



Choosing & Using an External Evaluator

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Preface

This booklet is one of a series of publications that are being developed by the HIV/AIDS Programs of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to assist Ryan White CARE Act grantees in designing and implementing evaluation studies. The series will consist of concise reports which, together, will provide guidance on a wide range of issues relating to program evaluation. The reports will address topics, such as criteria and guidelines for selecting and using external evaluators, the sources and uses of data for needs assessment, methodological issues in program evaluation, tools and strategies for assuring cost and outcome effectiveness, and related topics. Several reports will feature evaluation studies conducted by RWCA grantees. The ultimate goal of the series is to improve programs and services for people living with HIV by enhancing the ability of RWCA grantees to conduct methodologically sound evaluations and to develop action plans based on study findings.

In April 1997, HRSA formed a Monograph Advisory Committee, consisting of one representative from each RWCA Title, to provide guidance and oversight for the series. Committee members are advising HRSA on evaluation topics that should be addressed in the series and the criteria that should be used to select publications. They also are reviewing draft reports to suggest ways of making the information more useful and understandable to RWCA grantees. Committee members include:

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Choosing and Using an External Evaluator

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Executive Summary

The Ryan White CARE Act (RWCA) Amendments of 1996 stress the importance of program evaluation and accountability. Well-designed evaluations help RWCA grantees, service providers, and HIV Planning Councils and Consortia assess the effectiveness of their programs in reaching target populations, the degree of congruence between their plans for service delivery and the ways in which services are actually delivered, and the impact and efficiency of their programs.

This booklet focuses on the effective selection and use of external evaluators to design and conduct RWCA evaluations. It suggests a seven-step process for defining the purpose and scope of the evaluation, identifying the evaluator's tasks, soliciting and selecting the evaluator, and working with the evaluator to plan and implement a study that is methodologically sound and responsive to the informational needs of planners and service providers.

Step 1: *Form an evaluation committee* to oversee the entire evaluation process—from initial planning through implementation and the final report.

Step 2: *Define the purpose and scope of the evaluation.* Prepare a Statement of Work that describes the purpose of the evaluation and the evaluator's tasks. Develop a cost estimate for the evaluation so that the reasonableness of the budgets submitted by potential evaluators can be assessed.

Step 3: *Solicit candidates* by issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) or by conducting a more informal search. Applicants should be asked to submit examples of evaluation reports that they have prepared and contact information for at least two references who are familiar with their work.

Step 4: *Select the evaluator* through review of technical proposals or formal interviews with

leading candidates. Ask candidates to discuss the questions and issues that they believe should be the focus of the evaluation, the types of data that would address these questions, alternative methods of data collection, possible sampling or participant selection procedures, and ways of analyzing the data. Candidates also should be assessed based on their understanding of the program and its informational needs, their experience in conducting similar studies, the quality of their previous work, their ability to communicate with committee members, and the reasonableness of their proposed budgets.

Step 5: *Write and negotiate a contract* that describes the evaluator's tasks, the documents and evaluation instruments that need to be reviewed by the evaluation committee, and a schedule for submitting "deliverables" and claiming reimbursement.

Step 6: *Interact closely with the evaluator* through regular meetings and the review of progress reports and evaluation instruments.

Step 7: *Prepare the final report and release of results.* Review the preliminary draft of the final report for factual accuracy, comprehensiveness, organization, clarity, readability, and potential usefulness for decision making.

External evaluators can greatly enhance the quality and usefulness of RWCA evaluations if the purpose and tasks of the evaluation are clearly defined, adequate time is devoted to the evaluator selection process, and evaluation committee members are actively involved in designing and implementing the evaluation. Contractual arrangements can be transformed into "functional partnerships" if they are built on shared understanding of the objectives of the evaluation, a clear delineation of the responsibilities and authority of each partner, and mutual respect.

Introduction

Why Evaluate?

HRSA HIV/AIDS (Ryan White CARE Act) Program grantees increasingly are recognizing the importance of program evaluation. Well-designed evaluations help grantees, service providers, and HIV Planning Councils and Consortia assess the effectiveness of their programs in reaching target populations, the degree of congruence between their plans for service delivery and the ways in which services are actually delivered, and the impact and efficiency of their programs. Study findings may be used to strengthen and enhance services during early stages of development (*formative evaluation*) or to make decisions on whether a program should be started, continued, or chosen from two or more alternatives (*summative evaluation*).

Programs that desire to “do good” for selected populations must also know “how well” they have met their goals. Evaluation empowers program staff and participants to develop specific criteria for assessing program effectiveness and to use the findings for program improvement. If done well, evaluations may help to attract additional resources and support.

The Ryan White CARE Act (RWCA) Amendments of 1996 stress the importance of program evaluation and accountability. The legislation requires HIV Health Services Planning Councils to consider the cost and outcome effectiveness of proposed strategies when determining priorities for the allocation of Title I funds. Planning Councils also are authorized to evaluate the effectiveness of Title I-funded services in meeting identified needs. To qualify for Title II funding, States are required to schedule periodic independent peer reviews of the quality and appropriateness of services provided by Title II-funded providers. HIV Care Consortia must demonstrate that they have procedures for evaluating the cost and outcome effectiveness of service delivery mechanisms.

The RWCA legislation requires Title III grantees to collect and report data on the epidemiologic and demographic characteristics of service users and the average cost of providing each category of early intervention service. Title IV statutory provisions direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct evaluations of programs offered by grantees. All Special Projects of National Significance contain an evaluation component. Although the RWCA does not require AIDS Education and Training Centers to evaluate their training programs, all grantees routinely conduct these assessments.

Internal vs. External Evaluators

When planning an evaluation, one of the first things your organization will need to decide is whether the study should be conducted by an evaluation committee, an internal staff person, or an external consultant. If evaluation funds are limited and the evaluation questions can be answered through a rather simple research design, a *committee* may be able to undertake the task. The Division of HIV Services and the Office of Science and Epidemiology in HRSA’s Bureau of Health Resources Development (HRSA/BHRD) have developed a series of self-assessment modules that HIV Planning Councils and Consortia can use to evaluate their effectiveness in:

- developing and pursuing a mission;
- achieving representation and diversity;
- conducting needs assessments;
- planning comprehensive HIV services;
- setting service priorities and allocating resources; and
- developing a continuum of care.

These modules are designed to be completed by volunteers with little or no experience in evaluation.

Hiring or assigning a staff person to serve as an *internal evaluator* may be desirable if your organization plans to have an ongoing evaluation program. Program directors and staff may be

more willing to devote time to the evaluation and acknowledge problems if they are working with an internal evaluator whom they know and trust. An internal evaluator also can work with staff to implement the recommendations that emerge from the study.

External evaluators, such as university faculty and consultants with research firms, may be the best choice if the ability to implement recommendations depends on the perceived objectivity of the evaluation. Because external evaluators have only contractual ties to your organization, they are less likely to experience conflicting pressures when the evaluation reveals problems, or when hard decisions have to be made on the program's continuation. Contractual arrangements also make it easier to procure evaluators with the desired mix of program knowledge, research expertise, and writing skills.

This booklet focuses on the effective selection and use of external evaluators. It suggests a seven-step process for defining the purpose and scope of the evaluation, identifying the evaluator's tasks, soliciting and selecting the evaluator, and working with the evaluator to plan and implement a study that is methodologically sound and responsive to your informational needs.

Step 1: Form an evaluation committee.

Before seeking an external evaluator, your organization should form an evaluation committee to oversee the entire evaluation process—from initial planning through implementation and the final report. The membership should include people with a direct interest in the program being evaluated—people living with HIV, service providers, program funders, and representatives of HIV activist groups—as well as people with evaluation expertise. To the greatest extent possible, the membership should reflect the different racial/ethnic groups and special populations affected by the local HIV epidemic.

The committee's size will depend on the scope of the evaluation and the number of stakeholders who need to be involved. The participation of key stakeholders increases the likelihood that they will accept the evaluation findings and use the recommendations to improve service delivery. However, a committee with more than 10 members may find it difficult to reach consensus on evaluation objectives and to coordinate their schedules and activities.

The people who serve on your evaluation committee should be willing to devote significant time to the effort. Committee members must be actively involved in the evaluation process to assure that they understand and make effective use of the evaluation results.

Step 2: Define the purpose and scope of the evaluation.

Evaluation Purpose and Questions

Before soliciting potential evaluators, the members of your evaluation committee need to decide what they want the evaluation to accomplish. Posavac and Carey list five ways in which evaluation can be used for program improvement.¹ An evaluation study can be designed to:

- assess unmet needs within an organization or service area;
- document the extent to which a program has been implemented and the characteristics of the service users;
- measure program outcomes;
- compare the cost effectiveness of two or more programs designed to achieve similar outcomes; and/or

¹ Posavac, Emil, and Raymond Carey. *Program Evaluation Methods and Case Studies*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997.

- provide information to maintain and develop program quality.

Once the purpose of the evaluation has been established, the committee members need to formulate specific evaluation questions to guide the study design. This also is an appropriate point to assess the program's readiness for evaluation.

- Do key stakeholders, such as Planning Council/Consortium members, people living with HIV disease, and service providers, agree on what the program is supposed to achieve and the criteria that should be used to measure program effectiveness?
- How committed are key stakeholders to using the results of the evaluation for program improvement?

Statement of Work

If your committee finds a sufficient level of consensus and commitment to move forward, the members need to decide what type of evaluation would be most appropriate. Would the questions be best answered by (1) a *quantitative evaluation* that produces numerical data on who, what, how many, and how much, (2) a *qualitative evaluation* that yields nonnumerical information on how and why something is occurring, or (3) a study design that employs both quantitative and qualitative methods? Can the evaluation questions be answered through a cross-sectional study, or does the evaluator need to collect data over several time periods? These decisions will help your committee to prepare a Statement of Work that describes the purpose of the evaluation and the evaluator's tasks. Exhibit 1 presents an outline of some basic tasks.

The Statement of Work should list each "product" to be submitted to the evaluation committee, the number of copies to be submitted, and the due dates. It also should specify whether the evaluator is expected to help implement the study recommendations.

Exhibit 1

Sample Tasks for an Evaluator

- Develop a work plan and project timetable.
- Conduct a literature review.
- Develop a study design that includes a description of the evaluation questions, the variables to be studied, a data collection and sampling plan, a data analysis plan, and procedures for protecting the confidentiality of client records and study participants.
- Submit regular progress reports to the evaluation committee.
- Develop and pilot test a survey instrument and/or discussion guide.
- Collect evaluation data through surveys, interviews, focus groups, or secondary data sources.
- Analyze evaluation data.
- Prepare a written report that describes the purpose, methodology, and findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for program improvement.
- Make an oral presentation on the evaluation.

After developing the Statement of Work, your committee should estimate the cost of the evaluation so that the reasonableness of the budgets submitted by potential evaluators can be assessed. Costs can range from \$2,000 to \$200,000, depending on the design of the study (cross-sectional or longitudinal), the size of the study sample, the sources and methods of data collection, the amount of data being collected, the level of detail that is needed, the customary consulting fees in the geographic area, and other factors. If your committee plans to contract with a university or research firm, the estimated budget should allow for indirect costs.²

² See Eilbert, Kay, and Rebecca Hines. *Evaluation of Local HIV Service Delivery: Issues, Approaches, and Strategies Under Title I, The Ryan White CARE Act*. Rockville, MD: Health

Step 3: Solicit candidates.

External evaluators can be solicited by issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) or by conducting a more informal search.

Request for Proposals

A formal RFP process notifies interested parties—by advertisement and/or letter—that your committee is seeking an external evaluator. The RFP consists of three documents: (1) a Statement of Work, (2) guidelines for preparing a technical proposal and budget, and (3) a description of the criteria that your committee will be using to evaluate proposals. Applicants should be invited to submit a technical proposal and budget, along with examples of evaluation reports that they have prepared or written synopses of these studies. They also should be asked to provide the names, affiliations, and telephone numbers of references who are familiar with their work. (See Appendices A and B for “Sample Technical Proposal Guidelines” and “Sample Evaluation Factors for Award.”)

Informal Solicitation

If your committee prefers a simpler solicitation process, you may wish to circulate a job description with the Statement of Work and an estimate of available evaluation funds—to private consultants, universities, and professional organizations in the area. The job description should specify the information and documentation that applicants need to submit with their letters of intent. At a minimum, you should require the submission of one evaluation report written by the applicant and the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of two references for whom the applicant has conducted evaluation projects. (See “Sample Job Description” in *Appendix C*.)

Resources and Services Administration, 1996 for descriptions of Title I evaluation studies and the names and addresses of persons who can be contacted for cost information.

Potential Sources of Candidates

Candidates with academic credentials in program evaluation usually can be found in college or university departments of health care administration, psychology, sociology, and educational research. A center for health services research or educational research within a university also can be an excellent source of qualified evaluators.

The Office of Science and Epidemiology in HRSA/BHRD maintains a list of researchers with expertise in HIV-related evaluations. AIDS Program Directors in State Health Departments and AIDS Education and Training Centers also may be able to suggest qualified evaluators. Local United Way agencies, hospitals, and nonprofit organizations may have additional suggestions.

The RFP or job description should be advertised at least once in the local newspaper(s) and distributed to all of the candidates identified by the aforementioned sources. Evaluation committee members may wish to write or call evaluators who have been highly recommended by trusted sources to encourage them to apply.

Step 4: Select the evaluator.

Technical Proposal Review

Technical proposals should be reviewed according to the criteria that were distributed with the RFP. *Appendix B: Sample Evaluation Factors for Award* highlights five key areas that should be considered:

- understanding of the problem and scope of work;
- technical approach;
- management plan;
- personnel; and
- experience of the organization.

Although all of these areas are important, the technical approach should receive the closest scrutiny. The proposal should provide a clear and detailed explanation of the methods that will be used to answer the evaluation questions within the desired time frame. Exhibit 2 lists questions that committee members should ask when assessing the proposed technical approach.

After reviewing and ranking the technical proposals, your evaluation committee should review and compare the budgets of the top-ranked proposals. Committee members should give special attention to the person-days (or hours) that are proposed for each task, the mix of professionals and support staff assigned to each task, and expenses that do not appear to be related to the study's technical requirements:

Selection by Interview

If candidates are sought through a more informal process that does not require the submission of technical proposals, the evaluation committee should review letters of intent, résumés, and sample evaluation reports in order to narrow the pool down to five or fewer candidates. These leading candidates should be invited for interviews.

The sample evaluation reports submitted by candidates should be carefully reviewed for their organization, clarity, readability, and potential usefulness for decision making. Candidates whose reports are highly technical, poorly written, disorganized, or difficult-to-understand should be eliminated during the initial screening process. Questions that should be asked of candidates, or discussed at the conclusion of the interviews, are as follows:

Does the candidate understand the difference between research and evaluation?

The primary purpose of research is to develop a new knowledge base or expand on an existing one.

Program evaluation, on the other hand, provides information that RWCA grantees, HIV Planning Councils and Consortia, and service providers can use to improve programs or make program continuation decisions. It is possible for program evaluation efforts to expand an existing knowledge base while simultaneously providing guidance on program improvement. However, evaluators sometimes are more interested in exploring questions of theoretical interest—or getting the study results published—than in meeting your evaluation needs. To prevent such a situation, have the candidate describe the difference between research and evaluation approaches.

What is the candidate's prior HIV-relevant evaluation experience?

Each candidate should be asked to describe her or his experience in designing and conducting similar types of evaluations. How much experience has the candidate had in working with HIV service providers and with people of different races, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations? How knowledgeable is the candidate about HIV-related service planning and delivery issues?

Does the candidate understand the program?

During the interview, each candidate should be asked to describe her or his understanding of the program being evaluated—its goals, target population, and methods of achieving goals. Any misunderstandings about the program should be corrected during the interview so that the candidate will have a fair opportunity to respond to subsequent questions. An evaluator who has a sound understanding of program goals and strategies will find it much easier to ask relevant questions when planning the evaluation and interpreting the study findings.

Exhibit 2

Questions Regarding Technical Approach

Does the proposal include plans for a **literature review** to identify studies and evaluation instruments that could contribute to this evaluation?

Does the proposal specify *who* will be the **focus of the study** (e.g., service users, HIV-positive individuals who are not in care, program staff, etc.)?

Does the proposal specify *what characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors will be assessed*? Can these study variables be measured reliably?

Does the proposal suggest **specific criteria for assessing “successful” implementation or outcomes**?

Does the proposal include a **plan for involving people living with HIV disease** in the design and conduct of the study and the interpretation of study findings?

Does the proposal specify the **sources and methods of data collection**?

- Have relevant sources of secondary data (e.g., Annual Administrative Reports, Title III Program Data Reports, HIV/AIDS surveillance data, hospital discharge data, Medicaid data) been considered?
- If a survey is proposed, are there plans to test the instrument for reliability and validity? Has the applicant considered using, or adapting, an existing survey instrument?

Does the proposal include a **sampling plan**?³

- Probability sample designs, such as simple random samples and stratified random samples, allow the evaluator to assume that

the sample is representative of the target population and, therefore, to make inferences about the population based on sample data. If some form of nonprobability sampling is proposed (e.g., a convenience sample of people who happen to be available), does the proposal offer a *convincing rationale* for choosing this sampling technique in lieu of a probability sample?

- Does the proposal include a plan for determining sample size? Larger samples reduce the possibility of a Type II error (i.e., falsely concluding that the program is not effective). However, a large sample is no more representative of the target population than a small sample if the study participants were selected by nonprobability sampling methods.

If a qualitative study is proposed, does the proposal explain **how study participants will be identified and selected**?

- Is there a clear description of the topics that will be explored in interviews and focus group discussions?
- If focus groups are planned, does the proposal specify the number of groups, the size and composition of each group, and the method of participant recruitment?

Does the proposal specify **procedures for protecting the confidentiality** of client records and study participants?

Does the proposal include a **data analysis plan**?

- If more than one evaluation method is proposed (e.g., a survey and focus groups), does the proposal explain how the data will be integrated and analyzed?

Does the proposal present a **realistic time schedule** for accomplishing the various tasks?

³See Aday, LuAnn. *Designing and Conducting Health Surveys*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996 for a comprehensive discussion of probability vs. nonprobability sample designs and sample size determination.

What would be the candidate's general approach to the evaluation?

A significant portion of the interview should be devoted to a discussion of the candidate's proposed methodology. Each candidate should be asked to describe the questions and issues that s/he believes should be the focus of the evaluation, the types of data that would address these questions, alternative methods of data collection, possible sampling or participant selection procedures, and ways of analyzing the data. Many of the questions listed earlier in Exhibit 2 also would be relevant.

Asking candidates to describe their proposed evaluation strategies provides an opportunity to assess their interpersonal communication skills. If a candidate uses highly technical terms during the interview, or presents information in a way that committee members cannot understand, these communication problems are likely to continue throughout the evaluation.

Does the candidate think that the evaluation can be conducted for the available monies?

Candidates should be asked to explain how their proposed evaluation approaches can be carried out within the allotted budget. The evaluation plan may be excellent but unattainable with available funds. After all interviews are completed, the top 2-3 candidates should be asked to submit detailed budgets so that your committee can assess the reasonableness of the person-days and other proposed expenses.

What is the candidate's attitude toward supervision by the evaluation committee?

The evaluator will need to report to the evaluation committee or to a person designated by the committee. Candidates should be advised of the ways in which the evaluation committee will interact with them and the frequency with which they will be expected to report to the committee. A candidate who prefers to work more autonomously probably is not appropriate for the position.

Will the candidate's existing professional commitments interfere with the planned evaluation?

Skilled program evaluators usually are in great demand. Asking each candidate to describe current and anticipated professional commitments will help your committee determine whether the evaluator has sufficient time to devote to the study. If the commitments seem excessive, ask the candidate to explain how the evaluation can be accomplished along with other tasks.

If a candidate proposes to have additional persons assist with the evaluation, it is important to know how tasks will be divided among the team members. Using a team of experienced persons to perform an evaluation is common practice, but you should be certain that the team members are capable of performing the contracted tasks and that the candidate will be involved in all tasks that require expert consultation and direction.

Does the candidate have good references?

Candidates should be asked to provide the names, affiliations, and telephone numbers of persons for whom they have conducted evaluations. Some questions that would be appropriate to ask these references are as follows:

- Did the study design adequately address your organization's evaluation questions?
- How responsive was the evaluator to your requests and suggestions?
- Was the evaluation conducted within specified time lines?
- Was the evaluation conducted within the allotted budget?
- Did the evaluation report provide useful information for making policy and/or programmatic decisions?
- Would your organization contract with this evaluator again?

What is the committee's general reaction to the candidate?

During the interviews, each candidate's ability to communicate and work effectively with committee members should be carefully assessed. A clash of personalities or working styles may jeopardize the implementation of the evaluation and the acceptance of study findings. If committee members have negative subjective reactions to a candidate, the reasons for these reactions should be carefully considered during committee deliberations.

What is the committee's overall rating of the candidate?

Following the interview process, committee members should individually rate the candidates on all of the issues previously described.

Appendix D presents a "Sample Candidate Rating Form" that uses a five-point Likert-type scale. By combining committee members' individual scores, the candidates can be ranked to identify the evaluator most acceptable to the majority of committee members.

Step 5: Write and negotiate the contract.

Appendix E presents a sample contract. After briefly stating the purpose of the evaluation, the contract should list the evaluator's tasks, as specified in the Statement of Work (Step 2). The tasks can be summarized in a single paragraph or itemized by bullet or number. If the evaluator is expected to make oral presentations on the study findings or to assist with implementing the study recommendations, these responsibilities should be stated in the contract.

Because your evaluation committee will be working in close partnership with the evaluator, it is important to describe the committee's roles and functions. The contract should specify which documents and evaluation instruments need to be

reviewed and approved by the evaluation committee, a schedule for submission of progress reports, and the manner in which the progress reports are to be delivered (e.g., in writing, by telephone, in person).

In another paragraph, or on a separate page, the contract should list the beginning and ending dates of the contract, the "deliverables" (i.e., products) that need to be submitted to the evaluation committee, the number of copies to be submitted, and the due dates. The contract also should specify the schedule for reimbursing the evaluator, the deliverable(s) that must be submitted and approved to receive each payment, and appropriate billing procedures. Between 20 and 30 percent of the evaluator's fee should be withheld until the evaluation committee accepts the final report.

Evaluation contracts should specify who "owns" the data gathered during the evaluation and who will have access to the study data and findings. Depending upon the nature of the study, it may be important to denote procedures for protecting the confidentiality of client records and study participants. The contract also should specify who has the right to publish the study's methodology and findings and under what conditions.

Step 6: Interact closely with the evaluator.

Committee members can guide the evaluator on the design and conduct of the study by:

- orienting the evaluator to the program's goals, target population, and methods of achieving goals;
- reviewing and commenting on the study design, data collection instruments, and other evaluation documents in a timely and constructive manner;

- helping to solve problems that arise during the evaluation; and
- helping the evaluator to interpret study findings.

Within two weeks after awarding the contract, evaluation committee members should meet with the evaluator to review the scope of work and the committee's expectations. The evaluator should be asked to present—orally and in writing—a draft work plan and timetable for study design, implementation, and analysis. The evaluator may be asked to make some revisions in these plans following the committee review.

Committee members can keep the study moving in a timely and efficient manner by scheduling regular meetings with the evaluator. Agenda items should include discussions of the variables that are going to be measured, criteria for assessing “successful” processes and outcomes, data collection and sampling strategies, evaluation instruments, and problems that arise during implementation. The meeting minutes should document the decisions and agreements reached at each meeting.

In addition to holding regular meetings with the evaluator, the entire committee—or designated members—should continually monitor the evaluator's adherence to the work plan and timetable. A committee that is only intermittently involved in the evaluation process may not discover that the evaluation is going in an inappropriate direction until considerable time and money have been wasted.

Step 7: Prepare the final report and release of results.

As the evaluation project nears completion, your committee should meet with the evaluator to determine the format of the final report and the

evaluator's role in releasing the study findings. The evaluation report should address each evaluation question directly and succinctly and should provide information that is useful for making policy and programmatic decisions. The final report should include:

- Table of Contents
- Executive Summary
- Introduction (description of the program and the purpose of the evaluation)
- Methods
- Findings
- Discussion and Recommendations
- Appendices

The evaluator should be required to submit a preliminary draft of the final report for review and approval by the evaluation committee. The committee members should review the report for factual accuracy, comprehensiveness, organization, clarity, readability, and potential usefulness for decision making.

If committee members make revisions that would significantly change the focus, findings, or recommendations of the report, these revisions should be discussed in a meeting with the evaluator and followed up in writing. However, your committee should take care not to compromise the integrity of the study by asking the evaluator to suppress or de-emphasize negative findings. An evaluator who is required to make changes that do not appear to be supported by the data has the right to disassociate from the report and to assign authorship to the committee. Every effort should be made to avoid this situation, as it raises serious questions about the objectivity of the study.

Conclusion

Well-designed and carefully conducted evaluations contribute to program improvement by providing RWCA grantees, planning bodies, and service providers with detailed feedback on structures, processes, and outcomes. To assure that the study findings are relevant and timely, your organization needs to develop a *functional partnership* with the external evaluator. This partnership must be built on a shared understanding of the objectives of the evaluation, a clear delineation of the responsibilities and authority of each partner, and mutual respect.

External evaluators can greatly enhance the quality and usefulness of RWCA evaluations if the purpose and tasks of the evaluation are clearly defined, adequate time is devoted to the evaluator selection process, and evaluation committee members are actively involved in designing and implementing the evaluation. If the steps identified in this booklet are followed, the evaluation process should be enjoyable and productive for your organization and the external evaluator.

APPENDIX A

Sample Technical Proposal Guidelines

To facilitate proposal evaluation, the offeror should submit a “technical proposal” in accordance with the following guidelines. This technical proposal should not exceed __ pages. The person-loading matrix and résumés referenced in C.2 and D.3 should be included as attachments. The proposed budget for the project should be shown in a cost proposal that is separate from the technical proposal.

The technical proposal should be organized and will be evaluated according to the following requirements:

A. Understanding of the Problem and Scope of Work

The proposal should provide a statement, in the offeror’s own words, of the issues, purposes, and scope of the evaluation project to demonstrate an understanding of the intent and requirements of the contract.

B. Technical Approach

The proposal should provide a detailed description of the proposed technical approach that will be used to fulfill each of the requirements specified in the Statement of Work and in furnishing the products and services enumerated in the Schedule of Deliverables. The proposal should:

1. describe the methods that will be used to carry out each task, including the sources and methods of data collection, the plan for identifying and selecting study participants, procedures for protecting the confidentiality of client records and study participants, and the plan for data analysis;
2. discuss potential problems that may be encountered in conducting the evaluation and recommend approaches for resolving the problems; and
3. present a proposed time schedule for accomplishing the tasks.

C. Management Plan

The offeror should describe how the project will be managed, including procedures for assuring that tasks are completed in a timely and quality manner. The plan should:

- identify the person who will serve as the day-to-day project manager and as the official responsible for senior management oversight (if different from the manager);
- clearly identify the person(s) who will be responsible for the design and conduct of the evaluation study and all other professionals who will spend significant time on the contract; and
- describe the involvement of any consultants or subcontractors.

2. The offeror should append to the technical proposal a person-loading matrix that displays person-days by task by person. This matrix should display the appropriate totals and subtotals for each individual and each task in the following format:

Task	Professional Person-Days (Name)	Support Days	Time by Task
1.			
2.			
.			
.			
10.			

Total Time By Person

D. Personnel

1. The proposal should separately list each professional's previous work that is relevant to this contract, with dates of the work and the name, affiliation, and telephone number of a reference who may be contacted for further information. Work that is considered relevant is experience in (a) evaluating HIV-related services and programs; (b) designing survey instruments and discussion guides; (c) analyzing quantitative and qualitative data; and (d) working effectively with people of different races, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations.
2. The proposal should specify the project manager's experience in managing similar types of evaluations or projects.
3. Résumés for all professionals who will work on the contract should be appended to the technical proposal.

E. Experience of the Organization

The proposal should specify the offeror's experience in evaluating HIV-related services and programs, designing survey instruments and discussion guides, and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. The offeror should include a clear synopsis of prior studies that are relevant to this project. Each synopsis should indicate the sponsor of the study and the name, affiliation, and telephone number of a person who can be contacted for further information.

APPENDIX B

Sample Evaluation Factors for Award

1. PROPOSAL EVALUATION

The proposal will be evaluated using the criteria as they relate to the letter paragraphs in the Technical Proposal Instructions.

<u>Evaluation Criteria</u>		<u>Weights</u>
A. Understanding of the Problem and Scope of Work		10
B. Technical Approach		40
1. Relevance and completeness	(10)	
2. Proposed methods, approach to study design and data analysis, and understanding of potential problems	(25)	
3. Creativity of proposed approach	(5)	
C. Management Plan		10
1. Discussion of arrangements to assure management control, quality of products, and completion of work on schedule	(5)	
2. Task-specific person-loading matrix	(5)	
D. Personnel		30
1. Project manager's experience in managing similar types of projects	(10)	
2. Experience and expertise of project staff	(20)	
E. Experience of the Organization		<u>10</u>
1. Relevance of prior work cited in the proposal	(7)	
2. Clarity of synopses and indications of quality of work described	(3)	
	TOTAL	100

APPENDIX C

Sample Job Description

Program Evaluator

The [name of organization] wishes to contract for the design and conduct of an evaluation of an early intervention program for people living with HIV disease. A description of the program and a Statement of Work are attached. The evaluation, which is to be conducted from January 1, 1998 through August 31, 1998, is intended to assess the effectiveness of the program in reducing inappropriate emergency room visits and inpatient admissions.

Interested candidates should submit a letter of intent that describes their experience in designing and conducting similar types of evaluations; a current résumé; a copy of an evaluation report written by the candidate; and the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of two persons for whom they have conducted evaluation projects. The above information should be sent to: Ms. Jane Zee, [address]. Applications postmarked by 11-15-97 will be accepted.

Candidates who are invited for an interview should be prepared to describe the questions and issues that they believe should be the focus of the evaluation, the types of data that would address these questions, alternative methods of data collection, possible sampling or participant selection procedures, and ways of analyzing the data. After all interviews are completed, the top 2-3 candidates will be asked to submit budgets that itemize person-days and other proposed expenses. Candidates should assume that approximately \$40,000 is available for the evaluation, including indirect costs.

APPENDIX D

Sample Candidate Rating Form

Candidate Name: _____

1. Distinction between research and evaluation

1	2	3	4	5
Has no understanding of the distinction between research and evaluation		No opinion		Clearly understands the distinction between research and evaluation

2. Understanding of the program

1	2	3	4	5
Has no understanding of the program		No opinion		Has excellent understanding of the program

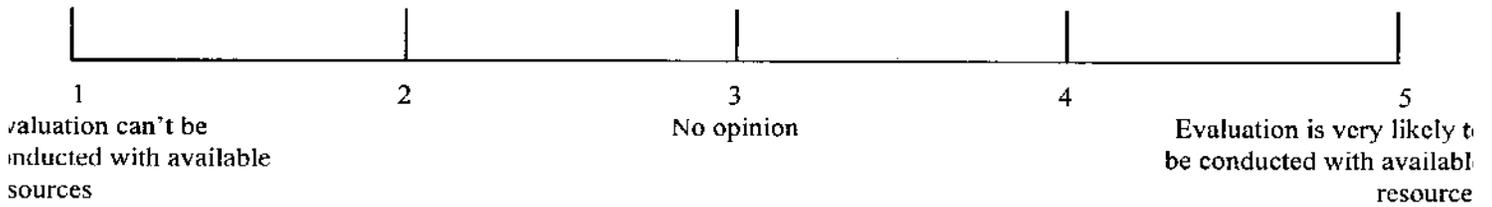
3. Prior HIV-relevant evaluation experience

1	2	3	4	5
Has no experience with evaluations like this one		No opinion		Has done evaluations similar to this one

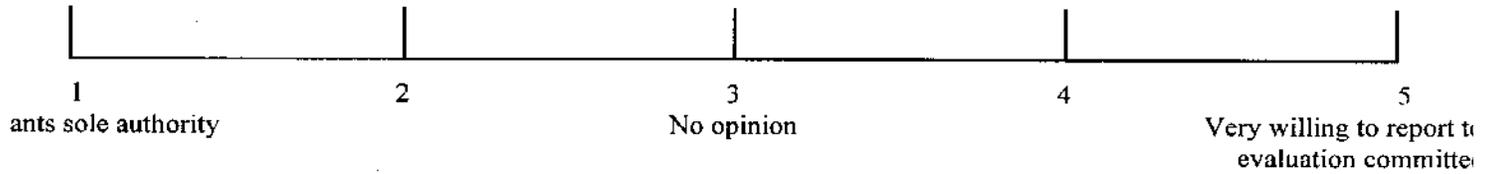
4. Evaluation approach

1	2	3	4	5
Not understandable: can't clearly explain how evaluation approach addresses program needs		No opinion		Understandable: can clearly explain how evaluation approach addresses program needs

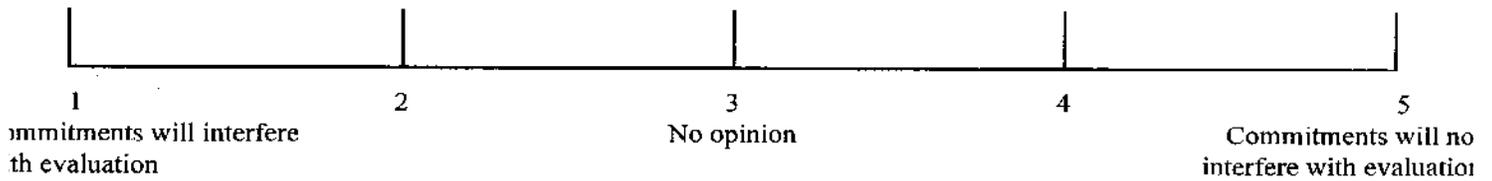
5. Evaluation costs



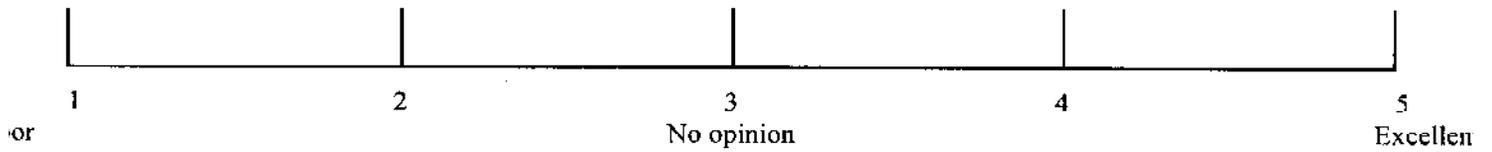
6. Attitude toward supervision



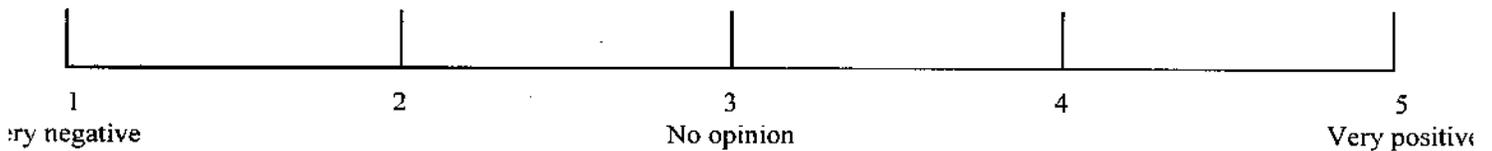
7. Professional commitments



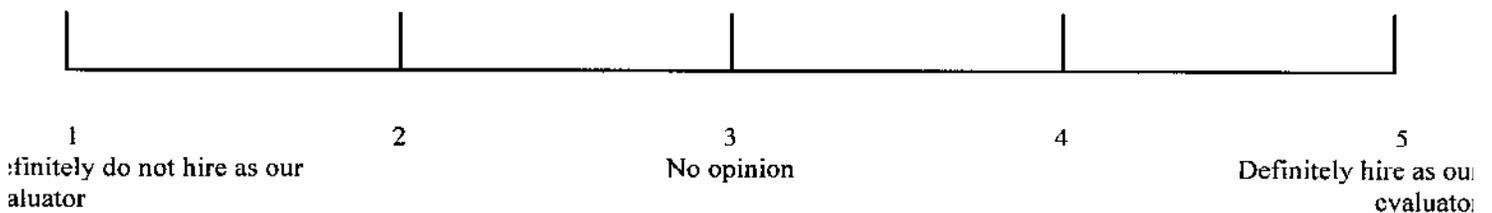
8. References



9. General reaction



10. Overall rating



APPENDIX E

Sample Contract

The evaluator, _____, will be responsible for designing and conducting an evaluation of the HIV early intervention program operated by [name of organization]. The study will assess the effectiveness of the HIV intervention program in reducing inappropriate emergency room visits and inpatient admissions.

The evaluator will report to an evaluation committee, chaired by Ms. Jane Zee, that will have oversight responsibility for the evaluation. The evaluator will serve as an advisor to the committee and will be expected to attend all meetings of the committee, unless informed otherwise. In performance of this contract, the evaluator will:

- Meet with the evaluation committee within two weeks after the effective date of the contract award to review the scope of work and the committee's expectations of how the evaluation will be conducted. At this meeting, the evaluator will present—orally and in writing—a draft work plan and timetable for study design, implementation, and analysis.
- Revise the work plan and project timetable as required by the evaluation committee.
- Submit monthly progress reports to Ms. Zee and meet bimonthly with the evaluation committee to review expenditures, progress on the tasks, and emerging issues.
- Conduct a literature review to identify studies and evaluation instruments that could contribute to the evaluation.
- Submit, for review by the evaluation committee, a study design that includes a description of the variables to be studied, a data collection and sampling plan, a data analysis plan, and procedures for protecting the confidentiality of client records and study participants.
- Revise the study design as required by the evaluation committee.
- Develop a data collection instrument and submit to the evaluation committee for review.
- Revise the data collection instrument as required by the evaluation committee.
- Pilot test the data collection instrument and make revisions as appropriate.
- Collect evaluation data and enter into a computer file.
- Conduct appropriate statistical analyses on the evaluation data.

⁴This sample contract illustrates content typically included in such documents and is *not* intended for use as a legal contract. Before issuing your contract, be sure to review it with a legal counsel.

- Submit, for review by the evaluation committee, a draft report that describes the purpose, methodology, and findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for program improvement.
- Conduct a briefing on the study findings for the evaluation committee and persons designated by the committee. Incorporate their comments and suggestions into the final report.
- Submit the final report, along with a .dbf file or SAS database and documentation of the file contents, to the evaluation committee.

The evaluation committee will be responsible for making timely decisions regarding the design and conduct of the study. If the committee recommends changes in the study design, the suggested changes will be specific and feasible within the scope of this contract. If the evaluator disputes the feasibility of the changes, Ms. Zee will be the final arbiter. If the evaluation committee reverses one of its decisions, and the changes require additional work on the part of the evaluator, the contract may be modified by mutual agreement of the evaluator and the committee. The evaluation committee also will be responsible for:

- orienting the evaluator to the program's goals, target population, and methods of achieving goals;
- reviewing and commenting on the study design, data collection instrument, and other evaluation documents in a timely and constructive manner;
- assisting the evaluator in resolving political or logistical barriers to conducting the evaluation; and
- helping the evaluator to interpret study findings.

The evaluation contract will be in effect from January 1, 1998 through August 31, 1998. The evaluator will deliver each product at the time specified below.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Delivery Date</u>
1	Initial work plan and project timetable	8	2 weeks from effective date of contract (EDOC)
2	Revised work plan and project timetable (if required)	8	3 weeks from EDOC
3	Written progress reports	8	Monthly submissions
4	Literature review	8	4 weeks from EDOC
5	Draft study design	8	6 weeks from EDOC
6	Revised final study design	8	9 weeks from EDOC
7	Draft data collection instrument	8	10 weeks from EDOC

<u>Item</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Delivery Date</u>
8	Revised final data collection instrument	8	13 weeks from EDOC
9	Draft report	8	29 weeks from EDOC
10	Briefing for evaluation committee and designated persons	N/A	31 weeks from EDOC
11	Final report and .dbf file or SAS database with documentation	25 - final report; 1 .dbf file or SAS database	35 weeks from EDOC

A deliverable will not be considered satisfactorily completed until it is approved/accepted by the evaluation committee. If a deliverable is not approved/accepted by the evaluation committee, specific reasons for its disapproval/rejection will be provided within two weeks of the deliverable's receipt.

The evaluator will be reimbursed in five installments upon the receipt and approval of each deliverable by the evaluation committee and upon the evaluator's completion of an invoice. The payment schedule will be as follows: 10% after Deliverable 4; 20% after Deliverable 6; 10% after Deliverable 8; 40% after Deliverable 9; and 20% after Deliverable 11.

The study data will become and remain the sole and exclusive property of [name of organization]. The evaluator may publish articles on the study or present papers at professional meetings, provided that these submissions are approved in advance by the evaluation committee.

Accepted by:

Contracting Organization

Date

Evaluator

Date



U.S. Department of
Health & Human Services
Health Resources and Services Administration
HIV/AIDS Bureau