

**Working with Outside Evaluators workshop
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Panelists:

- Faith E. Lutze, Ph.D., Washington State University Criminal Justice Program; principal investigator, Washington State Reentry Housing Pilot Program evaluation
- Joe Marrone, Senior Program Manager, Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston; principal investigator, Clark County HGAP (CHEC) Evaluation
- Greg Theurer, Northwest Resource Associates; Whatcom County HGAP Evaluation

Introduction: Jennifer Turin, CTED

Facilitator: Charlie Corrigan, Building Changes

Key Points:

1. Importance and usefulness of starting evaluations early in the implementation and development of a new program

By involving your program evaluation early in the development of your processes and procedures, you are better able to get feedback and make mid-course adjustments to the program as needed. In addition, working with an evaluator earlier rather than later will help make sure you are collecting the right data from the beginning that will help you answer your research questions. Otherwise, you may collect loads of data that ultimately is not relevant to determining if the program is working or not.

2. Importance of both quantitative and qualitative information

This is not an either/or question, but instead you should think about *both* qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluating your program. Qualitative information gives the program's context and is important for process corrections and improvements, and documenting challenges. On the other hand, some folks will only care about the "bottom line" in terms of numbers. You want that single stat sometimes to give a legislator or mayor: such as, how many clients were saved from homelessness, or what percentage of children graduated high school because of your program? Also, you need to collect the right quantitative data. Sometimes the data that you are already collecting is relevant, and sometimes it actually has little value for your evaluation. How are you designing the evaluation? Are you comparing your data to comparison groups (populations with similar backgrounds, but not enrolling in your program)?

3. Use your evaluation to answer questions that will be valuable for your agency and for external partners

You will probably have two types of audiences and therefore two types of evaluation products: one for the greater public without operating details, and one for internal use and improvement of process. Your evaluation can make the case to funders and government partners: is the program sustainable and should it be continued or expanded? You should also ask the question internally: is this program serving our target population in the way we wanted it to? Or do we need to make changes to the way we are doing business because of these outcomes?

4. Putting it all together and finding an outside evaluator

Questions to ask yourself in thinking about working with an evaluator:

- Are you comfortable with the language of program evaluation? If not, it may be useful to familiarize yourself with some key concepts by reviewing completed evaluations of similar programs or talking with evaluation practitioners.
- Do you have the questions in mind that you want your evaluation to answer?
- Do you know the audiences for the evaluation and its final products?
- Can the evaluators explain how they will answer your research questions and communicate the results to your target audiences?
- How long should the evaluation be? This often depends on your funding and on the length of the program. Can you build in a budget or an agreement with the evaluator to return to the project after some time has elapsed to update the outcomes?