Get Your "Party" Started: Establishing a Successful Third-party Evaluation

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Guidelines for Working with Third-Party Evaluators
Top 5 Tips for Working with Third-party Evaluators

- Hire as early as possible
- Devote time to the evaluation
- Conduct an evaluation needs assessment
- Communicate regularly
- Receive interim reports and work products at regular intervals
Key Points to Remember

- The Principal Investigator is responsible for all aspects of the project—including a timely, comprehensive, and rigorous evaluation
  - A third-party evaluator may contribute to some or many pieces of the evaluation

- Identify the project’s specific third-party evaluation needs and work with a third-party evaluator as early as possible
  - This provides the greatest flexibility in how you work with a third-party evaluator

- The project’s evaluation goals and design may dictate the need for third-party assistance and the total (desired) budget for the evaluation
  - A third-party evaluator can help identify the most cost effective way to use his or her services
Content of the Guidelines

- Part 1. Making the Most of a Third-Party Evaluation
- Part 2. Finding and Hiring a Third-Party Evaluator
- Part 3. Monitoring and Managing the Third-Party Evaluator’s Work
- Part 4. Concluding the Evaluation Project
Part 1. Making the Most of a Third-party Evaluation

- Determining what is needed from the third-party evaluation
  - Appendix A: Evaluation Primer
  - Appendix B: Evaluation Needs Assessment
- Benefits and limitations of working with a third-party evaluator
- Determining when to bring a third-party evaluator on board
  - Exhibit 3: Influence of Timing on Expectations for Third-Party Evaluations
Part 1. Making the Most of a Third-party Evaluation (continued)

- Developing a third-party evaluator scope of work
- Creating an evaluation budget
  - Appendix C: Budgeting Guidance
  - Appendix D: Time Frame Estimates for Common Data Collection Activities
Part 2. Finding and Hiring a Third-party Evaluator

- Developing a Request for Proposals
- Navigating the solicitation and review process
- Preparing the Third-Party Evaluation Contract
Part 3. Monitoring and Managing the Third-Party Evaluator’s Work

- Establishing a strong working relationship with a third-party evaluator
  - Exhibit 4: Keeping Third-party Evaluations Independent
  - Appendix E: Common Practices for Protecting Personally Identifiable Information

- Maintaining regular communication

- Keeping track of evaluation progress
  - Exhibit 5: Evaluation Progress Checklist

- Addressing problems with the third-party evaluation
Part 4. Concluding the Evaluation Project

- Identifying and responding to outstanding contractual items
- Ensuring the receipt of all evaluation documents
- Establishing a chain of communication in the event of future information requests
- Completing the appropriate transfer or destruction of data and files
- Exhibit 6: Evaluation Close-Out Tasks
Bringing a Third-party Evaluator on Board: Lessons from the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO)
National Assessment Center – National Center on Educational Outcomes

Mission:

- To support the development of inclusive assessment in a rapidly changing state (and consortium) assessment system environment in order to promote improved educational results for students with disabilities.
Hiring a Third-party Evaluator at NCEO

- Preparing an RFP that meets NCEO’s needs
- Conducting the third-party evaluator hiring process
  - Qualifications and experiences that support NCEO’s work
  - References from experts from the field of educational assessment and evaluation
- Developing EEC’s evaluation contract
  - Addressing financial arrangements
  - Outlining requirements for the University of Minnesota human subject protection and data confidentiality
  - Identifying deliverables from EEC
Monitoring and Managing EEC’s Work

- Establishing a strong working relationship between NCEO and EEC
  - Goals and expectations
  - Decision-making processes
- Regular communication with EEC
- EEC’s support in keeping track of evaluation progress
- Addressing problems with the evaluation facilitated by EEC
Benefits of Working with EEC

- Bring technical expertise in research methodology, statistics, or related topics to NCEO
- Provide credibility and objectivity by acting as an external “critical friend”
- Take on responsibility for completing some or all of the (formative and summative) evaluation tasks, allowing NCEO staff to focus on project implementation
Limitations

- Add unanticipated or additional cost to NCEO
- Add to NCEO’s monitoring and management tasks focused on the work of contractors
- Not know NCEO’s background or content area as well as project staff
- Be less available or accessible, as compared to NCEO staff
Getting Started with the Evaluation: NCEO’s Experience

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NCEO Logic Model

**NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CENTER (NCEO) LOGIC MODEL (V7)**

1. To provide & document research based information about high quality assessment systems for students with disabilities.
2. To provide TA&D to States & Consortia to support appropriate inclusion of students with disabilities in assessment systems.
3. To provide leadership & coordination to ensure that students with disabilities are included in and benefit from existing and emerging approaches to high quality assessment.
4. To use resources efficiently across all activity areas so that project outcomes are achieved.

### Activities

1.0 **Knowledge Development Activities**
   - Collect, synthesize, report research & policy data
   - Conduct biennial survey of state needs, issues & trends

2.0 **Technical Assistance and Dissemination**
   - Four Tiers of TA to States/Consortia
   - Recruit & coordinate a cadre of experts
   - Develop, update & maintain website & use technology to increase reach/impact
   - Prepare & disseminate reports/materials

3.0 **Leadership and Coordination**
   - Compile & report States’ APR/SPP data
   - Maintain & meet w/Advisory Committee
   - Partner w/ other organizations, support RTTA & GSEG, participate in the NCEO CoP
   - Proposals & products vetted to TACC & plan dissemination strategy w/ NICHIY
   - Communicate implementation & evaluation plan status with Project Officer & stakeholders

### Outputs

- Maintain and update interactive web tools
- Develop at least 3 KD products annually
- Publish findings from state survey biennially
- Disseminate reports/materials at national/regional meetings, webinars & teleconferences
- Implement 4 TA Tiers to facilitate state review/revision of policies/practices
- Maintain up-to-date website
- Electronic dissemination
- Summarize APR/SPP
- Collaborative topical teleconference(s)
- TACC updated
- Multiple audiences receive products/NAC resources cross listed on other websites

### Short Term Outcomes

- NAC products/materials/TA are accurate, up-to-date, research-based
- States/Consortia use NAC products/materials/TA
- States/Consortia participate in activities developed through and in collaboration with NAC’s coordinated support and leadership

### Intermediate Outcomes

- States/Consortia assessment policies, practices, training, data use and monitoring procedures reflect research based practices/inclusive assessment systems

### Long Term Outcomes

- Assessments in which students w/ disabilities participate improve in quality
- States/Consortia improve accountability for results
- States/Consortia use of assessment results for decision making improves

PM = Performance Measures have been incorporated in the Evaluation Plan.

**Continuous Monitoring & Improvement + Formative & Summative Evaluation**
Evaluation Plan

- Strategies
- Performance measures
- Implementation
  - Evaluation questions
  - Data sources
  - Methods/analysis
  - Party responsible
  - Timeline
Year 3 Data Collection Schedule

- Prepare and attend the AC meeting
- Review 3+2 recommendations
- Revise Evaluation Plan & Data Collection Schedule based on 3+2 Review, if needed
- TA Database, WW NCEO, & NIRS formative report
- Develop and administer a QAR survey
- Develop and conduct QAR follow-up interviews
Year 3 Data Collection Schedule (continued)

- Design assessment of NCEO collaborations (on-site)
- Prepare a QAR survey/interview report
- Finalize “Rate the States” tool
- Conduct a TACC database/collaboration review
- Prepare and submit 524B Annual Performance Report
- Discuss evaluation findings with NCEO key staff
- Plan for Year 4 evaluation activities (on-site)
Ongoing Activities

- Staff entries into the TA Documentation Tool, Where in the World Is NCEO Tool, and NIRS
- Quarterly reports on tool entries
- Monthly calls with EEC and NCEO internal evaluation team to co-develop instruments and protocols
- Monthly progress report with meeting minutes sent to PI
- Monthly conference calls with the Project Officer, including EEC as requested
Developing and Maintaining a Strong Relationship with the Third-party Evaluator
Agreement on Roles and Responsibilities

- Defining the work
  - Goals, expectations and timeframe
- Creating an evaluation workgroup
  - Internal and external evaluators as members
- The elephant in the room
  - Dynamic tension is a good thing
Managing the Working Relationship

- Balancing internal and external perspectives
  - It’s a partnership

- Communication and decision-making
  - Keep minutes of all meetings
  - Establish schedules
    - Data collection schedule
    - Project management schedule if necessary
  - Be consistent in your reporting
    - Method and timeframe