

## **CDC Coffee Break: How Do I Work with an Internal Evaluator Or External Evaluation Contractor?**



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Welcome to today's evaluation Coffee Break, presented by the Evaluation and Program and Effectiveness Team in the Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Today's presenter is Eileen Chappelle, who is a health scientist with the Division.

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**Disclaimer: The information presented here is for training purposes and reflects the views of the presenter. It does not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**

The information today presented is for training purposes and reflects the view of the presenter and does not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Okay, so let's get started with today's presentation. Eileen, the floor is yours.

## Overview

- ❑ **Internal vs. external evaluators**
- ❑ **Setting realistic expectations**
- ❑ **Program and contract requirements**
- ❑ **Considering costs**
- ❑ **Staying involved at the right level**



Thank you. Before I begin, I wanted to share two things. One, I wanted to acknowledge Michael Schooley for letting me use some of his slides. And also, I wanted to provide a little bit of background about my experience. Currently, I'm an internal evaluator within the Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention at CDC. But in a former role, I was an external evaluator, both in an off-site setting and also within the client offices. So I think that brings personal perspective of what it's like to be both an internal and external evaluator. On this overview slide, it provides a list of the overarching points I'll be making during this short presentation.

## Who Should Conduct Your Evaluation?

- ❑ **Internal evaluator (staff within your organization)**
  - Within your program
  - Part of a different department
- ❑ **External evaluator (contractor)**
  - Physical location in-house
  - External physical location
- ❑ **Combination of both**
  - Internal evaluator with external support

So, your program has a requirement that you have to evaluate them; you have to evaluate the program. Now what are you going to do? Who's going to conduct your evaluation? There's different approaches that can be taken. You can have an internal staff, internal evaluators, someone within your organization to conduct the evaluation. They can be part of your program or they can be part of a different department. You can have an external evaluator or contractor to conduct the evaluation. Or you can have a combination of both, where you have someone provide support to an internal evaluator or have external support on concrete pieces of the evaluation.

## Internal Evaluator

### Possible Advantages:

- Makes use of existing staff (\$)
- Promotes maximum participation by program staff
- Builds staff expertise
- Comes with understanding of the program environment or context

### Possible Challenges:

- Time commitment (FTE)
- May not be sufficiently knowledgeable to design and implement the evaluation
- Funders may not perceive evaluation results as objective
- Internal political challenges

So let's talk a little bit about some of the pros and cons, or advantages and challenges, of each of these approaches or models of evaluation. If you have an internal evaluator, usually it's seen as less expensive, just because you're not pulling resources to hire someone external to your organization. You're using your existing resources and oftentimes building the evaluation capacity within your organization. This person usually understands the environment that surrounds the program, may have close connections or ties with those involved with the program. So this is an advantage.

Some of the challenges are, if you're pulling from an existing staff resource, they might have other commitments or other priorities that they have to address, so it's a little bit of tug and pull of their time. Also, some may not see the internal evaluator as completely objective.

## Internal Evaluator with External Support

### Possible Advantages:

- May be less expensive than entirely external
- May increase the likelihood that the evaluation will be consistent with program objectives

### Possible Disadvantages:

- Time commitment (FTE)
- A contractor used for consultation only may not give the attention needed to evaluation tasks
- May be perceived as less objective

You could also have an internal evaluator with external support. This is a blending of the two approaches. It's still a little bit less expensive than a completely external evaluator, and it does allow for having someone to provide support to that internal evaluator to conduct that evaluation. However, it does add a role of project management or contract management, sort of an administrative role of the internal evaluator to make sure that the external evaluator is conducting or providing what they need.

## External Evaluator

### Possible Advantages:

- Results may be perceived as more objective
- May have greater knowledge of the technical aspects of evaluation
- May offer a new perspective to program operations

### Possible Disadvantages:

- Can be expensive (\$\$)
- May not have an adequate understanding of the issues relevant to your program or target population
- May not have easy access to the information needed for the evaluation

When you have a completely external evaluator, they are seen as more objective. In some cases they have a greater knowledge of the field of evaluation because they work with different programs.

Some of the specific disadvantages are that they can be seen as more expensive, because you have to pull resources to bring in a new person to provide assistance. The external evaluator may not be aware of the context of the program, and they really need to rely on program staff to get that understanding and knowledge. Also, they might have difficulty accessing particular types of information.

## Questions To Ask Yourself

- How much can we spend for evaluation?
- Have we successfully conducted previous evaluations of similar programs?
- Can we collect the information needed to conduct the evaluation?
- Are there agency staff who have training and experience in evaluation-related tasks?

So, when you're trying to decide between the various roles of internal, external evaluator, you might just want to first ask yourself, how much can you spend on evaluation? What are the resources that you have available? And do you have the evaluation expertise in-house, as well as, does that particular person have time to conduct the evaluation?

## Regardless of Which You Choose

- Designate an internal lead or coordinator.
- Remain part of the team and participate in all phases of the evaluation effort.
- Consider utilizing an evaluation advisory panel.
- Include stakeholder input at appropriate points.
- Design and implement evaluation plans that will provide you with useable information.

And regardless of which role you choose, you want to make sure you have someone who can facilitate a coordination role between the evaluator and the program. You want to make sure that program staff are involved in all aspects of the evaluation. So you make sure that the evaluation is still useful. In accordance with the CDC Evaluation Framework, you want to make sure you include stakeholder input at various steps in the evaluation. And this input could be talking to key stakeholders or having an advisory panel as a resource.

But ultimately you want to make sure that you design and implement an evaluation that will provide useful information.

## Setting Realistic Expectations

- ❑ **Review evaluation expectations.**
  - Purpose
  - Key questions
  - Format of evaluation results
  - Preliminary plan for using the evaluation results
  - Logistics
- ❑ **Plan your evaluation as you develop your program.**
- ❑ **Share program information.**
- ❑ **Incorporate intermediate milestones.**
- ❑ **Keep the end in mind as you plan the evaluation.**

Setting realistic expectations. Everyone who's involved in the evaluation should have a clear understanding of what the purpose of evaluation is. What are the key questions? What you're expecting from the evaluation, and the overall sense of how the evaluation is going to be conducted. As you set the expectations, you want to be clear on what you're trying to do with the information, and also thinking about what types of interim reporting you need to keep everyone informed. What kind of updates can you share along the way that can be useful to the program?

## Program and Contract Requirements

- **Make sure you understand the evaluation requirements for your program and funder.**
- **When developing an evaluation contract, check in with your agency contract staff.**
- **Set clear expectations up front.**
- **Incorporate interim reporting.**
- **Monitor your contract expenditures.**
- **Review your evaluation timelines.**



So, thinking about your program or contract requirements, you want to make sure that the evaluation requirements within your contract follow in line with the expectations of your funder or those key stakeholders that are looking for the evaluation results. The worst that can happen is to have an evaluation contract and have the evaluation conducted and not meet the initial expectations. Then it's just not useful.

You also want to make sure, as you're developing an evaluation contract, to speak with or check in with your agency contract staff who are knowledgeable about things to include, in terms of language or expectations within contract. It's important to make that connection. You want to make your expectations clear up front. You want to be clear about if you need to have interim reporting or what type of deliverables you need to have, if you want to have your evaluator give monthly reports or take any meeting minutes of your discussions. Things of that nature.

You also want to make sure that as you're establishing your evaluation timelines, that they're not conflicting with program timelines.

## Considering Cost

- ❑ **Time is money.**
- ❑ **Distinguish the “must know” vs. The “nice to know.”**
- ❑ **Beware of “project creep” or “scope creep.”**
- ❑ **Consider a fixed-cost contract rather than time plus fixed fee.**
- ❑ **Take time to plan. It often saves money in the long run.**



Considering cost. Everyone's heard that time is money, especially in the contract world. If you're asking the contractor to do a small thing, an additional thing, it might detract from the things that you must get done within your contract, so that's something to be mindful of.

Be clear in understanding what type of information you need to know versus what would be nice to know, especially if you're talking to various stakeholders. Other questions may come up which are important, but may not necessarily fall in line with what you must know for this evaluation. It's kind of, when I talk about getting to the nice-to-knows, it kind of has an impact on the project. The scope of your evaluation starts growing and it's something you want to be mindful and keep your evaluation focused so that the results will be useful to all involved.

Also, when thinking about costs, keep in mind the type of contract mechanism you may use. And even though it may seem like it takes a lot of time in the beginning to plan your evaluation, it's an important investment, because the more thoughtful your evaluation, the more, hopefully, the results of the evaluation will be most useful and save money in the long run.

## **Characteristics of a Good Evaluator**

- **Experienced in the type of evaluation needed**
- **Able to work with a wide variety of stakeholders**
- **Can develop innovative approaches to evaluation**
- **Makes use of program data sources as appropriate**
- **Understands potential benefits and risks**
- **Educates program personnel**
- **Shares all findings with staff**
- **Respects all levels of personnel**

Here's a list of characteristics of a good evaluator. And there's various resources for evaluators. You can go to the American Evaluation Association website. They have a list of local evaluators in your area. You could also go to your local university as a potential resource, or go to applied research firms that specialize in conducting evaluations.

### **Program Responsibility Regardless of Model**

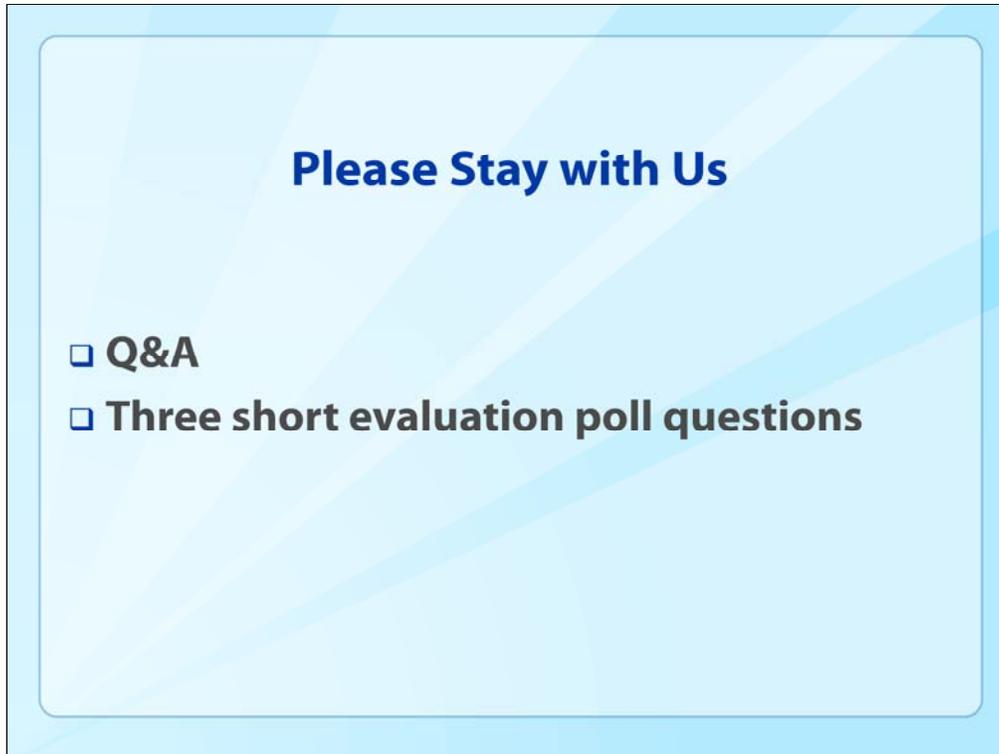
- ❑ **Program staff should be engaged and involved throughout the evaluation.**
- ❑ **An external evaluator will only know as much about what you need as you share with them.**
- ❑ **Foster the communication between program staff and evaluation staff.**

So, in closing, regardless of the approach or model that you take, it's important to make sure that your program staff are engaged and involved throughout the evaluation. You don't want to have a disconnect between expectations of program or the usefulness of information in the program and the evaluation. Also realize that if you do work with an external evaluator, they're only going to know what's shared or provided to them in terms of getting contacts or getting access to data. So, it's something to work through on how can you make data available. And just keep the lines of communication open between evaluation and program.

## Resources

- American Evaluation Association
  - [www.eval.org](http://www.eval.org)
- WK Kellogg Foundation, Evaluation Handbook
  - [www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2010/W-K-Kellogg-Foundation-Evaluation-Handbook.aspx](http://www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2010/W-K-Kellogg-Foundation-Evaluation-Handbook.aspx)

So, in this slide is a list of resources that you may find helpful in terms of determining if you want to use an internal or external evaluator as you conduct your evaluation.



**How much should I expect to spend on an evaluation?**

It really depends. That's a generic answer, but, in terms of an evaluation, you want to spend about 5 to 10 percent of your program budget for evaluation, but it depends on how rigorous your evaluation is going to be or how complicated or how much information you need to be gathered to answer the question in your evaluation. But overall, 5 to 10 percent.

**Does CDC require or prefer using an outside evaluator?**

For the National Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program at CDC, there's no specific requirements about having an external evaluator conduct the evaluation. It's really more about having the evaluation in place, via internal or external. So there's no requirement.

**Can you talk a little bit more about different contracting mechanisms?**

Sure. When you do decide to have an evaluation contract, you want to keep in mind, you want to have a fixed-cost contract, where you have an amount of money, and this is how much you're willing to pay to get the evaluation done, versus a time-specific fee, where it's, you're being charged kind of by the hour, and then you have a fee attached for all the charges, which, depending on the type of evaluation that you're doing, often you may find having a fixed-cost contract may be the way to go. But in certain circumstances, having an hourly rate might be useful, depending on how your evaluation is designed.

## Q&A (cont.)

**You showed some examples of what to look for in a good evaluator. What are some indications that you haven't selected the right contractor, or red flags that it's not on track?**

I think that when you're working with external evaluators, you want to see that they're getting their deliverables done on a timely basis, that they're being responsive, that they're understanding the information that's being shared with them. There are programs out there that are very complicated, and it might take a couple of times to really process the information. But if you shared the information and they're still not getting it, that's almost like a red flag, because they're not going to understand what you're looking for, and they might not understand your program. But I think if you keep those things in mind, it might be helpful if you need to do any course correction.

**What do you mean by an evaluation advisory group?**

An evaluation advisory group is a group of either experts or key stakeholders of the evaluation that you can go to to either present, for example, share your ideas of what your key evaluation questions are, or incorporate their thoughts into developing an evaluation survey tool, or helping, kind of like a resource for, once you have the results of the evaluation, they can help provide context, so it's almost like a check in of, is this what you expected, or does this seem feasible as an answer to the question. So it's really—an evaluation advisory group is just a pool of some of those stakeholders or experts that can help you.

## Q&A (cont.)

**If you want to use an internal evaluator, what are good ways to build evaluation capacity on your staff?**

I think good ways to build evaluation capacity—listening to some of the Coffee Breaks or going to the various online resources, sharing of evaluation results and sharing of approaches that were taken within various programs so that people can understand, okay, this is how this evaluation was conducted for this reason, yet this other evaluation was a little bit different. Here's why. I think by starting small and then expanding, you can build that capacity. But there's a lot of resources online that can be useful. And there's also a lot of resources from the CDC if you have particular questions.

Our CDC Summer Evaluation Institute is a good resource as well, and that's a three-day conference with evaluation tracks for evaluators who are just beginning in the field, and also is emphasizing intermediate and advanced evaluation topics in the coming year. That's held in June every year. Certainly look for that announcement.

# Thank you!

**For more information please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

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The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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