



PRE-EVALUATION PLANNING PROTOCOL

Questions for evaluators inspired by 22 tales of mistakes made and lessons learned from evaluation failures.¹

Questions for Consideration Before Submitting a Proposal or Accepting a Project

1. What are the potential risks, to the evaluation and to myself, of undertaking this project given my current workload and level of self-care for physical and emotional health?
2. How will I obtain sufficient information to understand the complexity of the context of the evaluation, the evaluand's organizational health and readiness, and the potential utilization of results?
3. What is the evaluation history of the program/ organization and how may it impact this evaluation?
4. What are the expectations and level of commitment to the evaluation of the ultimate audience for this evaluation [e.g., a donor, board, policymaker, central management team], and how would our communication channel work?
5. What is my rationale for working solo or in collaboration with one or more colleagues on this project, and what T-chart advantages and disadvantages contributed to that preference?
6. What evidence is there to suggest that the needs of the client would not be better served with an evaluability assessment or use of a term other than "evaluation" at this time?
7. What factors could affect my independence to follow guiding principles and standards in this evaluation (e.g., conflict of interest, friendship with stakeholders, building trust with participants without becoming overly collegial, effect on future work options) and is the best solution to manage the risks or walk away now?

Questions for Consideration Before Commitments are Made

1. What additional language or mechanisms are required in the project documentation to ensure adequate time, process, and budget will be in place to provide a buffer in the event of emergent client requirements, overlooked stakeholders, program complexity, training needs, translation, resource development, churn, external turbulence, and other situations that could contribute to scope creep?
2. In what ways might a series of shorter contracts (e.g., 3, 6, 12 months maximum) be more beneficial to the client and evaluator than one of a longer term?
3. How could the composition and communication plan for the Steering Committee/ Working Group be strengthened?
4. What language do I need to see in the work plan for early and ongoing key stakeholder engagement (e.g., joint inception meeting, roles, timeline, task prioritization, surfacing expectations, logic and/or causal model development, system maps, rich pictures, data analysis, frequent review points)?
5. What evidence have I gathered that there is a good fit between the client and myself for this project and what evidence might I be overlooking to suggest this is not a good fit?

¹ Hutchinson, K. (Ed.). (2019). *Evaluation Failures: 22 tales of mistakes made and lessons learned*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Tool developed by Sandra Sellick (sandra@evaluationlink.ca).



REFLECTION PROTOCOL

Questions for evaluators to answer during and after an evaluation project based on 22 tales of mistakes made and lessons learned from evaluation failures.¹

Questions for Deep Learning During an Evaluation Project

1. What are my gut and instincts telling me about this evaluation, and am I being proactive enough in listening to the clients concerns and addressing any concerns I may have with the client?
2. In what ways am I nurturing reflection practice, evaluation capacity building, and champions among key stakeholders and program staff, and am I overlooking additional further opportunities for development?
3. What are biases are emerging on my part this evaluation and how can I mitigate them?
4. What dissonance do I detect between my assumptions and emerging information about the program or organization (e.g., cultural context, capacity, stakeholder engagement) and what action is needed?
5. What have I done this week to check climate at regular intervals during calls and meetings to keep the tone focused on growth and build trust with the Steering Committee/Working group and stakeholders?
6. Are further improvements needed to peg data collection tools to the evaluation questions, indicators, and purpose of the evaluation?
7. How could I improvement my records of communication now in anticipation of churn, scope issues, or other reasons for wanting a meticulous paper trail?
8. Who could I call on among my evaluation colleagues to discuss these reflections?
9. In what ways could I adjust my self-care practices to maintain balance and perspective in this evaluation?

Questions for Deep Learning Following an Evaluation Project

1. What surprised me during the evaluation and what are the implications of these surprises for future evaluations?
2. What aspects of this evaluation were successful, why were they so, and how can I use this reflection for the betterment of the craft of evaluation?
3. What aspects of this evaluation were unsuccessful and how can I improve my practice as a result of this learning (e.g., alternative approaches, reading, collaboration, protocol updates)?
4. What signs, if any, should have told me to walk away from this evaluation and what are the implications of this for future projects?
5. What errors did I make in this evaluation and what can I learn from them?
6. Which of my colleagues would I most trust for help with blindspots?

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