because of the variety and scope of duties involved, considerable thought should be given to selecting team members. United Way of America (1996) recommends that an evaluation team consist of five to seven individuals because a larger team may impede decisionmaking by having too many diverse opinions. A team that is smaller than this recommended size may become autocratic in its decisionmaking.

Because evaluations require expertise in several disciplines, it is helpful to create a working group of individuals with specialized training and experience, as well as members who will fill other specific evaluation roles. Such teams may be created from the following possibilities:

- **Someone with strong subject-matter background.** Directors with a background in child sexual abuse or in the multidisciplinary team approach.
- **Someone with quantitative competence.** A social scientist, perhaps the lead evaluator, with demonstrated quantitative skills.
- **Multidisciplinary team representative.** One of the multidisciplinary team members to provide agency representation.

- **Staff.** A staff member to be involved as early and as frequently as possible in evaluation planning, and provide input and cooperate with the project.

“We have a volunteer research advisory board that provides consultation, guidance, and support services. Then we incorporate this information into our best practices.”

- **Data collection personnel.** Individuals to act as liaison between the participants and the team. An assigned data collector could function in this role.
- **Persons to represent the qualitative and non-social-science aspects of evaluation.** Both primary and secondary users of the evaluation need to be considered, such as the board of directors, chief executive officer, program director, funding agent, staff, community groups, participants, other organizations, legislators, parents of victims, and task force members.

When it is decided to include an evaluation audience member, identify individuals who have the greatest interest in the evaluation results and identify what their interest might be. Representatives of this group must have been part of the evaluation design to ensure that the evaluation results are considered legitimate by the audience.

Because some Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) are funded by the legislature or have the support of prominent community and political leaders, many directors indicated concerns about the political ramifications of an evaluation. When this is a concern, it may be useful to include individuals from these groups in evaluation proposal discussions or as evaluation team members.

Internal Versus External Evaluator

Any evaluation leader, whether internal or external, should possess evaluation expertise. Center discretion may be used to decide whether the evaluation team will be created before or after the team’s leader has been selected.

The majority (71 percent) of administrators who are conducting evaluations indicated that they are conducting their own evaluation. However, 27 percent of the administrators interviewed would prefer that an external evaluator (e.g., university faculty) conduct the evaluation, and an additional 45 percent would prefer a combination of internal and external collaborators to conduct the evaluation. These percentages reflect a recognition of the need to consider including an external evaluator in the evaluation process. Exhibit 3.1 lists advantages and disadvantages of internal and external evaluators.

“We prefer both an internal and an external evaluator. We would be able to include the questions that we believe are important. The outside person would have a different perspective and maybe think of things we didn’t think of.”

Ideally, evaluations are objective reports of a program. However, there is often enormous economic, social, and psychological pressure to produce favorable evaluation results. An important reason for including an external evaluator is to prevent the bias surrounding data analysis results (Scriven 1993). Although it is necessary to guard against bias, it is also important to remember that preference and commitment do not necessarily constitute bias. Evaluations funded by grants, for example, may find possible solutions to bias by determining whether the

funding agency has an office that administers independent contracts for conducting evaluations.

Collaborating With an External Evaluator

“Our county administrator had a management company come in and do an internal evaluation of our center. We didn’t want them to come at all, but it wasn’t so bad after all and we learned some useful information.”

Locating an external evaluator

To facilitate the search for an external evaluator, a detailed job description that describes what the evaluator will be expected to accomplish (Braskamp, Brandenburg, and Ory 1987), including the degree of involvement (such as level of project control, or partnership or advisory role), can be developed. When internal specifications for the evaluation process have not been determined, the description can be written to indicate that the evaluator will be responsible for assisting with the development of the evaluation design. Job descriptions will also be useful during the interview process to lead the discussion and select the most appropriate candidate.

“We have a contract with an external evaluator [from a university] who is paid by another agency. We simply send them group data. Between all of the agencies involved, we are able to look at family connection, number of children revictimized, number of children involved in the juvenile justice system, number of pregnant teens, and domestic violence in our sample of children referred to the center.”

The following sources might help locate an evaluator:

- Other CACs conducting an evaluation.
- Recommendations from other agencies.
- Local universities (faculty and graduate students).
- Professional associations (e.g., American Evaluation Association).
- State or local government planning and evaluation departments.
- Technical assistance providers (included in some Federal grants).
- The Internet.
- Public library reference resources.
- Research institutes and consulting firms.
- National advocacy groups and local foundations.
- Newspaper advertisements.

“Any help that I can get for free, I take. We have no budget for evaluation. The university helps out where they can, and in exchange we give them access to data.”

Community and university partnerships

A college or university can be an excellent source for locating an evaluator because some faculty will be interested in conducting field research in this area. Departments that may have interested faculty include public administration, public policy, psychology, human development, criminal justice, social work, and

sociology. It may be feasible to suggest an exchange of data, rather than fees for services provided by the faculty.

A few centers have built working relationships with university faculty and graduate students. These relationships can be mutually beneficial to both directors and researchers: Researchers possess the necessary evaluation knowledge and directors have indepth insights into their program.

“We have an intern who helps us with the evaluation. The victim advocate is in charge of the evaluation, but the intern calls the families.”

Some centers have expressed concern about hiring or working with graduate students and interns. A criminal background check can be performed on them, just as for any other employee of the center. This procedure has worked well for several centers.

Advertising in a newspaper

Advertising the evaluator position in a newspaper and soliciting applications is another alternative to a university or organization. The detailed job description written for the external evaluator position can be useful in crafting the advertisement. An advertisement should be specific and include any evaluation design criteria that have already been established by the CAC. A sample advertisement follows:

Evaluator Needed

Evaluator needed to conduct an outcome evaluation of the Child Advocacy Center in Metropolis, USA. Responsibilities include directing the team, designing an evaluation, collecting and analyzing data, and producing evaluation reports.

Applicant must be able to work well in a team. Documented expertise and references required.

Interviewing potential evaluators

Whether solicited applications are received or faculty member collaborations are made, several potential areas of disagreement between administrators and evaluators need to be discussed before the partnership is made final. During the interview, the following issues should be discussed:

- Proximity of the applicant to the center.
- Philosophical compatibility between director and evaluator.
- Evaluator expertise and practical experience (a primary selection criteria).
- Evaluator’s understanding of the evaluation context (e.g., the evaluator’s comprehension of the environmental setting in which the evaluation takes place, such as a small CAC with a multidisciplinary team).
- How much information is to be collected and reported.
- In what form the information should be obtained.
- With what frequency the information should be collected.
- What level of reliability of information is acceptable.
- With what degree of confidentiality the information should be collected.
- Who owns the evaluation data.
- Who will author the evaluation report.

Many evaluators specialize in various areas of evaluation (Thompson and

McClintock 1998); for this reason, ensure that the evaluator is experienced in the desired type of evaluation (e.g., evaluating programs similar to your own) and that the evaluator will produce the type of information required. Evaluators should be familiar with each of these concepts, and a discussion of them can be one way to determine the evaluator's knowledge and ability to convey concepts to nonevaluators. The selected evaluator should always be evaluated (Scriven 1993); obtaining a second opinion is important.

Contracting with the evaluator

A contract is necessary for either a collaboration or external evaluator, and it should clearly state expectations for the evaluation (Morris, Fitz-Gibbon, and Freeman 1987; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1996). This can be accomplished by creating a contracted statement of work (SOW) (Gunn 1987). The expected roles and functions of the evaluator should be clearly defined before the evaluation begins. What will be accomplished and when it will be delivered, as well as the possible consequences for violating those expectations, should also be clearly defined. Because decisions are incumbent on timely evaluative information, stipulations for meeting deadlines should be included. The SOW should specify that an evaluation team will be selected and convened early in the planning phase of the evaluation; that periodic reports in addition to the final report will be required; and that any personnel changes must be approved to prevent "bait and switch" tactics (Gunn 1987).

Positive evaluation partnerships

This section provides examples of successful internal/external collaborative evaluation relationships. The characteristics of positive community-university relationships include having—

- University personnel on the CAC board of directors.
- A scientist on the board of directors who understands the value of research.
- An existing relationship between the director and faculty.
- Returns on the investment to the CAC, such as workshops or additional data collection that will be useful for the CAC.

The following anecdotes come from directors commenting on successful partnerships.

"We have hired a woman from X University who helps us out. She used to work at the center. This is a joint effort. The practitioners are deeply involved in the process. We need the front-line practitioners, and the Ph.D.s can help guide our work. We exchange access to data for expertise and advice."

"X took the initiative to contact us and has followed through and produced useful documents."

"A public management student wanted to do an evaluation of our program as his school project, so it was free for us, although we had to work some things out. He conducted phone interviews with a cross-section of agency personnel. However, we were opposed to his sending out client surveys himself. Therefore, we selected 100 clients to send surveys to and placed some surveys in the waiting room (we got 30 back). He also wanted to sit in on therapy and the interviews and of course I objected to that. He wanted to see our records and witness daily activities and we just had to work around those requests. He

was professional and accommodating of our needs. It worked out beautifully.”

Negative evaluation partnerships

Several reported experiences of internal/external collaborative evaluations were described as abysmal failures. Characteristics of poorly functioning community-university relationships include—

- Inability to agree on the research question.
- Unresolved confidentiality issues.
- Dissipation of the commitment to the center over time.
- Lack of new or useful information provided to the center.
- Difficulty contacting the faculty member.

The following anecdotes come from directors describing failed collaborative relationships.

“One time an evaluation was sponsored by the police department, but the evaluator did not bother to consult with the police involved in the project.”

“X did an evaluation, but they didn’t have any knowledge of our culture. It was a bad experience.”

“We had the cooperation of X, we had even done some preliminary planning, but they needed \$15,000 to set up the evaluation, so until they get the money the project is on hold.”

“The outside evaluator didn’t know about the team concept or child abuse. They did a good research job,

but the evaluation only scratched the surface, and it cost too much.”

“X wanted to do an evaluation, but we couldn’t agree on access to information and when clients could complete the forms without contaminating the criminal justice aspects of the case. We wanted to do it, and had several false starts, but it’s complicated asking clients for information. It never worked out.”

Evaluation Team Members’ Responsibilities

Work on the evaluation purpose and design can begin after an evaluation team is assembled. Throughout the planning and implementation process, team members will be assigned to various tasks. It is imperative to inform the evaluation team of the inherent burden that an evaluation places on team members and on the program. The chart in exhibit 3.2 (see also the planning form depicted in exhibit 8.1) and the exercises below provide examples of the ways in which expectations, responsibility, and organizational activities can be defined and accomplished by the team (Gunn 1987; Shapiro and Blackwell 1987).

Evaluation Team Exercises

A working paper

One way to involve all players in the decisionmaking process is through a working paper that outlines the technical language and the process of evaluation, and that includes schematic drawings of the steps in the process. The working paper is presented to the evaluation team by the evaluator. The evaluator begins with informal lessons in evaluation research and moves step by step into mapping out considerations, options, and decisions.

The Delphi Method

The Delphi Method is another group activity to elicit information from group members (Gunn 1987). The meeting can begin with a discussion of the purpose of the evaluation and proceed to having the team generate and prioritize a list of potential factors that could impact the evaluation (e.g., environmental, financial, managerial, material, sociological). Member ideas from these sessions should be recorded. The same procedures can be repeated for the remaining aspects of the evaluation.

Create lists

Another useful exercise to facilitate team discussions is to create lists of activities that the team will need to address.

Creating and using lists for discussion can also be incorporated into the exercises. The following list-making activities enable team members to appreciate the association between the CAC's activities and the program by providing an opportunity for each team member to express what he or she thinks is important about the program and by fostering discussion among other members (see also "Putting it all together: Building the logic model," chapter 5):

- Realistic project goals and corresponding activities that are expected to lead to particular outcomes.
- Project services and other activities.
- Background characteristics of clients that might influence the relationship between activities and goals, such as history of abuse or need for translators.
- Events or factors during or after program activities that could influence how or whether the project accomplishes its goals; one example is factors that may affect desired outcomes, such as strong ties to family.

Concerns and responses letter

During the planning phase, it may be beneficial to survey staff, agencies, and other relevant parties to determine their concerns and possible areas of confusion regarding the forthcoming evaluation. A formal letter (see exhibit 3.3) to those involved in the evaluation, coauthored by the director and the evaluator and approved by the team, can address those issues.