Caught in the Middle: The Challenge of Maintaining Effective Evaluator-Client Relationships with Both Programs and Their Funders
Evaluation 2015
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Panel

Patti Bourexis, The Study Group, Inc.

Kathryn Race, Race & Associates, Ltd.

Pat Mueller & David Merves, Evergreen Evaluation & Consulting, Inc.

Discussant

Melanie Hwalek, SPEC Associates
Panel Inspiration + Direct Experience of Three Evaluation Companies
1. Serving the needs of an individual program and the external funder – who’s the client?

2. Working with multiple programs sharing one funder.

3. Working directly for both funders and the programs they support.

Situations Where the Evaluator Can Get Caught in the Middle
Part One: Sharing of real-life experiences of working with programs and funders.

Part Two: Sharing practice with the audience.

Part Three: Discussion with the Evaluation Live! Model developer.

Part Four: More discussion with the audience.
WHO'S THE CLIENT?

Kathryn Race
Race & Associates, Ltd.
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Program staff *may* come into the evaluation: Feeling skeptical, apprehensive, maybe fearful or anxious (Donaldson, Gooler & Scriven, 2002)
See it as a threat
See it as a requirement and not necessarily beneficial to the program
Counter this **early on** by letting stakeholders know that:

Evaluator will have one foot in each camp
Authenticity: Be True to Yourself

Use a communication style that is authentic to yourself, that encapsulates your values as a professional. Examples of communication styles include: Intellectual versus Relational (discussion is about the task versus discussion about the task and the person); Direct versus Indirect (meaning conveyed by words versus through suggestion).
[http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/pub/1.5.3_-_Communication_styles.htm]
Clarity: Be Clear

Acknowledge that the evaluator has a **dual** responsibility: to the program/project and to the funder.

Let stakeholders know that you may/will likely present views at times that align with the stakeholders **AND** at other times present views that align or agree with the funder. Be clear as to which party you are representing when presenting an idea or concern.

Emphasize that the **evaluation** should have **value** for the individual program or project.
Build Trust
Start with a Program Theory Model or Theory of Change Model
Examples of Program Models
Program Theory Models or Theory of Change Models

Build trust through reducing ambiguity


Help to establish your credibility
Creating Trust through Model Building

May "demystify" the evaluation offering a description of what it will entail and what will be excluded from the evaluation.

And in general

Treat stakeholders as the professionals they are.
Cutting across Clarity, Trust, Authenticity and Transparency (from the beginning and throughout the program):

**No surprises.** Mixed results will be discussed ahead of time with the stakeholders before informing the funder to give the stakeholders time to respond to or implement a plan to mitigate concerns or issues.

Offer a **fair and balanced** approach to presenting results -- both the positive findings and the challenges.

Describe yourself as a "critical friend" or a "collegial coach" remind stakeholders of this relationship as needed.

Take a **collegial** not adversarial approach.

Exercise critical listening skills.

Be **straightforward** with stakeholders and expect that from them.
“There is no such thing as a minor lapse in integrity.”

Tom Peters
WORKING WITH MULTIPLE PROGRAMS SHARING ONE FUNDER

Pat Mueller & David Merves
Evergeen Evaluation & Consulting, Inc.
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Client Context

- Grants/Cooperative Agreements
- Program Performance Measures
- External evaluation required
- Multiple clients within a Program area
- Two scenarios…
Early Childhood
Professional Development
• Knowing the...
  • Client context
  • Project Officers
  • Performance Measures
  • Respondent pool
• Replicate instrumentation/data tracking
• Repeaters build relationship & investment
• Small community builds trust & sharing
• High turnover of key leadership
• Project management vs. evaluation
• Maintaining authentic communication
• Travel/Budget implications
• Boundary issues
• Small community can breed distrust
• Confidentiality issues
WORKING DIRECTLY FOR BOTH FUNDERS AND THE PROGRAMS THEY SUPPORT

Patti Bourexis
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OR
What's Important

- Authenticity
- Clarity
- Trust
- Transparency
- Confidentiality
- Boundaries

+ 

- Expectations
- Consistency
- Management
- Ego
• Scope of work.
• Communications.
• Reporting.
• Posture toward both parties.
• Will do’s and won’t do’s.

Expectations
Consistency

• Behave in alignment with expectations 100% of the time.
Management

- Monitor the quality of the relationships.
- Address rumors, issues, & concerns.
- Renegotiate or exit unsatisfactory relationships.
• Appreciate your success.
• Don’t get cocky.
Recapping What’s Important

• Authenticity
• Clarity
• Trust
• Transparency
• Confidentiality

• Boundaries
• Expectations
• Consistency
• Management
• Ego
SHARING PRACTICE
Discussion Between the Panel and Audience
1. Have you been in the same or similar situations as those described by the panel? Did the situation make you feel uncomfortable? How did you “stay out of the middle”?

2. Which of the critical elements described by the panel seem most important to you? Anything missing?

3. What opportunities do these situations present for evaluators?

4. How do you handle situations where equity is lacking between the program and the funder?
5. How do you resolve situations where the goals and objectives of your program client are not aligned with the funder’s goals and objectives (and vice-versa)?

6. Have you ever turned down a work opportunity because of the potential to be “caught in the middle”?

7. What’s your own list of critical elements for maintaining a positive evaluator-client relationship under these circumstances?
LET'S HEAR FROM OUR DISCUSSANT

Comments from the Perspective of the Evaluation Live! Model
Thanks!