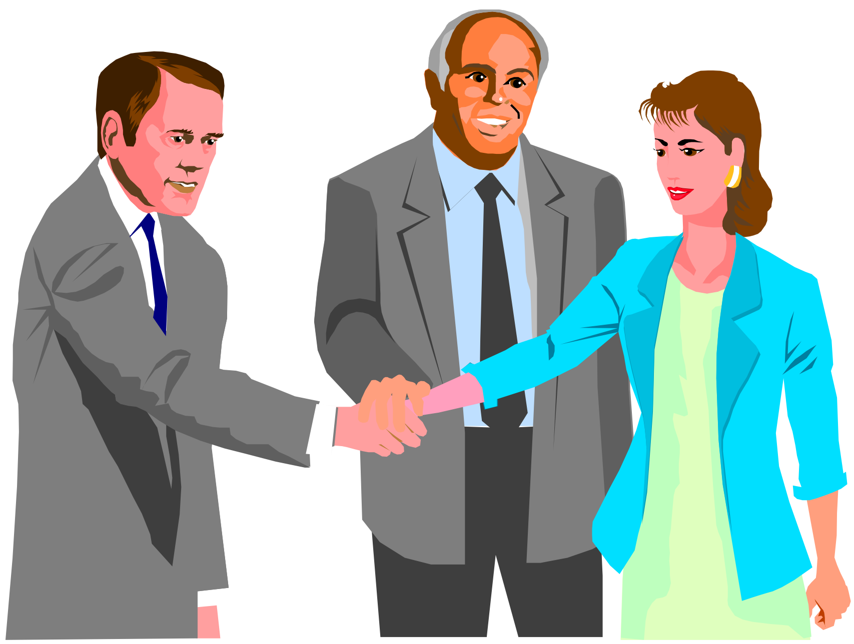
Working Well with Evaluation Consultants: A Guide



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Introduction to this Guide

This guide is designed to help people and organizations across the Northwest Territories who are planning to work with a consultant to conduct an evaluation. It outlines steps you can take to ensure an effective partnership and a useful and credible product. In this context, we are talking about evaluation of programs and services your organization provides. This means evaluation as used for getting feedback, data and information about your organization and its activities. Program evaluation gives you useful information to help decide what areas of your program work, and what areas need improvement.

Over the years, Government of the Northwest Territories staff have collaborated on a number of evaluations with external evaluation consultants, so we looked for ways to learn from these experiences. In preparing this guide, we surveyed GNWT staff who had experience in this area as well as some of the consultants they had worked with to see what they found helpful. What we learned from others' experiences and what we heard from these northerners is reflected in what is covered in this guide.

This guide is broken down into three sections: planning your project (includes deciding to hire a consultant, and developing the necessary terms of reference); processes for finding and choosing an evaluation consultant; and, working with the consultant effectively. Much of our emphasis is on the initial planning phase of the evaluation. It is our experience that if you invest the time and effort in planning all the details of the project, completing it is quite straightforward. Unfortunately, the reverse is also very true. A poorly planned evaluation can result in a number of problems as it proceeds.

At times, you may find that you need more information than is provided here. If that happens, look for help. There may be others in your organization that can help you. If not, contact the Budgeting and Evaluation Division of Financial Management Board Secretariat (GNWT) at (867) 920-6196, or check our web page. Our staff is available to provide technical support and assistance.

Section A: Planning Your Project

You will need to think carefully about what you wish to accomplish. In order to carry out your project, you will need to develop a Terms of Reference, and also decide if you wish to use a consultant or do the project in-house.

1. Do You Want to Use a Consultant?

There are times when it may be preferable to do an evaluation in-house using your skills and/or those of other staff. You may choose to do this for financial reasons, to build evaluation skills into your organization or because an external evaluation consultant may not have the same credibility with people involved in the program that someone from within your organization does. However, you may need to work with an external evaluation consultant in situations where:

- you or other staff don't have the time to do the evaluation;
- you don't have all the skills or expertise to do it; and/or
- you need a fresh or impartial look at the program.

Here are some of the factors to consider when deciding whether to hire an external evaluation consultant:

Pros	Cons
➢ Less work for you	➢ You give up some control over the process
➢ Consultants have the relevant skills and experience	➢ You may not learn useful skills
➢ Consultants bring an impartial point of view	➢ It may be expensive - you need to find the funds
➢ Results might be seen as more objective to other members of the community	➢ Consultant may not completely understand the program

Please note that although hiring an external consultant may lessen the work involved for you and your staff, managing an evaluation contract is demanding and time-consuming. This guide, however, is written for those of you that have decided to use an outside consultant for your evaluation project. From this point forward, the information and advice provided will be based upon the premise that you are using an outside evaluation consultant.

2. Project Management – Steering Committee

Before proceeding with the evaluation, you will need to decide who the Project Manager will be. This person should be familiar with the program and understand the basics of evaluation.

The Project Manager will also need to have the time to actively manage the contract by providing direction and support to the external evaluation consultant, as well as be the link between the consultants and program staff and other stakeholders. There also must be adequate financial resources available to support the evaluation.

You may want to establish a steering committee to guide the process. The steering committee provides overall direction to the evaluation consultant though the Project Manager, and provides members the opportunity for input. This involvement tends to increase the ownership of the evaluation's findings, and boost motivation to act upon them. Committee members usually represent the key stakeholder groups including funders, program clients, and community groups. Whether or not there is a steering committee struck, it is important to inform all key stakeholders, and get their cooperation and support before you begin.

Program staff needs to be aware that an evaluation is being planned. Their cooperation will make the evaluation a better product, so be sure to involve them as much as possible. If possible, explain to everyone what role they will have in the process.

If key staff members are resistant or unwilling to participate in the evaluation, the findings from the evaluation may not be accurate or complete. Sometimes people are anxious about evaluations because they fear negative consequences, for example, the program losing its funding, or staff cuts. If you clearly explain why you're doing the evaluation, who is requesting it be done, and what the findings will be used for, people will be more willing to trust the process and participate.

3. Developing Your Terms of Reference

Once you have decided to use an external consultant, you now need to clearly define what the purpose of the evaluation is. Things to think about might include:

- Is the program meeting the clients' needs?
- Is it cost-effective?
- Are there other approaches or program designs that would improve the success of the program?
- Is the program being implemented effectively?

Defining the purpose and the expected outcomes of an evaluation is necessary to make sure it is effective and provides information that is useful to you. It is a good idea to sit down with stakeholders, who may include funders, program clients, community groups, and managers or staff within your organization, to identify why you are evaluating your program, what information you hope to get, and how the evaluation findings will be used.

The Terms of Reference must include everything evaluation consultants (proponents) need to know to prepare their proposals and develop their approach to the evaluation. If the document is done well, evaluation consultants can accurately interpret what you're looking for. In responding, proponents may propose different approaches to the evaluation but they all should start from the same understanding of what you're looking for and why.

The tone and the language used in the Terms of Reference are important. If you are doing an a request for proposals in particular, you want to grab the interest of evaluation consultants and motivate them to respond by being as clear as you can about the scope of the evaluation and your expectations.

There may also be standard topics that you and your organization will want covered in Terms of Reference. For example, the GNWT's Financial Administration Manual (FAM) sets out the standard clauses dealing with the proposal selection process and issues such as liability insurance requirements etc. For another example, see the BC Government's request for proposal on-line guide at http://www.pc.gov.bc.ca/data/docs/rfpguid.doc

Complete Terms of Reference should usually include all of the following:

- objectives for the evaluation;
- program overview;
- evaluation scope;
- statement of work;
- project time frame;
- budget range;
- project management;
- deliverables;
- provisions of the contract;
- proposal format requirements;
- submission procedures and deadlines;
- how proposals will be rated; and
- who to contact for more information.

Each of these components is discussed in greater detail below. If preparing the Terms of Reference looks too difficult or too time consuming a task, you may want to seek help with the job. If you don't have the time or skills to do it well, remember what is at stake:

> ***Good Terms of Reference => good proposals => good agreements => good evaluation => good results => a better program***

Objectives of the Evaluation

The objectives explain what you are trying to achieve with the evaluation. They state what outcomes and follow-up actions are expected. Objectives should be specific and measurable. They will form the basis around which proponents organize their proposals, so you can clearly see what they plan to do to address each one.

Objectives should be agreed to by the Steering Committee or the person or group for whom the evaluation is being done.

Program Overview

This section tells the evaluation consultant all they will need to know about the program in order to prepare their proposal. It should summarize information about the following:

- a brief history of the development of the program;
- a description of its current structure and program elements;
- any previous program evaluations;
- an outline of program activities and how they relate to program objectives;
- the expected program outputs and outcomes;
- an outline of where the program operates and who it serves; and
- the number of staff and overall budget figures.

More details can be attached as appendices.

Don't forget to outline what program information is available. Proponents need to know what information exists on clients and the services provided to them by program staff. A number of the consultants surveyed told us that lack of program data or lack of access to it was the challenge they most frequently encountered when conducting evaluations.

Telling proponents what program information is available, and in what format it exists, is also important. You want to be clear about this as it makes a big difference to proponents' plans and budgets whether data is not available, or can be found in paper files or in electronic format. If the data isn't there, they'll need to plan on collecting it. Paper files can take a great deal of time to go through, whereas electronic files can usually be accessed very quickly. All of these situations have significant budget implications. If program data is on computer, specify what type of computer (i.e. Apple or IBM) and what spreadsheet or database software was used to create the data files (i.e. Lotus or Excel or Access, etc.).

One problem that consultants report they have consistently encountered is the lack of information provided in the RFP, or little lead time with which to research and prepare the proposal. For an unusually large or complex project, it may be worth your while to allow for a "pre-proposal" stage, either through extra time for the consultants, or even by providing a small budget for proponents to do research with. In either case, a more informed consultant can have a greater understanding of the needs of the project, prepare a better proposal, and ultimately lead to a better project.

Evaluation Scope

Defining the scope tells proponents how wide or narrow the focus or scope of the evaluation is to be. To begin, explain why the program is being evaluated and which aspects of it will be the particular focus. For example, is it to satisfy a requirement of your funder, to determine if the program design was properly implemented or to examine inputs, outputs or outcomes for clients? As well, specify who the audience(s) will be for the reports and findings.

Detailed Statement of Work

In this section, list any specific evaluation questions you know you want answered and outline any particular approaches you want to be part of the evaluation. For example, you may want focus groups held with program clients or a presentation of the evaluation results to a particular group of stakeholders. Describe any specific methods you want used to gather the information. If you want all program clients surveyed, note that requirement here. If you specifically don't want a survey or other approach taken, mention that too.

It may be better to leave such methodological decisions to proponents and leave room for them to put their expertise to work and suggest original or creative ways to conduct the evaluation.

It is very useful to develop a fairly detailed workplan at this stage. It will have to be developed eventually in any case, so it is helpful to develop it ahead of time and append it to the Terms of Reference, or contract. The proponents will have a much better idea of what exactly you are looking for, as will you yourself. It is important to recognize, however, that the plan will likely change as the project progresses.

Project Time Frame

In deciding how long to allow for the evaluation to be completed (time frame) keep the following in mind:

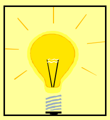
- Are there decisions pending about the future of the program? If so, when do decision-makers need to have the information they require to make these decisions? Will completing the evaluation within your time frame give them the information they need when they need it? Is there any flexibility on these or other deadlines?
- Is it realistic, feasible and reasonable to expect that everything included in the statement of work can be accomplished within the time allotted?

- Will staff, managers, committee members, etc. be able to provide information and input to the consultant quickly?

- Have you allowed time for travel delays due to bad weather or other unforeseen problems? For example, if you get very busy, will you still be able to carry out your responsibilities such as providing feedback on draft reports in a timely manner?

- Is the period of time you're considering a good time to be evaluating this program? Will it be operating? Will key program contacts be available? Is it a good time of year to be contacting people in this community?

Once you answer these questions, you can set a realistic time frame for the project.



Before you go on, take a second look at the statement of work, in light of the financial resources and time available for the evaluation. Is there enough time and money available to accomplish all you want to do?

Outline Available Budget

Identifying a budget amount, or at least a range, is important as it helps evaluation consultants put forward the best approach they can while staying within the limits of your budget. It is the final piece of information they need to completely understand what the scope of the project is and how best they might respond.

When budget information isn't provided, proponents are left to develop their proposal budgets based only on what you have outlined as the evaluation scope and statement of work. This can lead to situations where great proposals come in, but at twice the available budget, resulting in much frustration and negotiation to scale down the proposal.

Even if all proposals come in at the budgeted amount, you are in a position to judge which proposal offers the best value per dollar. (More on this point in the Section B3 - Choosing the Best Proposal.)

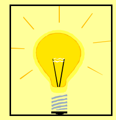
This section should also set out what costs and expenses are to be covered in each proposal's budget. Typically, all professional fees are included. Sometimes, however, there are good reasons to directly pay travel or other out-of-pocket expenses. For example, GST exempt organizations might find it worthwhile to pay travel costs directly and thereby avoid having to later reimburse the evaluation consultant for the GST on those amounts. Don't forget to let the proponents know if there are any special budget considerations, for example if your organization is GST exempt.

Project Management

Proponents need to know whom they will be working with on the project. The Terms of Reference should also indicate whether there is a steering committee, or any advisory body with whom the proponent must work. The Project Manager should have the time to actively manage the project as it proceeds and will be the crucial link between the evaluation consultant, the steering committee, program staff and other stakeholders.

<u>The Deliverables</u>

Here you describe the products you expect the evaluation consultant to "deliver" over the course of the evaluation. Most often, deliverables will be some form of interim report(s) and one or more final report. Think carefully about what you want in the reports. Do you want recommendations? Or, only an analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the current program? It is important to have a clear sense about what you want the reports to contain. You may also want to allow for the reporting on sensitive or extremely confidential issues to be in a separate document, such as a cover letter.



With longer reports, make sure there is an executive summary to be sure people can get the main points in a few pages. You may also wish to require that an audio-visual presentation of the evaluation results be prepared and delivered.

For each deliverable, note when it is due, and outline, in general terms, what content you want covered. As well, mention any particular formatting required. Format considerations may range from specifying the number of copies required of a hard-copy report to requiring that an electronic version of the reports be in a particular file format (i.e. MSWord 6.0 or WordPerfect) consistent with the software used in your organization. Different audiences may require different formats as well, such as overhead presentations. The use of graphics, tables, charts, etc., may be particularly helpful in some reports.

Each report should be tailored to its readers' needs and language skills. Be clear as to whom the readers will be for the evaluation report(s) and note your expectations about use of plain language, etc. While it may seem obvious, be clear about your expectations about spelling and grammar. If you want any material to be translated, specify which documents you want translated into which languages. Also, make clear what the evaluation consultant's responsibility is to make minor editorial changes and corrections to errors of fact that you may request in reports or presentations.

The last issue to deal with in this section concerns ownership of the reports and materials that are created in the project. State whose property they will become and who will hold the copyright. So others can learn from your experiences, you may wish to allow the evaluation consultant to have the right to publish the reports, or to collaborate with you to present a workshop or write an article.

Asking that all reports be first submitted as outlines can be very helpful in reducing the chances of disagreements later on. The outline format focuses attention on the points to be dealt with in the document. Once you agree on what content is to be covered in a report, any subsequent disagreements that arise should be minor editorial issues.

Provisions of the Contract

If your organization will be using some form of standard contract with the successful proponent in the project, attach a copy of it to your Terms of Reference.

Proposal Format Requirements

Once you have completed the above sections, you will have outlined your evaluation plans and described exactly what you want the successful proponent to do. To help compare the proposals you receive, it is helpful to set out a common format and outline for proponents to follow. If all proponents use a consistent format and provide the same types of information in the same order, it will make your review and evaluation of the proposals much easier. As noted earlier, ensuring that each proponent clearly organizes their proposal around the evaluation objectives will also help you to compare and decide between proposals.

In general, it may be helpful for each proposal to begin by introducing the evaluation team, and then move into their proposed approach to the evaluation followed up by the budget and workplan details.

A sample proposal outline might include:

- cover letter;
- executive summary;
- description of the project team;
- relevant experience;
- division of labour among team members;
- proposed methodology;
- detailed workplan;
- budget with breakdown of fees and expenses;
- appendices;
- resumes of team members;
- insurance certificates, etc.; and
- copies of other evaluation reports done by the proponent.

Submission Procedures and Deadlines

You must make it very clear exactly how the proposals are to be submitted. This includes the deadline for submission (time and date), the location, the specific person that proposals much be delivered to, (if applicable), and any other details that are necessary for the proponent to know, in order to make sure the proposal reaches the right party at the right time. You will need to give some thought as to how much time you will allow proponents to prepare their submissions. A complex project will require more time, and therefore a later deadline, than a simple, straightforward project.

<u>How Proposals will be Rated</u>

You will need to outline how and when you plan to select the successful proposal from amongst those submitted. Give an overview of the decision making process you will be following, who will be involved and when a decision will be made. A table showing the relative weighting of each of the factors you will use to rate proposals is the final piece of information to include. This is discussed in more detail in Section B (3) below.

<u>Who to Contact for More Information</u>

Include the names, phone numbers, addresses, and email addresses if applicable, of the Project Manager(s), or any other persons who will be able to answer questions and provide information that the proponents may request.

Section B: Finding and Choosing Your Evaluation Consultant

Now that you have evaluation Terms of Reference, you can proceed with advertising and hiring of a consultant. The details of the process of finding the best evaluation consultant for your project will vary according to a number of factors. Be aware of any restrictions your organization may have about how you can retain consulting services. For example, there are rules within the Government of the Northwest Territories that dictate the process to be followed depending on the size of the project and the availability of the required evaluation expertise (see Appendix 5).

Once you know these restrictions, you can begin the search for an evaluation consultant. Your first step in selecting a consultant should be to determine whether a general understanding of program evaluation is the only requirement. For a complex or highly specialized subject, you may also require that your consultant have proven expertise in the field. You should also identify other special requirements, for example, if your consultant will be conducting surveys in a small community, you might want to ensure that you hire someone with previous experience conducting field research in the NWT. Sometimes, depending on the subject matter, complexity or size of the project, consultants will work together to submit a proposal featuring a team which will collectively have what they see as the required skills and expertise to do the evaluation.

With more specialized programs, you may need to look outside the NWT and talk to people in other places about which consultants might be best qualified. For example, in evaluating the GNWT's Employee and Family Assistance Pilot Program (EFAP), the GNWT was looking for an evaluation team which had both northern experience and the specific EFAP evaluation skills required. The successful team was led by a northern evaluation consultant in collaboration with one of the few experienced EFAP evaluation consultants across Canada.

You may turn to a number of sources for suggestions on possible consultants: ask colleagues in your field who may have experience conducting evaluations for suggestions; contact the NWT Chapter of the Canadian Evaluation Society; or look in the Yellow Pages of the phone book, or consult a business directory.

1. Advertising for Consultants

Although advertising a Request for Proposals is commonly used, there are other options for arranging for consultants, such as "sole source" and invitations to specific consultants. Sole source is useful if the subject area of the study is very specialized, your resources are limited, or time is tight. You can approach one evaluation consultant and ask them to prepare a proposal. However, this means you may risk missing a better proposal from someone else.

Inviting proposals also can save time, effort, and money, as you would not need to advertise extensively. You would simply ask two to three consultants to submit proposals, but again, risk missing out on a better approach.
Your organization may have specific rules about how you can advertise or call for proposals, so be sure to check before you proceed.

In addition to meeting the organization's requirements, don't forget that the whole point of all your work on the Terms of Reference is to attract the best possible proposals. You want, therefore, to make sure that all qualified potential proponents know about it. In addition to placing ads, one option may be to place the Terms of Reference on the Internet so interested parties can download it themselves, saving you having to print copies and/or spend time and money faxing the documents. However you advertise it, keep a contact list including names, phone/fax numbers, and email addresses of those who have received a copy of the RFP so you can contact them if you need to with any changes to deadlines or other requirements.

2. Responding to Questions

Regardless of how thorough you were in preparing the Terms of Reference, proponents will have questions when they review it and plan their proposals. You need to decide how you will respond to these questions. As a start, check your organization's rules on this. You will want to make sure all proponents get the same information you provide any one of them. You can do this by faxing or emailing any replies to everyone on your contact list.

3. Evaluating the Proposals

Of all the proposals you've received, you now need to select the one that best matches your needs. To do that, use the decision model outlined in your Terms of Reference to rate the proposals received.

Now you start to see the benefits from all your hard work in crafting a good set of terms of reference. A good set will have included the information proponents needed to submit proposals that closely match your requirements and provide the creative solutions you want.

If you have a steering committee they should be included in the selection of the evaluation consultant. Even if there is not a steering committee, you will want to include people with either particular expertise in the program or with experience in evaluation to help you rate and evaluate the proposals. Be sure all members of your rating team are familiar with the rating criteria and have had time to review all of the proposals. Take a few minutes to make sure you share an understanding of what is meant by each of the criteria.

A sample decision model is included as Appendix 4. It was developed to compare proposals submitted to evaluate the GNWT's Public/Private Partnership Initiative.

Factors used in rating proposals might include:

- Project Team – The names, qualifications, and experience of specific persons assigned to this project.

- Past Experience – You will want to see if the proponents have conducted similar evaluations in the past, or if they have experience working in the communities or regions where your program operates. If you require a particular approach be used, you want to ensure that there are team members with that necessary experience.

- Method and Approach – You will want to assess how well the proponents' approaches match your requirements, resources, and desired outcomes for the project. Their approach(es) must be complete and comprehensive. As well, you need to look closely at their work style. Are they presenting themselves as experts, to be left alone to do the work, or as facilitators, to work closely with program staff and stakeholders? You should be clear on which approach is most consistent with your requirements.

- Project Schedule and Feasibility of Workplan – You will want to check that the time lines proposed seem reasonable for the work outlined, and also that they are compatible with your work schedule and project requirements.

- Value for Money – Are the costs outlined reasonable, for the product to be delivered? Make sure costs are broken down between fees and expenses, and that there is efficient use of resources.

- References – You will want to make sure the references provide positive assessments of these consultants and their work.

- Other considerations – You may want to look at other things, such as the proponents having sufficient insurance if necessary for your project, or have an overall assessment category for the quality of the proposal itself. A clean, concise, well-organized and well-written proposal is a good indication of the quality of product a consultant will tend to generate.

4. The Final Decision

If the two best proposals are very close in your ratings, you may wish to get more information from them before you choose one. Interviewing both proponents either face-to-face or by phone might be a good option for this. This lets you meet them, get a better feel of who they are and how they work and to ask for any clarifications you might want on their proposals.

This is a good time to point out any areas where a proponent's plans are not consistent with the requirements of the terms of reference. Such inconsistencies may be simply based upon a misinterpretation of what your terms of reference called for and can easily be worked out.

In order to protect the integrity of the selection process, you must be sure to ask the same questions and give each proponent the same opportunity to provide additional information and feedback.

You may also wish to ask to see a sample of an evaluation report the proponents have written. Reviewing such samples will give you an indication of their approaches to this important task.

Lastly, if you haven't already as part of your rating process, don't forget to check the references for the proponent to whom you're thinking of offering the contract. What you hear might influence your decision or provide you with insights as to how best to work successfully with that particular evaluation consultant.

Once you select a proposal, let all the other proponents know your decision as soon as possible by telephone or by a letter. They may ask for feedback. Providing comments about what you saw as areas for improvement in their proposal can be helpful to them. A debriefing allows the unsuccessful proponents the chance to further explore where their proposals fell short, in order for them to do a better job in the future.

Section C: Working Effectively With Your Evaluation Consultant

Once you have selected a proposal, the action phase of the evaluation begins. You've "planned the work" and now you need to "work the plan"! As you get underway, remember that everyone involved has a stake in the evaluation going well and leading to the best possible evaluation results. In addition to working from a good evaluation plan, the relationships between the evaluation consultant(s), project manager, steering committee, and program staff are very important. Everyone needs to put his or her best efforts into this collaboration to pull it off successfully.

This section discusses seven key areas for the Project Manager to note when working with an external evaluation consultant:

1. Initial meeting
2. Contract
3. Project management
4. Providing feedback
5. Payment
6. Deliverables
7. Evaluating or debriefing the evaluation project

1. Initial Meeting

When surveyed, both GNWT staff and consultants told us that good clear ongoing communication fostered through regular contact and timely scheduled meetings were important to ensure the best possible outcomes from the evaluation. At the outset, move quickly to arrange an initial meeting with the evaluation consultant. The Project Manager, steering committee members and senior program staff should also attend. As the Project Manager, you want to be proactive, enthusiastic and well organized for this first meeting. This is the time to set the tone for the rest of the project.

At this meeting you should:

- Review the Terms of Reference and the accepted proposal. Make sure that any inconsistencies between the two documents are discussed and are remedied. For example, if the evaluation consultant sets out payment terms that are inconsistent with those of your organization, raise the issue and be clear which schedule will apply.
- Make sure all parties have the same understanding about what is to be done and who is responsible for what tasks. Confirm that everyone understands and agrees to their roles and responsibilities.
- Identify any revisions to the Terms of Reference due to changes in circumstances since they were prepared. For example, any delays encountered in the selection process may require adjustments to the deadlines in the workplan.

- Set up a schedule of meetings throughout the life of the project while everyone is together at this initial meeting. One of our survey respondents noted that canceling a meeting if it isn't needed is much easier than trying to arrange an unscheduled meeting on short notice.

Make sure minutes are taken at this first meeting, as well as all other meetings you have with the consultant. The minutes should reflect any changes to the Terms of Reference or Workplan, the schedule of future meetings, who is responsible for any follow up actions required, and when the tasks are to be done. Provide a copy of the minutes to everyone who attended the meeting as soon as possible.

2. Contract

Now you're ready to sign the formal contract with the evaluation consultant or evaluation team. Its terms shouldn't be a surprise to anyone as a sample should have been attached as an appendix to the Terms of Reference and discussed at your initial meeting. Any changes agreed to in the initial meeting should be reflected in the contract and revised Terms of Reference. The successful proposal should be referred to and attached. The contract needs to clarify which document prevails, should there be any disagreement between terms of the contract and those in the proposal.

If it is necessary for the evaluation consultant to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of program clients, make sure that this is specified in the contract. Particularly where the final evaluation report will be made public, you want to make sure that program data will be reported in a way that doesn't compromise this. In dealing with programs operating in small communities, protecting client privacy may be particularly challenging.

Remember that the contract should be signed before any work begins.

3. Project Manager Responsibilities

Once the initial meeting has been held and the contract signed, the next step is to introduce the evaluation team to other key stakeholders, and all program staff not represented on the steering committee. This can be done by phone or in writing but where possible, do it in person. As noted in the first pages of this guide, you want to keep program staff well informed, as their cooperation is necessary for the success of the evaluation and for implementation of its findings.

The Project Manager should make sure there is a regular flow of information to key players. Even if the steering committee members and/or the evaluation consultant are in different regions, stay in touch regularly by phone, email, videoconference or in person.

4. Access to Program Data

As discussed previously, the Terms of Reference will have outlined the location and format of program data that will be available to the consultants. If you have provided plenty of information at the RFP stage, consultants will have an easier time when accessing data during the evaluation project. Timely access to the data is one of the problems most frequently encountered by the evaluation consultants surveyed. The Project Manager, working with steering committee members and program staff, needs to facilitate the evaluation consultant's access to the program data to help keep the project on track.

5. Monitoring Progress

In addition to regular meetings and other contacts, another way to keep the project on track is through interim reports. Respondents to our survey suggested that it is important that tentative findings and recommendations be communicated to the Project Manager and steering committee as they arise. If there are serious errors or problems, this allows time for discussion and possible modification before the final report is submitted.

Staying in touch helps avoid surprises. As the evaluation proceeds, if something doesn't fit within the original Terms of Reference, discuss it with your evaluation consultant. If it is a small additional piece of work, such as preparing a presentation of what they found in a survey of program clients, they may be willing to take it on for non-additional charge. For example, during the evaluation of the GNWT's EFAP (Employee and Family Assistance Program) replies to the employee survey trickled in for some time after the deadline. Even though the evaluation consultant was only required to tabulate the data from those questionnaires received by the deadline, as a gesture of good will, she agreed to add in the data from those received later at no additional cost.

If the task(s) are substantial and the evaluation consultant finds no budget flexibility under the existing fee arrangements, you may want to negotiate the addition of a new task to the terms of the project along with additional appropriate payment. For example, if problems are encountered in finding or accessing existing program data, you may need to negotiate the addition of another method of collecting that data if it is important to the outcome of the evaluation.

6. Feedback

In order to keep the focus on the content of the reports, ask that each report be first submitted as an outline.

Outlines allow all parties to come to an agreement on the topics to be covered without getting into group editing of a document.

When you review an outline, compare what is included with those topics that have already been agreed to in the contract or in meetings. If the topics provided in the outline are not consistent with the topics that had been agreed to, make sure that you let the evaluation consultant know and request a revised outline.

When you're reviewing the draft reports there are a number of things to keep in mind. First, make sure the reports contain no factual errors. Second, make sure that the reports are concise and clear. To keep reports at a readable length, include more technical matters in appendices. Last but not least, remember there are many ways to say the same thing. Before you ask for changes, make sure the change(s) you want will improve the accuracy, clarity or quality of the report.

If you have questions or concerns about the conclusions drawn by the evaluation consultant based on the data they have gathered and analyzed, you should ask them what evidence led them to those particular conclusions. It is their job to provide you with their impartial professional opinions even if you disagree or dislike their findings. However, it is appropriate to ask them to correct factual errors, and to revise conclusions based on inaccurate or out-of-date information.

When giving feedback on reports, one program staff member surveyed noted that quick turn around is almost always required. Point out any concerns or comments you have to the evaluation consultant as soon as possible. This allows them to make course corrections if required. As well, in some cases, little if any further work is possible until the evaluation consultant can review the feedback on whatever document you have for review.

When feedback is provided to the evaluation consultant on a draft or an outline make sure that it is consistent. The Project Manager should make sure that input from steering committee members and others is reviewed and pulled together before it goes to the evaluation consultant. Don't put the consultant in the position of needing to decide whose input to act on, if there are differences. However, the steering committee should be used only as a decision-making or advisory body, and care should be taken not to get them involved in writing the report or carrying out any of the evaluation project.

7. Payments

Often progress payments are tied to delivery of reports or achieving some other milestones. When you receive an invoice from the evaluation consultant, check to be sure that it is consistent with the budget and payment schedule agreed to. If so, quickly process the payment as agreed to in your contract.

8. Deliverables

When you're handed a final version of a report or presentation, note if it is on time and review it to see if the content and format is as agreed to in the contract or subsequent meetings, and if there are enough copies provided. If the report has been translated into a language in which you're not fluent, you may want to have it checked for accuracy. If you have problems or concerns with any of the deliverables, contact the evaluation consultant immediately as your silence may be interpreted as acceptance of what has been delivered.

Presentations of the results can be a great way to get more people involved and aware of what you've done on this evaluation project and what action should be taken on it. Work with your consultant to make sure that the right people hear what you have to say. It is always a good idea to present findings to program staff or other project participants first. Be innovative in the way you present results, and use different methods for different audiences, depending on their needs or interests.

Make sure that the people that contributed their time and their stories are acknowledged and thanked. For example, if respondents to a survey or focus group were promised a copy of the results send them out the executive summary. Make sure copies of the report(s) are distributed as promised and required. Posting the final report on the Internet may be a useful way to be sure that interested parties can read it.

9. Evaluating or Debriefing the Evaluation

Having paid the final invoice and arranged presentation(s) of the results, you may be tempted to sit back and think that the project is over. It isn't. The final phase of the evaluation project needs to happen before all is wrapped up.

Evaluating the evaluation can be as important as evaluating the program was in the first place. Although this is not common practice, it was noted by a number of consultants surveyed, that this would be extremely helpful. A review of the evaluation process helps point out what could be improved for the next time. Talk with the consultant about what went well and what didn't and how it could be improved. Look back at how relationships between the parties involved worked, and how the evaluation plans unfolded. This review can help the evaluation consultant improve his approach on future projects, and can help you and your organization benefit from lessons learned for your next evaluation.

Final Note

Throughout this guide, we have shared with you collective northern wisdom about working better with evaluation consultants. We've walked you through the steps involved in each of the three phases of an evaluation project: planning; choosing your consultant; and working with your consultant. Checklists that outline the tasks in each phase can be found in the next section. Copy and refer to them as you develop a set of Terms of Reference or prepare to manage your next evaluation project.

If you have some collected wisdom of your own to add to what is here, fax or email us at the address below. We will look at adding it in future editions.

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Appendix 1

Checklist: Planning your Project

Have you:

- ❑ Reviewed your resources and needs to determine if you want to hire a consultant? (page 2)
- ❑ Decided who the project manager(s) will be? (page 2)
- ❑ Discussed the project with program staff and stakeholders? (page 3)
- ❑ Established a steering committee if desired? (page 3)
- ❑ Developed a detailed Terms of Reference? (pages 3 – 10 inclusive)
    - ❑ Carefully defined the specific purpose of the evaluation, and what you wish to accomplish? (pages 3 – 4)
    - ❑ Included as much information as possible for the proponents? (page 4)
    - ❑ Reviewed any standard requirements in your organization's proposal selection process? (page 4)
    - ❑ Prepared a program overview? (page 5)
    - ❑ Reviewed data and information sources available for the consultant? (page 5)
    - ❑ Listed technological/document-formatting requirements? (page 5)
    - ❑ Prepared a detailed workplan and budget? (pages 6 – 7)
    - ❑ Thought about and outlined the required deliverables, with any special formatting requirements or presentations techniques for different audiences? (page 8)
    - ❑ Outlined contract provisions, proposal format requirements, rating system? (pages 9 – 10)
    - ❑ Identified contact people to provide consistent information as necessary (perhaps project manager)? (page 10)

Appendix 2

Checklist: Finding and Choosing a Consultant

Have you:

- ❑ Reviewed hiring and advertising restrictions and requirements in your organization? (page 11)
- ❑ Checked for special requirements you may need in a consultant? (page 11)
- ❑ Decided how you will advertise, such as general call for proposals, invitations to specific consultants, or sole source? (page 11)
- ❑ Prepared a plan for rating proposals? (page 12)
- ❑ Decided who will respond to questions from proponents, and in what manner? (page 12)
- ❑ Thought about a "pre-proposal" phase, for consultants to gather information? (page 12)
- ❑ Reviewed proposals against your decision model? (page 13)
- ❑ Interviewed your short list of successful proponents, if applicable? (pages 13 - 14)
- ❑ Done a reference check of proponents? (page 14)
- ❑ Advised everyone involved as to who the successful proponent was? (Be sure to notify the unsuccessful proponents promptly as well.) (page 14)

Appendix 3

Working Effectively with your Consultant

Have you:

- ❑ Quickly arranged an initial meeting with your consultant and steering committee members? Did you include everyone who should be there? (page 15)
- ❑ Reviewed and revised as necessary, the Terms of Reference with all parties? (page 15)
- ❑ Set up a schedule of meetings throughout the life of the project? (page 16)
- ❑ Taken minutes and provided everyone with copies of what was agreed upon? (page 16)
- ❑ Signed a formal contract with the revised Terms of Reference appended? (page 16)
- ❑ Made very clear any confidential or sensitive issue requirements? (page 16)
- ❑ Introduced the consultants to all key stakeholders? (page 16)
- ❑ Ensured that program data and any other information necessary is available for the consultants? (page 17)
- ❑ Planned for interim reports to monitor progress? (page 17)
- ❑ Made any changes to the Terms of Reference as needed as the project progresses? (page 17)
- ❑ Negotiated any changes to the budget if necessary? (page 17)
- ❑ Established a feedback process for sharing information on reports or data submitted by the consultants? (pages 17 - 18)
- ❑ Adhered strictly to your payment schedule? (page 18)
- ❑ Reviewed the final products to ensure all provided is what is required or agreed upon? (page 19)
- ❑ Made sure that program staff are promptly informed of any results? (page 19)
- ❑ Made sure that all contributors are recognized and thanked? (page 19)
- ❑ Debriefed or evaluated your evaluation? (page 19)

Appendix 4

Sample Decision Model

P3 EVALUATION PROPOSAL RATING CRITERIA

Weight	BASIC ELEMENTS	
20	Project Team: The names, qualifications and experience of persons assigned to this project.	
20	Past Experience: A description of the contractors including a description of the agency and its mission, history, and major business objectives	
20	Method and Approach: The completeness and comprehensiveness and accuracy of the evaluation design.	
5	Project Schedule: Timeliness and feasibility of proposed schedules and deadlines.	
20	Value for Money: The evaluation should be efficient and produce information of sufficient value so that the resources expended can be justified.	
15	References: An assessment of the work done in the past by this company from a previous client.	

Where applicable fees and estimates will be adjusted in accordance with the GNWT's Business Incentive Policy.

***** Note: This is a sample only. The Basic Elements and their Weight can be adjusted according to your requirements.***

CRITERIA GUIDELINES

Project Team

Multi- disciplinary team should include:

- Expertise in financing mechanisms.
- Accounting expertise
- Public sector management experience.
- Familiarity with the construction industry.
- Knowledge of Social Science research methods.

Past Relevant Experience

- Involvement with Public/Private Partnership Initiatives.
- Demonstrated success conducting large-scale evaluation projects.
- Past experience conducting evaluations of infrastructure programs.
- Experience conducting research in the NWT and Northern communities.
- Experience in developing monitoring systems.

Method & Approach

Completeness and comprehensive of the evaluation design, including:

- Identification of stakeholders and stakeholder communication techniques.
- Appropriate selection of information to be compiled.
- Consultation procedures are practical and appropriate for northern context.
- Understanding of critical issues.
- Proposed co-ordination with contract manager.
- Familiarity with relevant literature and information sources.

Project Schedule

- Proposal demonstrates resources and expertise available to implement project.
- Proposed approach is timely and feasible.

Value for Money

- Fees and expenses.
- Cost effectiveness.

References

- Communication skills and methods were effective.
- Satisfactorily completed projects on a timely basis.
- Products delivered within deadline.
- Products useful , relevant and clear.
- Proven ability to work effectively with a variety of stakeholders.

Appendix 5

GNWT Contracting Procedures

If you work for the GNWT, or an agency that operates under the GNWT's Financial Administration Act (FAA), you will want to refer to the following, to be sure you are complying with government legislation and policy requirements:

- Government Contract Regulations (found in Financial Administration Manual, Directive 9904);
- Contracting Directives (Financial Administration Manual Directives 800, and 801-1 to 801-5); and,
- Purchasing Guidelines (prepared by Public Works and Services).