DON’T BE “EVALUATED”
PART I -- BE A KEY PARTNER IN
YOUR PROGRAM’S EVALUATION

HIRING AND WORKING
WITH AN EVALUATOR
This presentation covers a variety of topics which provide information on hiring and working with an evaluator, including:

- What can an Evaluator do for you?
- Advantages of Hiring an Evaluator
- Disadvantages of Hiring an Evaluator
- Selecting an Evaluator
- Developing an Evaluation Plan
- Maximizing Collaboration
- Other Evaluation Resources
Introduction

- Evaluation is an essential tool to developing and sustaining juvenile justice programs
- Evaluation Results:
  - Help program managers and staff understand how daily activities relate to goals and objectives
  - Provide information on fidelity of implementation and highlight areas for improvement
  - Support funding requests
Most program managers are capable of conducting some evaluation activities. Managers may want assistance with:

- Identifying performance measures
- Measuring outcomes
- Setting implementation standards
- Designing an evaluation study
Who is an Evaluator?

- Someone who...
  - Has formal training in research and/or evaluation
  - Has experience in conducting evaluations
  - No licensing or certification requirements
  - Many are members of professional evaluation organizations, such as:
    - American Evaluation Association
    - American Educational Research Association
  - Many evaluators with backgrounds in social science
What Can An Evaluator Do For You?

What you need in an evaluator depends on what you already have. Think of evaluation as similar to the process of building a home, depending on your expertise or financial resources, you might:

- Build your home with no help from experts;
- Do most of the work yourself, only hiring an expert to help with the most difficult areas; or
- Hire someone to build your house from top to bottom.

But even in this case, your builder will consult with you on a number of factors.
Evaluators Have Multiple Roles

- A good evaluator is:
  - Part Facilitator
  - Part Researcher
  - Part Program Specialist

- An evaluator can help you to:
  - Develop measures
  - Analyze data
  - Make recommendations for improving service
Task: Develop a Logic Model

- A Logic Model is a written description of how activities and components relate to each other and to the goals and objectives you are trying to accomplish.

For more on Logic Models, see NJJEC webinars:

*Introduction to Program Logic*
https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=webinarAssessProjPerf_3

*Advanced Program Logic*
https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=webinarAssessProjPerf_2
Task: Develop Measures

☐ An evaluator can assist you in developing measures to determine if your program is meeting its goals and objectives.

For more on measures, see NJJEC webinar:

*Basics of Performance Measurement and Evaluation*

[https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=webinarAssessProjPerf_1_webinars](https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=webinarAssessProjPerf_1_webinars)
Task: Develop Evaluation Plan

- An evaluator can help you to design an evaluation plan to determine whether your program is meeting its goals and objectives.

For more on evaluation plans:

*Planning an Evaluation*
https://www.bja.gov/evaluation/guide/pe1.htm

*Research Designs*
https://www.bja.gov/evaluation/types-research.htm
Task: Data Collection Tools

- Your evaluator can help you by designing data collection forms and procedures, and databases to capture and record data collected.

For more on data collection, see NJJEC webinar: *Data Collection and Analysis*

https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=webinarAssessProjPerf_4
Task: Analyze Data

- Your evaluator can analyze data and present results and conclusions from the findings.

For more on data analysis and reporting, see:

NJJEC Webinar Data Collection and Analysis
https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=webinarAssessProjPerf_4

Reviewing Evaluation Findings with Stakeholders; Writing a Final Report; Using Evaluation Results
https://www.bja.gov/evaluation/guide/ru1.htm
Task: Provide Feedback

☐ Though a process evaluation, your evaluator can provide recommendations to the program regarding ways to improve service delivery.

For examples of process evaluation reports see:

*Helping Others Pursue Excellence in Public Schools: A Process Evaluation of HOPE CDC’s Mentoring Program*


*Preliminary Process Evaluation: 4-H Mentoring/Youth and Families with Promise (YHP) Program*

Advantages of Hiring an Evaluator: Specialized Knowledge and Ability

- Evaluators understand:
  - How to document program operations and processes
  - How to measure program outcomes
  - How to collect data
  - How to analyze data to determine program effectiveness
Advantages: Objectivity

- Objectivity is the ability to look at information and form unbiased conclusions.
- Most program managers and staff believe in the effectiveness of their programs ... thus staff may look at evaluation findings in a biased way (even if this is unconscious bias).
- A good program evaluator will point out both the positives and negatives in a program’s operations.
Advantages: Credibility

- As evaluators are generally more knowledgeable and objective, conclusions and recommendations tend to carry more weight.
- This credibility may be important to funders when making decisions about whether to continue to fund the program.
Advantages: Perspective

- Evaluators may come to the program with a fresh view about program activities.
- A good evaluator also brings a different way of thinking about program effectiveness – one grounded in empiricism (understanding program operations and outcomes through the collection and analysis of data, both quantitative and qualitative).
Disadvantages of Hiring an Evaluator: Cost

- Evaluators highly paid professionals and specialized knowledge and expertise can be expensive.
- Conducting a carefully controlled evaluation study to determine effectiveness can be both costly and time-consuming.
Disadvantages: Time

- It will likely take additional time for an evaluator to become familiar with your program’s operations and structure.
- Evaluator will need access to program documents and conduct interviews with staff.
Disadvantages: Lack of Expertise

- Hiring an unqualified evaluator can result in delays, mistakes, and possibly a poor product with potentially damaging results.
- Alienate staff
- Intrude upon clients and staff-client relationships
- Misunderstand the program
- Draw incorrect or inappropriate conclusion
Selecting An Evaluator: Basic Qualifications

- Consider the following ...
  - Education
  - Experience
  - Evaluation Philosophy
  - Communication Skills
Selecting: Education

- Formal training in research methods
  - Evaluation Design
  - Data Collection
  - Statistical Analysis
- Graduate-level training in social sciences should provide this knowledge
  - Such as someone with a Ph.D. in Criminology
  - Some schools offer certificates and degrees in program evaluation
Selecting: Experience

- Research and Evaluation are not the same – key differences:
  - Evaluators use research skills but also have experience working with programs
  - Experience working in a juvenile justice program is not required; but experience working with juvenile justice programs is required.
  - Familiarity with the juvenile justice system and with juvenile justice programs is essential
Selecting: Evaluation Philosophy

- Differences in how evaluators view their role:
  - Some are “experts” = the outsider, role is to review materials, interview program staff and recommend ways to “fix” the program;
  - Others are researchers more than evaluators – may avoid providing feedback to program staff to keep from contaminating the evaluation;
  - Neither are ideal models
- Look for evaluator who values collaboration
Selecting: Communication Skills

- Must be able to communicate with wide variety of people; stakeholders include:
  - Program managers and staff
  - Funding agency representatives
  - Legislators and City Council members and
  - Program clients

- Evaluators should be personable, engaging and present findings and conclusions clearly
Hiring Process

- Review evaluator’s resume
- Contact references
- Ask about their experiences
- Interview the evaluator
- Ask for samples of evaluator’s work and review to see if clearly written and understandable
Developing an Evaluation Plan

- Specify, in writing, what the evaluator will do.
- Program staff and evaluator must agree on:
  - Which questions will be addressed;
  - Tasks to be completed to address questions;
  - Who will do the tasks;
  - When tasks will be completed;
  - Define the products of the evaluation;
  - When the evaluator’s involvement ends.
An Example

- You run a social skills program for youth
- Your question: have youth developed more positive attitudes toward authority figures?
  - Finding or creating a survey to measure attitudes
  - Administering the survey
  - Scoring the survey
  - Entering scores into a database
  - Analyzing data
  - Presenting the findings
Evaluation Products

- Agreement on what the products will be
- Evaluator should provide formal report explaining what was done and what was found
- In addition, could also request:
  - Executive summary of final report
  - Briefing to stakeholders
  - Presentation
  - Periodic progress reports
Data Collection Tools

- Could also request data collection tools:
  - Database
  - Data collection forms
  - Database manual

- Helpful in maintaining consistency
  - Across time
  - Building to scale
  - If intend to replicate
Maximizing Collaboration: Preparing and Supporting Staff

- Always potential for conflict between evaluator and program staff
  - Staff may feel defensive and reluctant to answer questions
  - Evaluation means more work for staff
- Addressing issues early will improve ability of evaluator and staff to work together effectively
Explain Purpose to Staff

- Explain purpose of evaluation to staff – emphasize evaluator is not there to examine individual job performance, but seeks to
  - Improve implementation of the project
  - Demonstrate program effectiveness
  - Document program accomplishments
  - Justify existing funding and/or support for increased level of funding
  - Document activities for purpose of replication
Collaborative Approach

- Evaluator and program staff should work together to implement all phases of the plan
  - Identify program goals and objectives
  - Link activities to goals and objectives
  - Develop performance measures
  - Determine what data to collect
  - Interpret findings of the data analysis
  - Provide input on recommendations
Benefits of Collaboration

- Evaluator has a clearer sense of how the program works
- Evaluator is in a better position to provide useful feedback
- Program staff benefit from fresh perspective
- Evaluation is relevant and useful
Possible funding sources for evaluation:

- Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)
- National Institute of Justice (NIJ)
- OJJDP contracts with organizations and individuals to provide technical assistance. 
  - Justice Research and Statistics Association’s National Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center (NJJEC) is one example.
- OJJDP NTTAC Training Center
Other Resources: State Agencies

- The agency in your state that administers Federal funds may have resources available.
- Agencies may have program evaluators on staff as might the following state agencies:
  - Department of Corrections
  - Juvenile Justice Services
  - Other social service agencies
Other Resources: Local Agencies

- Explore possible evaluation expertise from your city or county government including:
  - County social agencies
  - Juvenile Justice service agencies
  - Mental health service agencies
- These agencies may have evaluators on staff who can provide assistance
Other Resources: Colleges & Universities

- Faculty members may provide assistance; focus on criminology, education, psychology, social work, and public policy departments
- Graduate students may be available who may be able to help with development of instruments or databases
Many evaluators are members of professional organizations, which may provide information on how to contact evaluators.

- American Evaluation Association
- American Educational Research Association
- American Society of Criminology
- Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences
- American Psychological Association
- American Sociological Association
Links to Other Resources

- Justice Research & Statistics Association [www.jrsa.org](http://www.jrsa.org)
- National Training & Technical Assistance Center [www.nttac.org](http://www.nttac.org)
- American Evaluation Association [www.eval.org](http://www.eval.org)
- American Educational Research Association [www.aera.net](http://www.aera.net)
- American Society of Criminology [www.asc41.com](http://www.asc41.com)
- American Psychological Association [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)
- American Sociological Association [www.asanet.org](http://www.asanet.org)
Final Note

- Summary - Benefits to Hiring an Evaluator
- Look for Part II – Translating Evaluation Results into Action!
- This PowerPoint presentation is available in PDF format on the NJJEC website at www.jrsta.org/njjec/
- More information about the NJJEC project, including resources and tools, is available on our website.
About NJJEC

NJJEC is a project of the Justice Research and Statistics Association funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). NJJEC’s purpose is to improve the evaluation capacity of states, localities, and tribes and facilitate the use of evidence-based programs and practices in juvenile justice.

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