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Selecting The Right Evaluator For Your 21st CCLC Program

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PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

This document was created to provide guidance to Oregon 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grantees. Based on Critical Element II in the USED State Education Agency (SEA) Monitoring Protocol requirements from the U.S. Department of Education, this document should support Oregon Project Directors in identifying, interviewing and selecting the most qualified local level evaluator.

Modified from the New Jersey Department of Education Office of Student Support Services, Final Comprehensive 5-Year Evaluation Report Outline 21st CCLC Team

LET'S GET STARTED!

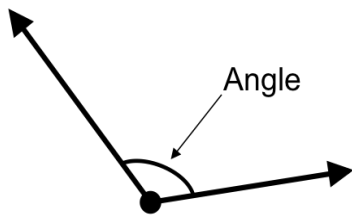


FINDING THE RIGHT ONE

Finding an evaluator who meets your program's needs and provides unbiased feedback can be a challenging task with multiple objectives. However, your long-term objective should be building a partnership between program staff, funding source, and the evaluator you choose.

To do that, first determine the needs of your program and your funder. Knowing what you are seeking and why will go a long way toward ensuring the best fit between your needs and an evaluator's abilities. From there, look for a candidate whose education, experience, and outlook make them qualified to evaluate your program. Reviewing the originally approved grant application is a good place to start.

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CHOOSING YOUR ANGLE

An evaluation is not simply a matter of looking at your organization or initiative and saying, "I think we're doing okay." It should examine what you're doing from a number of different angles and perspectives. For example, it should give you not only a clear sense of whether or not you're accomplishing your goals, but of where your strengths and weaknesses lie, of how to improve what you're doing, and of new directions to explore.

No matter how well your evaluation is planned— and it should be well planned— you will still need evaluators that have the skills and knowledge to look at your particular situation accurately. Since national research on afterschool impact is fairly new, your evaluator should have experience with evaluating similar program types.

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WHAT TO PINPOINT

The real reason for an evaluation is its usefulness in improving the organization. The more accurate the information you get, and the better it is analyzed, the more useful it will be in helping you identify and build on your organization's strengths and pinpoint and correct the areas it needs to work on. A well-conceived evaluation can also help you adjust to changing needs in the community or target population, learn more about the implications of the issue you're working on, provide a base for advocacy, and help with fundraising. As a result, it is important that your evaluators do the best job they can.

Evaluators can have a positive impact on your program. Their research can offer much-needed influence by showing the impact of your grant program on the people it is intended to affect. Research can also offer the benefits of certain techniques or methods, and any areas for improvement. Competent evaluators provide ongoing feedback to program staff, so that they can improve and stay on track.

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Once you have an applicant pool together, it is time to select a qualified evaluator who you feel will work most effectively with you and your staff. There are **FOUR THINGS** to consider when choosing your evaluator.



ONE: Your evaluator must have the skill set necessary to perform the work. Depending on your needs, these skills will range from conducting one-on-one interviews to statistical analysis. Evidence that the evaluator has the necessary skill set can be found in examples of their previous work. Look for anything that will provide you with a clearer idea of their quality and capacity. Professional references could also report that the evaluator is reliable, responsive, easy to talk to, and a good listener.



TWO: Ask evaluators to explain their model or philosophy of evaluation. Some use more qualitative methods. Others use more quantitative techniques. Regardless of their methods, have a discussion to learn their rationale for data collection.



THREE: Evaluators not only need to have the know-how and experience, but they need to have the resources as well. Speak with the evaluator's staff. See what equipment they have. Look for other things that might indicate that the evaluator is prepared to take on the evaluation. You can also look at the evaluator's website, the quality of their letterhead, their promptness in returning calls, and the quality of their written communications.



FOUR: Evaluators should be familiar with the standards and guidelines for providing quality evaluations. This knowledge should extend to the American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principle for Evaluators and the Program Evaluation Standards of the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluations.

Remember, evaluators are stakeholders as well, and they have goals and perspectives of their own. When making your selection, be sure that the interests and areas of expertise of your evaluator lie in the area of your project.

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THINGS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR EVALUATOR

- Tell me about your experience in evaluating grant programs.
- What types of programs have you evaluated?
- Can you provide us with a list of grants you have evaluated?
- What has been your greatest success story during your evaluation career?
- Describe how you work with the grant program staff and constituents.
- How often would you meet with our staff to provide input and suggestions on how the program is functioning?
- How could our staff help you to succeed in conducting a good evaluation?
- What is your philosophy toward sharing information from your findings?
- How often will you communicate with us?

Finding the right evaluator can have measurable benefits for any grant program. Thorough evaluations can help grantees pinpoint problem areas in their programs and come up with ideas on how to fix them. Such evaluations can also affirm how a program is having a positive effect on its community, which could help secure more funding in the future.

The Oregon Department of Education will be requiring **two** separate documents for all programs ending their five-year cycle.

These documents are:

- (1) **the five-year Comprehensive Evaluation** and the
- (2) **Program Description Report.**



THE POWER OF THE PICTURE

With regard to a **comprehensive evaluation report** for a 21st Century Community Learning Program, an evaluator has the task of using data to develop a vivid picture of a program. That picture should include:



TELLING YOUR STORY

Tell the story of your program's implementation and demonstrate the impact of the program on participants. To do this, use any relevant data that has been collected and used to guide management decisions by identifying areas in which changes may be needed. The evaluation report can advocate for your program with potential by showing the progression of this story in a clear, narrative form. This story is also a chance to celebrate your achievements, regardless of how small or insignificant they may appear to be. An evaluator who takes this approach of telling clear, accurate story can be a strong advocate for your program.

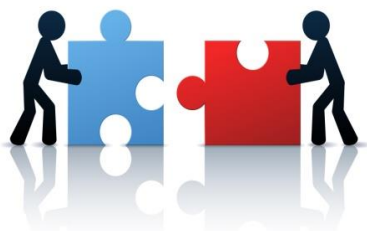
PARTS OF THE STORY

As outlined, this document (your program's story) must include the following sections:



SETTING THE SCENE: Introduction

This section should provide a background and description of the program (hours of operation, site locations). Also provide a description of the target population and community served (grade levels, ethnic and racial background, economic status, students with disabilities and non-public school/student participation).



PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER:

Program Implementation

This section should highlight the range and intensity of all required program components and detailed activities, staff specialties and certifications; and, a summary of accomplishments in program development and implementation with acknowledgement of changes in program design/implementation from previous years.



SHOWING THE EVIDENCE WITH DATA:

Measures and Outcomes

In this section, you will use quantitative and qualitative data to:

- ✓ Analyze trends (e.g., Attendance, Parent involvement, Teacher Rating, Activity and subject categories addressed);
- ✓ Make comparisons with state, national and federal standards;
- ✓ Determine progress toward achieving the state goals and objectives;
- ✓ Determine the level of achievement of each local level indicator identified in the previous NGO;
- ✓ Describe youth and family outcomes; and,
- ✓ Make comparisons of impact across program years, grade levels, sites to: determine common characteristics and achievements, and identify program strengths and weaknesses.

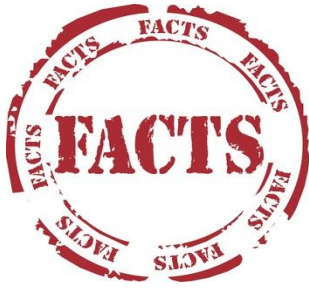
In addition to being written in a narrative style that creates a vivid picture of a program, final comprehensive evaluation reports should also use graphs and tables to describe and to picture trends and depict impact.



FINISHING STRONG:

Summary and Conclusions

This section should provide any and all major accomplishments of your program; review and status of recommendations from the previous program year evaluation; and plans to sustain and continue the program.



DON'T FORGET THE FACTS...But Just The Facts

Your evaluator will also need to submit a **Program Description Report**, as a separate attachment (4 pages maximum).

This report should be constructed as a *just the facts*-style document which details a description of:

1. The final evaluation must include, but is not limited to, the following sections:
 - a. Introduction
 - ✓ Background and description of program (hours of operation, site locations);
 - ✓ Description of target population (grade levels, ethnic and racial background, economic status, students with disabilities and non-public school/student participation).
 - b. Program Implementation
 - ✓ Range and intensity of all required program components and detailed activities,
 - ✓ Staff specialties and certifications; and
 - ✓ Summary of accomplishments in program development and implementation with acknowledgement of changes in program design/implementation from previous years.
 - c. Measures and Outcomes – Use quantitative and qualitative data¹ to:
 - ✓ Analyze trends (e.g., Attendance, Parent involvement, Teacher Rating, Activity and subject categories addressed);
 - ✓ Make comparisons with state, national and federal standards;
 - ✓ Determine progress toward achieving the state goals and objectives;
 - ✓ Determine the level of achievement of each local level indicator identified in the previous NGO;
 - ✓ Describe youth and family outcomes; and
 - ✓ Make comparisons of impact across program years, grade levels, sites to: determine common characteristics and achievements, and identify program strengths and weaknesses.
 - d. Summary and Conclusions
 - ✓ Major accomplishments;
 - ✓ Review and status of recommendations from previous program year evaluation; and
 - ✓ Plans to sustain and continue the program.

2. Program Description Report, as a separate attachment (4 pages maximum), must also be included, which details a description of:
 - a. the grantee agency;
 - b. established collaborations and/or partnerships and their contributions;
 - c. total population serviced [including non-public school students, if any];
 - d. characteristics of the student population [looking at students who have attended the program for at least 70 days or more];
 - e. enrollment, recruitment, and retention efforts;
 - f. program components (activities) offered;
 - g. average program and administrative costs²;
 - h. staffing and professional development offered;
 - i. linkages to school-day staff and activities;
 - j. coordination with other federal, state, or local programs; and
 - k. sustainability progress and achievement.



THINGS TO REMEMBER:



Look for an evaluator whose education, experience, and outlook make them a right fit to evaluate your program.



An evaluation should give you a clear sense of whether or not you are accomplishing your goals, how to improve what you are doing, and possible new directions to explore.



Competent evaluators provide ongoing feedback to program staff, so that they can improve and stay on track.



An evaluation should use data to develop a vivid picture of your program, which includes:

1. a background and description on the program;
2. the range and intensity of all program components;
3. quantitative and qualitative data;
4. major accomplishments of the program, and
5. plans to sustain, improve and continue the program.

Hopefully, these tips are helpful and will be useful to you moving forward. Take your time to find the right evaluator who can help guide your program to success.

Resources

1. Dewar, T. (1997). *A Guide to Evaluating Asset-Based Community Development: Lessons, Challenges, and Opportunities*. Chicago: ACTA Publications.
2. Killion, J. (2002). *Assessing impact: Evaluating staff development*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council. Chapter 6: Formulate evaluation questions. www.nsd.org/connect/projects/ai6.pdf
3. Florida Institute of Education at the University of North Florida—Safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools evaluation handbook: Choosing the right evaluation questions. www.unf.edu/dept/fie/sdfs/phasell.pdf
4. Maltrud, K., Polacsek, M., & Wallerstein, N. *Participatory Evaluation Workbook for Healthy Community Initiatives*. Albuquerque: New Mexico Department of Health, Public Health Division, Healthy Communities Unit.
5. New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Student Support Services, Final Comprehensive 5-Year Evaluation Report Outline.