

A Word to Project Directors: Getting the Most from Your Evaluation Partnership



The new funding cycle has begun, and many of you have an evaluator on board to help with the work. Maybe you found an external evaluator with some great experience, or you have someone inside your agency who likes applied research. Either way, now that you've got someone else to take the lead on the evaluation, can you check it off your to-do list? Not quite!

Resist the temptation to go on evaluation autopilot. You may have an evaluator in place and a written plan outlining your activities, but unless you stay involved in the evaluation, you may not get the results you need to guide your project. For instance, without any guidance from you, it's likely that the evaluator can follow your evaluation plan and complete a public opinion survey. But without your input, the survey might miss a critical question or two you need for the intervention, target the wrong city or park, or under-represent a key population group. Then the results might not give you exactly the information you need.



To keep that from happening, here are a few tips for managing a successful evaluation partnership:

Make your expectations clear. We all have our own ideas of what a great evaluation consists of, so it's possible you and your evaluator might interpret the evaluation plan differently. Make clear to your evaluator what you want to learn from each activity and when you would like to see the results. You can also discuss logistics, such as who will help with data collection, data entry and final report writing. Whether it's a meeting or in writing, or both, making your evaluation expectations clear will avoid misunderstandings and wasted time.



Stay in touch with your evaluator. Regular communication keeps you in touch with an evolving evaluation plan. Just as in programming interventions, it is impossible to plan every detail of a three-year evaluation. It will change slightly as program needs change, and it's important that the plan evolves in a direction that is useful to you and your project. To stay on top of things, you might consider meeting quarterly with your evaluator, by telephone or in person, to share progress updates, discuss plans to collect new data, review survey questions, interpret results and talk about their implication for next steps of the project. This is a chance for you to ask questions like, "What's the best way to sample this population?" or "What does that graph mean, anyway?" If you have those questions, it's likely that your coalition members and other key audiences will have them too, so any write-up should include an explanation.

Introduce your evaluator to TCEC. Evaluation for CTCP-funded projects includes some very specific

requirements. Even if your evaluator has years of experience, s/he will find some of these requirements to be new. So to be successful, your evaluator should know what CTCP expects. You can recommend the OTIS Evaluation Guide as a reference. Direct evaluators to our website (<http://tobaccoeval.ucdavis.edu>) so that they can read some background material, access a wealth of resources, and participate in our webinars. Invite them to give us a call or send us an e-mail; we are happy to answer questions.