

Internal versus External Evaluator

When deciding between hiring an internal or external evaluation, consider the following:

INTERNAL

EXTERNAL

Independence/objectivity

External consultants may be employed when a fresh perspective, objectivity, and/or independence are needed. "Insiders could be 'too close' to the work to be able to be objective" (Hallam 1998: 65).

Independence/need for facilitation between stakeholders

External evaluators may be in a better position to act as facilitators between parties as they are not part of existing power structures

Contextual knowledge

Internal evaluators may bring important knowledge of the organization (capacities and limitations) or network of partners, the stakeholder context, and individual personalities.

Technical expertise

External consultants can bring in specialized expertise and experience in evaluation, and in technical areas.

Commitment to and ownership of recommendations

Internal evaluators often craft recommendations to which internal stakeholders can and will commit. "The use of program staff can increase the legitimacy of what may otherwise be seen as a one-sided, donor-imposed process which can limit the learning effect and result in the influence of the evaluation... being close to zero." (Hallam 1998: 65)

Time constraints

Internal evaluations tend to be light and quick, better at providing immediate and direct feedback. Internal evaluations can also be chosen when there is little lead time for recruiting good, often busy, professional evaluators. However, freeing staff even for a short, intense period may be a problem.

Resource constraints

Internal evaluations tend to be quick and low cost.

Strengthening internal capacities

Internal evaluators may better facilitate learning within a program or key partner organizations, especially in follow-up. External evaluators may bring in new evaluation skills and knowledge, but learning objectives have to be reflected in the process and the style of evaluator selected.

MIXED APPROACHES

Hybrid methods (internal and external team members) can be employed, e.g., self-evaluation by internal staff integrated into an external evaluation; external facilitator for an internal evaluation). When applicable, these methods can:

- help develop staff evaluation skills;
- balance both legitimacy of the evaluation and ownership of the recommendations.

Make sure enough time is given to prepare the exercise and for consultation between insiders and outsiders before it begins. The relationship between internal and external consultants should be clarified in a letter of agreement, which states the objectives of the exercise and specifies where these may differ for the internal and external consultants. (Adapted from: Goslin, 1995: 224)

Note: The information contained is adapted from Conley-Tyler, Melissa (2005). A Fundamental Choice: Internal or External Evaluation? Evaluation Journal of Australasia, 4, 3-11. Available at http://www.aes.asn.au/publications/Vol4No1_2/fundamental_choice.pdf, accessed February 3, 2012.