

Q4

Who is going to do what?

WHAT IT MEANS AND WHY IT MATTERS FOR USEFUL EVALUATION

One of the things that can undermine the usefulness of evaluation is a lack of buy-in from key people like front-line staff or board members. Lack of buy-in often arises because people feel that evaluation will create a lot of extra work for them without yielding any useful result. They may feel that others have overly optimistic ideas about how long things will take or will take their contributions for granted. Time and money are always limited in the nonprofit sector, so people are understandably cautious about taking on any new tasks. This question is designed to address that type of concern head on. It gets into the practical aspects of evaluation work and tries to clarify who will do what, how much of it they will do, and whether they are comfortable with that role.

HOW TO ASK IT

The prompts below are designed to get as concrete as possible about the work that needs to be done in any evaluation project and to make it clear who will do what. Hopefully, these prompts will get people thinking about a few of the less obvious tasks that can end up using a lot of time and creating frustration. The focus here may differ depending on whether you are planning a completely new evaluation, seeking to improve or refine an existing plan, or simply trying to make the best of a plan that is already implemented. This discussion isn't designed to create a complete, detailed evaluation workplan, but rather to get people talking about roles and workloads. In the process of asking questions like these, it is often possible to draw out people's underlying concerns that they won't be able to deliver on what is being asked of them.



Q4 WHO IS GOING TO DO WHAT?

Here are some suggestions for other questions to ask should you need further probes to get to the information you are looking for:

How much time and energy do you, as a funder, expect to us devote to this evaluation?

What kind of support can you provide to help us succeed at this evaluation?
What kind of feedback are you able to provide?

How will we ensure that our evaluation is done ethically (e.g. in cases where we are working with vulnerable populations)?

Given what we talked about in question 1 (what we want to learn) and question 2 (how we can help each other learn), do we feel that this evaluation will be good value for money? Does anyone feel that they won't see a lot of benefit for the time they are investing?

In this evaluation work, who will play the following roles?

How willing are you to participate in the evaluation process?

Deciding on the key evaluation questions;
Clarifying the project's logic model or theory of change;
Designing or choosing surveys or other evaluation tools;
Developing an evaluation work plan with timelines and costs;
Gathering data; Analyzing data; Communicating about the findings

Are all of us clear on what is being asked of us?
Do these roles seem manageable?

What might go wrong during this evaluation?
Who will address these problems if they arise?

Is there a good balance of roles? Are the people making the decisions about this evaluation empowered to act on those decisions?

What support do you need to play a specific role?

Could we meet again if things start taking longer than expected or if we have trouble getting data?

When do we need help?
When do we need an outside consultant?



WHEN AND WHERE TO ASK IT

This question is often helpful in situations where a nonprofit is having trouble understanding funder expectations regarding evaluation. Talking about roles and responsibilities and clarifying the amount of work required is a good way to clarify exactly what is expected. It can also be a gentle way of letting a funder know that their expectations may be unrealistic. This question is also useful when front-line staff or volunteers within an organization are unsure what is being asked of them. It can help to address concerns about staff being taken away from service delivery to do paperwork by putting concrete parameters around the tasks required and the time they will take.



KEEP in MIND

CHALLENGES THAT MIGHT COME UP

FUNDER WON'T PLAY A SPECIFIC ROLE IN THE EVALUATION PROJECT

If you are talking with a funder about evaluation, you may find that they aren't willing to play any concrete role in carrying out your evaluation project. This is, perhaps, understandable. A funder may not want to be perceived as interfering and they are keen to make sure you do the type (and amount) of evaluation that works for your organization. This is fair, but if the funder isn't willing to shoulder any of the work themselves or fund you to do it, they shouldn't have high expectations in terms of what they will get back from you!

Funders who aren't able to help in a direct way may be willing and able to help with background work like sharing examples of similar evaluations and linking you to people with specific evaluation expertise. They may also have a vested interest in helping you synthesize your evaluation learnings into a form that is useful to them.

ROLE CLARITY ISSUES THAT DON'T BECOME CLEAR UNTIL THE EVALUATION IS UNDERWAY

DISCUSSION STARTER

Sometimes, concerns about who is doing what don't arise until you are in the middle of an evaluation project. You may, for example, be midway through your evaluation when you realize that your methodology is limited and you are not able to ask the questions that would help you to learn about the impact of your project.

How can we learn from this experience and share our learnings in a productive way with our funders and other stakeholders? ► To what extent can we change the evaluation process to make it work for us? Who needs to be part of this discussion? ► What is realistic for us to do given our timelines and budget? ► How might we still use the data we have already gathered even if it isn't everything we need or want to know?

The ONN Blog: Unpacking Nonprofit Evaluation: Who is taking the risks and who is making the decisions? may be useful when exploring this question. <http://theonnc.ca/unpacking-nonprofit-evaluation-who-is-taking-the-risks-and-who-is-making-the-decisions/>