

Checklist for Maximizing Your External Evaluator

The following items will help ensure that your organization receives the maximum benefit from an external evaluator.

- Clarity about why we need to do an evaluation.
- Have an understanding of what decisions are to be made as a result of the evaluation, when, and by whom.
- Determination of the need or not for an advisory group to oversee the evaluation.
- Appreciation that good external evaluators are booked heavily and make initial contact with them three to four months before we need them to start.
- Have engaged the evaluator at the beginning of the project (ideally) versus the end.
- Have provided the evaluator with a clear idea of what we hope to learn from the evaluation.
- Have asked the evaluator to suggest ways to obtain the answers to our evaluation questions.
- Appreciation that a credible evaluation costs time and money.
- Have allocated an appropriate budget to support the evaluation.
- Have established with the evaluator what deliverables are required and what they should look like, e.g., form, style, type of content, and level of detail.
- Are prepared to set aside some of our own time to work with the evaluator.

- Understand the need to meet with the evaluator to plan the evaluation, and meet with them occasionally throughout the process to review data collection tools, review findings, and generate action steps.
- Have provided the evaluator with a single program contact who can answer their questions in a timely way.
- Have given the evaluator access to all the program documentation, program data, contacts, and other information required to conduct the evaluation.
- Have obtained the necessary permissions required to share program data with the evaluator.
- Have specified the level of confidentiality required before data collection starts.
- Have facilitated introductions between the evaluator and participants, collaborators, and other partners to be consulted, with an eye to establishing the evaluator's credibility.
- Understand that getting the data into a useable format for analysis may require additional time and resources on the evaluator's part.
- Have let the evaluator know well in advance when information is needed from them for a specific meeting, presentation, or decision.
- Have responded to their questions and requests for additional information in a timely manner.
- Have informed the evaluator about any unanticipated changes to the program and are prepared to discuss with them how these changes might affect the evaluation.
- Have informed the evaluator about any additional opportunities or challenges to the evaluation in a timely way.

- Have asked questions when we need more information regarding the ongoing evaluation.
- Recognition that attributing outcomes to a particular program is often limited by program context and the evaluation resources available.
- Are open to hearing both positive and negative findings from the evaluation.
- A plan to use the evaluation findings to report on results to intended users and make program improvements.
- Are open to hearing ways to implement the recommendations.
- Appreciate their work and tell them so.