

Use of External Evaluators: Considerations for Scope of Services and Contract Development

The Children's Trust aims to partner with providers to offer the highest quality services to improve the lives of children and families in our community, and also must be accountable to the public by demonstrating effective program results. Therefore, it is critical for all funded programs to include a strong evaluation plan for capturing successes in program planning, implementation and outcomes. An evaluation can encompass a wide variety of activities and services. Prior to contracting with an evaluator it is important to understand what it is that you expect from an evaluator.

Empowerment Evaluation Approach

The Trust has adopted the Empowerment Evaluation approach, developed by Dr. David Fetterman at Stanford University (see more information and references to this method at www.stanford.edu/~davidf/empowermentevaluation). This approach is a collaborative and participatory evaluation method that rests on ten principles that are strongly aligned with the guiding principles of The Children's Trust: improvement, community ownership, inclusion, democratic participation, social justice, community knowledge, evidence-based strategies, capacity building, organizational learning, and accountability. Contracting with an external evaluator is neither required nor prohibited. However, if engaged, such an evaluator should be versed in working within the Empowerment Evaluation or other collaborative and participatory evaluation models, as well as be in philosophical agreement with the above principles.

Scope of Services

A scope of services should outline the specific tasks/responsibilities that are expected from the contract. In an evaluation, much of the work can be broken into phases. It is not uncommon for completion of each phase to be tied to payment. It is not uncommon in fields such as evaluation for each phase to include one or more deliverables, depending on the scope of the work within the phase.

It is important when considering hiring an external evaluator that you assess your organization's:

1. **Expectations** – What is the purpose of hiring an external evaluator? Are you contracting externally because your organization does not possess the capability to perform an evaluation internally? Or, are you hiring an external evaluator because you want an "external" perspective to balance that of an internal perspective on appropriate outcomes and to ask evaluation questions that might not occur to program staff in addition to methodological expertise that an external evaluator can bring?
2. **Capacity** – It is important to assess what portions of an evaluation your staff are able to perform internally. For example, using internal staff to perform data entry might be a considerable savings from an external evaluator's cost, keeping in mind, however, that data integrity is of utmost importance. In the spirit of Empowerment Evaluation, external evaluators can be resources for building evaluation capacity within your organization.

Listed below are some common components of an evaluation. This is not an exhaustive list, nor should every evaluation include each of these tasks. It is important to note, as well, that costs associated with performing some of the tasks listed can be expected to increase with the complexity of the project.

Planning & Research Activities

- *Assessment of the Program/Organization* – An evaluator should be able to orient themselves to a new program/organization rather quickly by developing a knowledge base that will be built upon during future work with program staff. If the evaluator is expected to provide recommendations for improvement for an organization or program then a brief amount of time may be spent assessing the current status/operations of programs. Program orientation is an inherent part of evaluation and may also be an integrated part of all other evaluation tasks and if billed alone then a justification should be available.
- *Identification of Goals/Outcomes* – Frequently, an evaluator is contracted to help programs define evaluation questions or goals. Defining appropriate evaluation questions will build the framework for an effective evaluation plan.
- *Identify and/or Develop Measurement Tools* – It is important to note that many published curricula have evaluation tests available. If you are purchasing a curriculum for your program, ask the publisher if there are valid tests available. Ask the publisher/author whether the test has been validated. If it has, request the findings. If your curricula does not have tests or measures available, an evaluator may be able to assist you with finding valid and appropriate measures. Another option is for an evaluator to thoroughly review the materials and design a measurement tool.
- *Training* – If the evaluator assisted your program by identifying or developing measures, then it is important that the staff be trained on how to properly administer the test. Remember that upper-level staff (managers) may be trained and expected to train line staff. This will help to minimize the number of training sessions that are included in the evaluator's scope of services.
- *Periodic Review of Program Data* – trend data and use it to examine program performance and drive continuous quality improvement efforts. In keeping with Empowerment Evaluation principles, this methodology implies more than just data analyses and report writing. Rather, it involves sitting down with program staff periodically to examine data and discuss its use on an ongoing basis to enhance programs.

Data Management & Analysis

- *Administration of Measures* – In order to obtain valid data from participants, tests and measures must be administered in a consistent and reliable manner. Data integrity is highly important to the Trust. An external evaluator can be used to assist in the administration of tests or measures. There are some benefits to contracting for this service include: consistency of administration and objectivity. While there are also benefits to administering by internal staff including cost savings and organizational capacity building, it is important to remember that the staff who are managing data are responsible for its integrity.
- *Database Development* – Maintaining data on program participants and program outcomes is very important. Using electronic databases or spreadsheets are safe and effective ways to manage a program's data. If the costs for developing a database are not realistic for the program budget, consider building technical assistance into the budget. Perhaps program staff can develop databases or spreadsheets and the evaluator will simply review and provide suggestions for improvement.

- *Data Entry* – As was mentioned earlier, using internal staff to enter data may be a simple way to save money in the evaluation budget. However, accurate data entry is another key area where data integrity must be maintained. This should be a factor when considering whether internal staff possess the capacity to perform data entry. External evaluators can be utilized to build the capacity of internal staff to perform accurate data entry. Again, there are benefits to using an evaluator – an evaluator may be able to perform data entry faster and more accurately. Benefits to administering by internal staff again include: cost savings and organizational capacity building.
- *Data Analysis* – A key component of evaluation is statistical data analysis. This analysis may include information on participants (demographics, socio-economic information, etc.) as well as programmatic information (impact, meeting of outcomes, etc.). Frequently, the data analysis will include tables and charts (i.e., visual representations of data).
- *Summary Reports* – The amount of information that is contained in a summary report can vary quite a bit. Some reports will contain only some narrative that support/explain the data analysis that was performed for the program. Others may include: background information on the program; socio-demographic information on participants; analysis of findings including strengths, weaknesses and recommendations.

Contract Components

Contracts should be expected with all sub-contractors. The body of the contract should outline the scope of services that was agreed to by the agency and the evaluator. Letters of agreement may be submitted with the proposal, however if funded, The Trust may request the consultant's scope of services/detailed evaluation plan prior to subcontract approval. Generally, The Trust will not accept simply a letter of agreement with an external evaluator. A more comprehensive contract or memorandum of agreement (MOA) must be established which outlines, in detail, the work that is being contracted, including the following:

Fee Schedules

The costs of evaluating the effectiveness of the program should be included in the proposed budget and justification, and may include purchase of instruments as well as staff/evaluator time for data collection, data entry, data management, and analysis. Such costs will typically comprise 3 to 10 percent of a program's budget, depending on the sophistication of the program evaluation design and methods.

Each item/category within the scope of services should be accompanied by the fee for that work. If a problem arises and an adjustment to the scope of services is required, knowing the costs associated with every phase/component of the evaluation, will enable the agency to be better informed and to assess the modifications to the contract (i.e., 'work within their budget').

Deliverables

Every phase/component of the evaluation should include contracted deliverables. Deliverables for the planning/development phase may include: program curricula, tests, assessments, databases. Most of an evaluator's time in a project will come during the beginning and end of an evaluation, however, if the evaluator is doing on-going training or technical assistance with your program, then a deliverable may include an *interim status*

report of their time/effort with your staff/program. If the evaluator is going to either assist the program's staff or take the lead on reporting requirements to The Trust, then would be important to include the quarterly and/or final evaluation reports that are required by The Trust.

Deliverable Due Dates

Just as each component or phase of the evaluation should include contracted deliverables, every deliverable should include a target due date. This is critical part of the contract. Establishing deadlines will help the agency and evaluator to discuss each party's expectations including:

- Dates for meeting with evaluator to periodically review data trends and discuss its use for program performance improvement
- Date that data must be submitted to the evaluator for analysis
- Date that evaluator will submit a draft of the report to the contracting agency
- Date the the final report will be submitted to the contracting agency
- Date that analysis of outcomes will be completed for reporting to The Trust.

The Trust's Evaluation Requirements

The Trust's contract reporting requirements may not include all of the components that are included in the evaluation contract, if that is the case, ensure that the evaluator prepares the data that is required by The Trust prior to completing the full analysis. Ideally, the Trust's final quarterly report and the evaluator's full report can be completed at the same time.

If The Trust is funding a program evaluation – a copy of the full evaluation report that is prepared by the evaluator must be submitted. Future funding of evaluation for your program will not be approved without a copy of the finished product for the prior year's evaluation.