Script for Hiring and Working with an Evaluator

[Title Slide 1 of 42]

Welcome to Don’t be Evaluated Part 1 – Be a Key Partner in your Program’s Evaluation; Hiring and Working with an Evaluator

This is one of a series of briefings prepared by the Justice Research and Statistics Association’s National Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center project. The purpose of this briefing series is to provide juvenile justice program managers with information that will help them to evaluate their programs. Each briefing addresses a topic that is of particular interest to juvenile justice program managers who are trying to determine the effectiveness of the programs they operate.

Note that this PowerPoint presentation is also available in PDF format on the NJEC website at www.jrsa.org/njec/

You’ll also find more information about the project overall, including resources and tools, on our website.

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[“Briefing Overview” Slide 2 of 42]

The purpose of this briefing is to provide information to juvenile justice program managers about how to go about hiring and working with an evaluator. The briefing discusses how a qualified evaluator can assist a program manager in assessing his or her program’s performance, what characteristics to look for in hiring a qualified evaluator, and how to go about finding such a person.

This presentation covers a variety of topics, including What Can An Evaluator do for you?; Advantages and disadvantages of hiring an evaluator; Selecting an Evaluator; Developing an Evaluation Plan; Maximizing Collaboration and Other Evaluation Resources.
Program evaluation is an essential tool for the management, development, and sustainment of juvenile justice programs. Evaluation and the results can help program managers and staff members understand how their daily activities are related to specific goals and objectives and how these goals and objectives relate to the juvenile justice problem or need that the program hopes to address.

In addition, evaluation can provide information on fidelity of implementation, or what we refer to as process evaluation, and highlight the areas for improvement.

Evaluation results can also help support funding requests to aid in your sustainability.

Why do you need an evaluator? Well, while most program managers are capable of conducting some evaluation activities, other managers may want assistance with the following areas:

- Identifying performance measures
- Measuring outcomes and that includes determining which data will be used to measure those outcomes.
- Setting implementation standards and again discerning the data to be used to track whether or not those program standards, or implementation standards, have been met.
- Evaluators also assist with designing an evaluation study which will determine whether the program is actually achieving the outcomes they hope for.

Who is an evaluator? An evaluator is someone who has received formal training in research and/or in evaluation and has experience in conducting evaluations of programs. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to identify a qualified program evaluator.

For example, there are no licensing or certification requirements for program evaluators, although many evaluators are members of professional evaluation organizations, such as the American Evaluation Association and/or the American Educational Research Association, membership in these organizations does not imply qualifications. There are also very few university degree programs in program evaluation.
Many evaluators have backgrounds in the social sciences, such as psychology, sociology, criminal justice, public administration, or education.

In a later section of this presentation we will discuss some of the qualifications to look for when selecting a competent evaluator.

[“What Can An Evaluator Do For You?” Slide 6 of 42]

What you need in an evaluator depends largely on what it is that you already have. If you think about evaluation as similar to the process of building your own home, what you can accomplish on your own depends largely on your level of expertise or the depth of your financial resources. Some options may include if you have a great deal of time and a lot of expertise, then you might be able to build your own home with no help from experts.

Another scenario is if you have a thorough understanding of home building and expertise in all but the most difficult areas, you might chose to do most of the work yourself, only hiring an expert to help with the most difficult aspects or those that require specialized ability or equipment, such as pouring a foundation, or plumbing and electrical wiring.

Finally, if you had little or no expertise (but lots of money), you might hire someone to build your home from top to bottom. Keep in mind, however, that even in this last case, the home builder will still consult with you on a number of factors, including from the basic layout of the house, to what color the rooms should be painted.

In this same way, programs can hire evaluators to provide as much or as little help as they think they might need to successfully carry out evaluation activities.

[“Evaluators have Multiple Roles” Slide 7 of 42]

Evaluators can have multiple roles in the evaluation process. A good evaluator is part facilitator, part researcher, and part program specialist. They can help you to develop measures to assess both the implementation of your project, but also the outcomes; They can analyze data and they can report from that data to make recommendations for improving your service delivery.

There are a number of tasks that evaluators can assist you with that we’ll be talking about in the next six slides. On each slide we’ll be providing additional resources where you can go to learn more.
The first task is developing a logic model. A logic model is a written description of how the activities and components of your program relate to each other and to the goals and objectives you are trying to accomplish.

For more on Logic Models, we have several NJJEC webinars, including

*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]

Available on the NTTAC.org website – that is NTTAC.org

The next task that an evaluator can assist you with is developing measures to determine if your program is meeting its goals and objectives.

For more on measures, see the NJJEC webinar on NTTAC.org entitled *Basics of Performance Measurement and Evaluation* [https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=webinarAssessProjPerf_1_webinars]

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

For more on evaluation plans please go to the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Center for Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement website. Two documents which address this issue include:

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

*Research Designs* [https://www.bja.gov/evaluation/types-research.htm]
[“Task: Data Collection Tools” Slide 11 of 42]

Your evaluator can also help you with data collection tools. Including designing data collection forms, procedures, and creating databases to capture and record data collected.

For more on data collection, see the NJJEC webinar entitled *Data Collection and Analysis* [https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=webinarAssessProjPerf_4]

[“Task: Analyze Data” Slide 12 of 42]

(weird sound may want to redo) The next task that traditionally evaluators do is to analyze data, and they present results and conclusions that they derive from the findings.

We refer you again to the NJJEC webinar on *Data Collection and Analysis* at NTTAC.org [https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=webinarAssessProjPerf_4]

Another helpful resource is a section of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Center for Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement website entitled *Reviewing Evaluation Findings With Stakeholders; Writing a Final Report; Using Evaluation Results.* [https://www.bja.gov/evaluation/guide/ru1.htm]

[“Task: Provide Feedback” Slide 13 of 42]

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

Two examples of process evaluation reports include:


There are, of course, advantages and disadvantages to hiring an evaluator. The primary advantage of hiring an evaluator is the same that comes with hiring any expert – specialized knowledge and ability.

For instance, evaluators understand how to document program operations and processes, how to measure program outcomes, and how to collect and to analyze data to determine program effectiveness.

Program managers and staff *usually* do not have expertise in these areas.

Another advantage to hiring an evaluator is that in addition to specialized knowledge, Evaluators have the ability to objectively assess program operations. The hallmark of good program evaluation is objectivity -- the ability to look at information about the program and form unbiased conclusions about whether the program is achieving what it wants to achieve.

Most program managers and staff believe in the effectiveness of their programs or they would not be working in them. Therefore, there is the potential that they will look at evaluation findings in a biased way (even if this is an unconscious bias). A good program evaluator will point out both the positives and negatives in a program’s operations.

Precisely because program evaluators are generally more knowledgeable and objective, their conclusions and recommendations tend to carry more weight than those that might be produced by the program managers and staff.

This credibility may be important to funders, for example, when making decisions about whether to continue to fund the program.
In part because they are objective, evaluators may come to the program with fresh views about program activities and relationships between program components.

In addition, a good evaluator brings to the table a different way of thinking about program effectiveness, one grounded in empiricism (that is, understanding program operations and outcomes through the collection and analysis of data, both quantitative (counts and other observations that are readily converted to numbers (for example, participant surveys)) and qualitative observations that are not easily summarized but provide rich description and/or anecdotes (for example, through interviews and focus groups).

There may be some disadvantages to employing an evaluator to assist your program with its evaluation efforts. For many programs, the main disadvantage of hiring an evaluator is the cost.

Specialized knowledge and expertise do not come cheap, and evaluation is usually no exception. Not only are evaluators highly paid professionals, but conducting a carefully controlled evaluation study to determine program effectiveness can be an expensive and a time-consuming process.

You may want to talk with an evaluator to assess where your program is in terms of the evaluation lifecycle – as a program develops, the type of evaluation required to improve, deliver, and replicate the program will change. It may be better to initially target your evaluation resources on a process evaluation which focuses on the development of your program and including short-term outcomes. This type of evaluation is likely to be less costly than a full scale long-term outcome evaluation.

Although careful evaluation takes time regardless of who is conducting the evaluation, it may take additional time for someone who is not familiar with your program to gain some knowledge about its structure and functions. The evaluator will need to review documents and conduct interviews to gain this knowledge.

Not only will this take extra time on the part of the evaluator, it will also require staff resources to locate and make copies of program documents, and sit through interviews with the evaluator.
Just as hiring a builder who is unqualified will result in delays, mistakes and perhaps a poor product, so too will hiring an unqualified evaluator produce potentially damaging results.

An evaluator who is not qualified may alienate staff, may intrude upon clients and staff-client relationships, may misunderstand the program and its functioning, and may draw conclusions that are incorrect or inappropriate.

If such an evaluator’s work is released to funders and the public, the program may suffer damage to its reputation and may find its funding jeopardized.

Note that when thinking about all of these advantages and disadvantages, that not all will apply in every case. Program managers must weigh all of these factors carefully when they decide to hire a program evaluator.

There are some basic qualifications you can look for when determining how to hire an evaluator. You should consider the following issues when selecting an evaluator.

You need to look at their formal education, their prior experience, their evaluation philosophy and the communication skills of your potential evaluator. We will discuss all these issues in more depth in the following slides.

As we noted earlier in this presentation, very few individuals have formal education in program evaluation. Most evaluators do have formal training in research methods (both qualitative and quantitative), with expertise in evaluation design, data collection, and statistical analysis.

Graduate-level training in the social sciences should provide this knowledge; for example, someone with a Ph.D. in criminology should have the research knowledge required to conduct evaluations.

A review of the American Evaluation Association database revealed approximately 10 schools offer certificates in program evaluation, and another 15 to 20 schools offer a Master’s degree and/or doctorate in program evaluation. These programs were frequently located in or related to the education, health and public administration academic departments.
While evaluation as a process has a great deal in common with conducting research, there are also many differences between the two.

A qualified evaluator must not only have research skills, but must also have specific experience working with programs. While experience working in a juvenile justice program is not a requirement for an evaluator, experience working with juvenile justice programs is.

The juvenile justice system is a complex one, and familiarity with the system and with juvenile justice programs is essential for communication, collaboration, and appropriate interpretation of evaluation findings.

Much has been written about how evaluations should be conducted, and different evaluators view the evaluation process differently.

For example, some evaluators may consider themselves to be “experts” and view their role as one of an outsider who reviews program materials, interviews managers and staff, and then makes recommendations for “fixing” the program.

Others see themselves more as researchers than as evaluators and may avoid providing feedback to program managers and staff until after the evaluation is completed so as to not “contaminate” the evaluation.

Neither of these are particularly productive evaluation philosophies for working with juvenile justice programs.

Instead, you should be looking for an evaluator who believes that the evaluation process is a collaborative one between the evaluator and program managers and staff.

With a collaborative approach, program managers and staff are seen as the experts, and evaluators work closely with them throughout the process of documenting program activities, developing performance measures, interpreting evaluation findings, and making recommendations for program improvement. The goal of such evaluations is to improve the program, not to declare the program a success or failure. More formal names for this evaluation philosophy include “participatory evaluation,” “utilization-focused evaluation,” and “empowerment evaluation.”
Evaluators must be able to communicate with a wide variety of individuals who have a vested interest in the results of their work. Program staff and managers, funding agency representatives, legislators and city council members, and program clients are some of the “stakeholders” to whom evaluators may be called upon to present their evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Evaluators should not only be personable and engaging, but should be able to clearly present findings and conclusions both orally and in written form.

The process for hiring an evaluator is similar to that for hiring any employee.

Carefully review the evaluator’s resume to determine if she/he has experience conducting evaluations of programs similar to yours.

Be sure that references include directors of programs that the evaluator has worked with in the past, and ask those individuals about their experiences with the evaluator, including how well the evaluator worked collaboratively with the program managers and staff.

Interview the evaluator and determine if this is a person with whom you would be comfortable working.

Finally, ask for samples of the evaluator’s work, including evaluation reports. Review the materials to be sure they are written clearly, without a great deal of jargon, and in a way that would be understandable to you and to those with whom you would like to share the evaluation findings.
When you have selected an evaluator, you must specify in writing what the evaluator will do. Early in the process both you and the evaluator should agree on the questions to be addressed by the evaluation, the tasks that need to be performed to address those questions, who will be responsible for these tasks, and when these tasks will be completed.

In addition to the evaluation plan, you should be sure that you have agreed with the evaluator on what the products of the evaluation will be. Evaluators should produce a final report and other products specified in the evaluation plan.

Finally, it is important that you and the evaluator agree on when the evaluator’s involvement in the process ends. For example, does the evaluator’s role end when the final report is submitted to you, or will the evaluator participate in the process of disseminating the findings, including presentations to various stakeholder groups, and being available to answer their questions.

The following is an example of the components or tasks that might be included in a program evaluation plan. Say you ran a social skills program for youth at your local high school. In thinking about your evaluation plan, one question you might want answered is whether the juveniles in your program have developed more positive attitudes toward authority figures, such as parents, teachers, and probation officers, as a result of your program.

You and the evaluator will need to agree on the tasks that need to be performed in order to answer this question. For example:

- You would need to identify or design a survey instrument to measure attitudes toward authority figures;
- You’d have to administer the survey to juveniles at the beginning and end of their program participation;
- The survey would have to be scored;
- And those scores would have to be entered into a database;
- Someone would have to analyze the data; and
- Present the findings.

These may all be responsibilities of the evaluator, or you may wish to save some money by having staff members administer and score the survey and enter the resulting scores in a computerized database. In any case, spelling out the responsibilities of the evaluator will avoid confusion and duplication of effort and ensure that all tasks are completed in a timely fashion.
As previously mentioned, you and your evaluator should agree on what the evaluation products will be. At a minimum, evaluators should produce a formal report at the end of the evaluation explaining what was done and what was found. However, you may also wish to ensure that other products are produced, such as an executive summary of the evaluation report, a briefing to your stakeholders (such as your county commissioners) regarding the evaluation findings, and/or a presentation you can use to explain your program results.

You might also want to consider whether the evaluator will provide formal progress reports during the course of the evaluation.

Another evaluation product could include data collection tools such as a database, data collection forms, and other products related to data collection. For instance, a database manual including a write up of the program process, evaluation procedures, with copies of the data collection forms helps to “manualize” or formulize your program.

This in turn will help to ensure program implementation consistency across time, building the program to scale, and replicating the program.

Evaluations are more useful when the program staff works with the evaluator to develop and implement the evaluation plan.

A good evaluator will seek to work collaboratively with you and your staff. However, there is always the potential for conflict between the evaluator and the program staff. Staff members may feel defensive and be reluctant to answer the many questions the evaluator may have. An evaluation often means more work for staff members, who must sit for interviews, provide access to files and notes, and collect data for the evaluation.

These are considerations that must be addressed at the outset of the evaluation process so that the evaluator and staff can work collaboratively.
[“Explain Purpose to Staff” Slide 32 of 42]

The evaluator and program manager must explain the purpose of the evaluation to staff and assure them that the evaluator is not there to examine the job performance of individual staff members. The evaluator should explain that she or he is committed to working together with program managers and staff to improve the program and the services it provides to youth. Specifically, conducting an evaluation provides the program with the opportunity to:

- Improve implementation of the project;
- Demonstrate program effectiveness;
- Document the program’s accomplishments;
- Justify existing funding and/or provide support for an increased level of funding;
- Document activities for purposes of replication.

[“Collaborative Approach” Slide 33 of 42]

The evaluator and the program manager and staff should work collaboratively in implementing all phases of the evaluation plan. Specifically, they should work together to identify program goals and objectives, link activities to goals and objectives, develop performance measures, determine what data to collect, and interpret the findings of the data analysis. Program staff should also have input on any recommendations resulting from the evaluation.

A participatory approach which respects one another’s roles and a focus on an equal partnership in the evaluation process helps overcomes barriers such as staff resistance. Addressing these issues early in the process will greatly improve the ability of the evaluator and program staff to work together effectively.

[“Benefits of Collaboration” Slide 34 of 42]

A close working relationship between the evaluator and program staff will reap many benefits for both. The evaluator who works closely with program managers and staff will have a much clearer sense of how the program functions and will be in a much better position to provide useful feedback. Program managers and staff will benefit from the fresh perspective that an evaluator can provide on their daily activities and how these relate to what their program is trying to accomplish. The result will be an evaluation that is relevant and useful, and one that has the endorsement of the program’s staff and managers.

The remainder of this presentation looks at a variety of evaluation and technical assistance resources.
Among Federal Agencies, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (known as OJJDP), the National Institute of Justice (as well as other Federal agencies) may fund program evaluation activities at the local level.

Moreover, OJJDP contracts with a number of organizations and individuals to provide technical assistance to states and localities that wish to evaluate their juvenile justice initiatives. JRSA’s National Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center project is an example of one such initiative.

The OJJDP National Training and Technical Assistance Center (NTTAC) has an “on demand” instruction and assistance Training Center which connects the juvenile justice and delinquency prevention community with training events, materials, and resources created by OJJDP’s training and technical assistance (TTA) providers, partners, and other federal agencies. You can find resources, training events, and materials for juvenile justice audiences including local programs, state juvenile justice representatives, court, probation, law enforcement, social service, and mental health professionals, educators, and researchers on the NTTAC website at www.nttac.org

The agency in your state that administers funds from OJJDP and other Federal agencies may have resources available to assist you with evaluation. Many of these agencies have program evaluators on staff, as might other state agencies, such as Departments of Correction and Juvenile Justice Services, along with other social service agencies.

Depending on the size of your locality, there may be funds and/or evaluation expertise available from the city or county government. County social and juvenile service agencies, as well as mental health service agencies, may have evaluators on staff who can provide assistance to your program.

Colleges and universities can be valuable resources for finding individuals who can provide assistance with evaluating your program. Although few universities have formal program evaluation departments, knowledgeable faculty members may be found in departments of criminology, education, psychology, social work, and public policy.
These departments may also have graduate students available who while they may not be qualified evaluators, may have enough knowledge to assist you with particular evaluation tasks, such as developing measurement instruments or automated databases.

In addition, these students often need data to complete their degree requirements – a partnership with a student where they assist with the evaluation in exchange for access to data can be mutually beneficial.

[“Other Resources: Professional Organizations“ Slide 39 of 42]

As noted earlier, many evaluators are members of professional organizations, and these organizations may be able to provide information on how to contact qualified evaluators.

You can check with organizations including the American Evaluation Association, the American Educational Research Association, the American Society of Criminology, the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, the American Psychological Association, and the American Sociological Association.

[“Links to Other Resources“ Slide 40 of 42]

Here are links to resources that may be of interest to you.

Justice Research & Statistics Association  www.jrsa.org
American Evaluation Association  www.eval.org
American Society of Criminology  www.asc41.com
American Psychological Association  www.apa.org and the
American Sociological Association  www.asanet.org

[“Final Note” Slide 41 of 42]

In conclusion, there are many benefits to hiring an evaluator to help programs collect and analyze data about their effectiveness. Juvenile justice program managers who do wish to hire an evaluator should look for someone who has experience working with similar programs and who believes in a collaborative approach to evaluation. By clearly specifying in advance the tasks the evaluator will perform, program managers can be assured of getting the assistance they need in developing performance measures and instruments, analyzing data, and presenting findings to key constituent groups.
In the near future, look for the second part of our series -- Don’t be Evaluated – Be a Key Partner in your Program’s Evaluation -- Translating Evaluation Results into Action! In Part 2 we will discuss the different ways you can present evaluation results, including targeting your presentations to specific audiences to maximize the impact, and help you build a strong and sustainable program.

A reminder that this PowerPoint presentation is available in PDF format on the NJJEC website at www.jrsa.org/njjec/

You’ll also find more information about the project overall, including resources and tools, available on our website.

Thank you.

[“About NJJEC” Slide 42 of 42]

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 to facilitate the use of evidence-based programs and practices in juvenile justice.

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