Evaluator Qualifications and Independence

Overview

Evaluator qualifications are critical to a successful evaluation that will strengthen the program's level of evidence. A single evaluator or a team of evaluators is fine, so long as all the necessary skills are covered. When selecting an evaluator, it helps if the evaluator has worked with similar programs and has demonstrated experience in conducting the specific type of evaluation described in your evaluation plan.

Evaluator Qualifications

When selecting an external evaluator, focus on the program evaluator and the evaluator's background and qualifications. What is the extent of the evaluator's experience with both the content area and the type of evaluation you are planning? Identify the evaluator's experience with similar interventions and with the type of RCT or QED that the evaluation is using (e.g., an RCT in which schools, rather than students, are randomly assigned to treatment or control). List the key people designing and overseeing the evaluation and ensuring its quality along with their education/training and type and years of experience.

Verify that the evaluator can handle the scale and size of the proposed evaluation. Provide at least one example of an evaluation that is similar in size, complexity, and number of sites. Discuss the experience the evaluator has in managing similar evaluation protocols (e.g., this type of sampling, data collection, analysis). If relevant, does the evaluator have the capacity to conduct an evaluation with multiple sites across a broad geographic area?

**Review Checklist:
Evaluator Qualifications**

☐ The extent to which the evaluator/team has sufficient capacity to conduct the proposed evaluation, in terms of technical experience and the size/scale of the evaluation, is described.

☐ The evaluator/team's prior experience with similar evaluations is described.

Evaluator Independence

Think about the independence of the evaluator from the program. To achieve a high quality evaluation, it is important that the evaluator have enough independence to render an honest and unbiased opinion of the program's outcomes and impacts. However, it is also important that you are able to provide the oversight needed to ensure that the evaluation meets the CNCS standards. Finally, it is important that the evaluator not have conflicts of interest regarding the evaluation.

To address these issues, think about the relationship between the program and the evaluator, and what steps are being taken to ensure independence and alleviate any apparent or real conflicts of interest. In doing this, it is important to explain the structure of the relationship between the intervention and the evaluation, including the role of the grantee with respect to the evaluator. This includes determining whether the evaluator is hired by the grantee and if that evaluator is an employee, consultant, or outside firm. In addition, what are the reporting and financial arrangements between the program and the evaluator? For example, is the evaluator paid for by the grantee and who gives direction and provides oversight?

You should talk about whether or not there are conflicts of interest related to the evaluation. Conflicts of interest could be related to a part of the program, the evaluator, or the relationship between the two. For example, has the evaluator played a role in designing the program, or is the person supervising the evaluator also responsible for program implementation and success? If there are conflicts of interest, they should be disclosed and measures to mitigate them discussed.

In terms of oversight, think about who is reviewing evaluation plans provided by the evaluator(s) and their qualifications to do so. In addition, when thinking about oversight discuss how you will make sure that the evaluator stays on schedule, produces the required evaluation products (e.g., design, instruments, data, analysis, reports), and how the individual(s) providing oversight can determine the quality of the products and whether they meet standards of scientific evidence and conform to CNCS requirements.

Finally, think about how the evaluation findings will be released. What are the roles of the grantee in releasing the evaluation findings? Does the evaluator have the ability to release findings independent of the grantee and CNCS? How will all parties ensure that findings are released in a timely manner?