

Working with a Professional Evaluator



What role can a professional evaluator play?

A professional evaluator can do the full scope of activities listed below, or you can hire them for just part of the process. For example, they could help you get a plan in place, give advice on which data collection tools you could use, or help complete end-of-the-year grant reports. Professional evaluators have expertise to help you:

- Ask critical questions and challenge your thinking
- Identify your goals for evaluation, i.e. are you doing this to:
 - Better describe what your program is doing?
 - Identify the most effective components?
 - Determine cost effectiveness?
 - Make internal improvements?
 - Report to funders?
 - Apply for additional funding?
 - Tell your story?
- Identify appropriate program outcomes
- Ensure that expected outcomes are connected to specific components or activities of the program (documented by a “logic model”)
- Define what success looks like and determine how that success can be measured
- Find or design the right data collection instruments
 - Often, there is not a previously existing tool that will exactly fit your needs, so evaluators can review what’s out there, see if it can be modified, or create a new tool just for you!



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- Collect the data themselves or oversee the data collection process by managing and training your staff
 - Sometimes approval is needed from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or human subjects board to help protect the rights of participants. Evaluators can apply for you.
- Analyze the data using appropriate methods
- Report evaluation findings in a manner so that they are easily understood, visually pleasing, and include actionable recommendations
 - Formats may include a presentation, a visualization or infographic, a short report or list of findings, or a lengthy, full report.

Note that many evaluators may work collaboratively with other independent evaluators or other firms.

How much will this cost?

We'd love to give you a ballpark, however the cost is widely dependent on many factors, mainly the scope of the evaluation or how much you're asking them to do. If you've got a limited budget or timeline, consider hiring an evaluator for just part of the process. And make sure to reach out to them as early as possible!

Who is the right evaluator for you?

Evaluators have varying expertise and experience, so it's important to identify one that matches the needs of your program. Before your first meeting or call with the potential evaluator, be sure to have a sense of what types of answers you're looking for. Here are a few things to consider:

- Familiarity with youth development
- Experience with out-of-school time learning environments

- Content or issue area that you are covering
- "Cultural competence" or their experience with similar student and family demographics
 - The American Evaluation Association says, "...a culturally competent evaluator is prepared to engage with diverse segments of communities to include cultural and contextual dimensions important to the evaluation. Culturally competent evaluators respect the cultures represented in the evaluation." In short, evaluators should know what language your audience speaks, literally and figuratively. They should be prepared to develop a survey in languages other than English, sensitive to the views and culture of stakeholders in the evaluation process, use varying survey methods dependent on the context of the situation, avoid stereotype bias, and be a person that your students and families are comfortable sharing information with. You can read more at: <http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=92>.
- Experience with your evaluation's primary audience, especially if you're working on a federal grant or with a tough private funder

Find an evaluator

- **Afterschool Expert Hub** (from the National AfterSchool Association) - www.catalyst-ed.org/naa-cover
- **American Evaluation Association** (hint: search "informal") - www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=108
- **InformalScience.org Member Directory** - www.informalscience.org/member-directory
- **The People Connector Directory** (from the STEM Learning and Research Center) - <http://stelar.edc.org/opportunities/people-connector-directory-itest-proposals>

More resources

- **Beyond the Bell Toolkit** (for more on working with evaluators from the American Institutes for Research) - www.beyondthebell.org/beyond-the-toolkit
- **Guide to Requesting Evaluation Services** (from Public Profit) - www.publicprofit.net/Your-RFP-For-Evaluation-Services-Is-Terrible

For more information visit afterschoolalliance.org