WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE EXPECTING (AN EVALUATION)

A GUIDE TO THIRD-PARTY EVALUATIONS AT THE KAUFFMAN FOUNDATION

At the Foundation we seek to pair all internally operated programs and most large grant portfolios with a third-party evaluation partner. This guide provides a quick overview of the process we use for designing and implementing these evaluations.

EWING MARION
KAUFFMAN
FOUNDATION

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1 PURPOSE

The primary purpose of all evaluation projects is to provide program staff with actionable evidence that can inform learning and continuous improvement. Third-party evaluations (TPEs) provide additional capacity to design and implement evaluations that are tailored to meet the unique measurement needs of each program or grant portfolio.

2 PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

OWNERSHIP
As the lead on the project, TPEs will assume ownership for the overall success of the work. Kauffman staff will provide guidance and support, but all operational aspects of implementing the project are the responsibility of the TPE partner.

ACTIONABLE
All aspects of the evaluation, from the types of data collected, analytical techniques used, timeliness of reporting, and deliverables created, should be designed with program staff use in mind.

FLEXIBLE
Given that plans should and do change often, the TPE partners will need to be able to change course quickly to meet the ongoing needs of the program.

RESPONSIVE
Evaluations of programs that are focused on serving historically marginalized populations require culturally responsive approaches. Evaluators are expected to use methods and instruments that are culturally appropriate and validated.

3 ROLES

KAUFFMAN PROGRAM STAFF
Provide input on the initial evaluation design, advise on stakeholders to include in qualitative data collection when necessary, help ensure timely responses to TPE data requests as needed, and engage in facilitated discussions when results are submitted. We expect program staff involvement to vary based on time availability.

KAUFFMAN EVALUATION STAFF
Manage the contract with the TPE partner, approve deviations from the original evaluation plan, serve as the intermediary between TPE staff and others (internal or external) to minimize demands on program staff time, and review all deliverables for accuracy and accessibility before they are disseminated.

TPE STAFF
Lead the design and implementation of the evaluation project, including all planning, meeting preparation, instrument development, data collection, analysis, and reporting.

GRANTEE OR EXTERNAL ORGANIZATION STAFF
While engagement levels will vary depending on the project, staff will generally provide documents, engage in discussions to clarify theories of change, goals, assumptions, and hypotheses, collect and submit data to TPE staff as needed, and engage in facilitated discussions when results are submitted.

4 TYPES OF EVALUATION

Most TPE projects will include some or all of the following core components.

CLARIFY PROGRAM STRATEGIES

Collaborate with program staff to formalize theories of change and/or logic models, identify assumptions and hypotheses, develop evaluation questions, and support the development of key performance indicators.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Develop solutions for building the data collection capacity of a grantee or program, including direct technical assistance or the creation of templates and tools.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Create systems that are capable of reporting on key metrics, including plans for metric data collection, reporting, and assisting program staff in analyzing and reflecting on descriptive results.

FORMATIVE EVALUATION

Collect evidence from a variety of sources (including surveys, focus groups, and interviews) to provide short-cycle feedback to program staff.

SUMMATIVE EVALUATION

Conduct rigorous analyses that compare participant outcomes to those of a relevant control group.
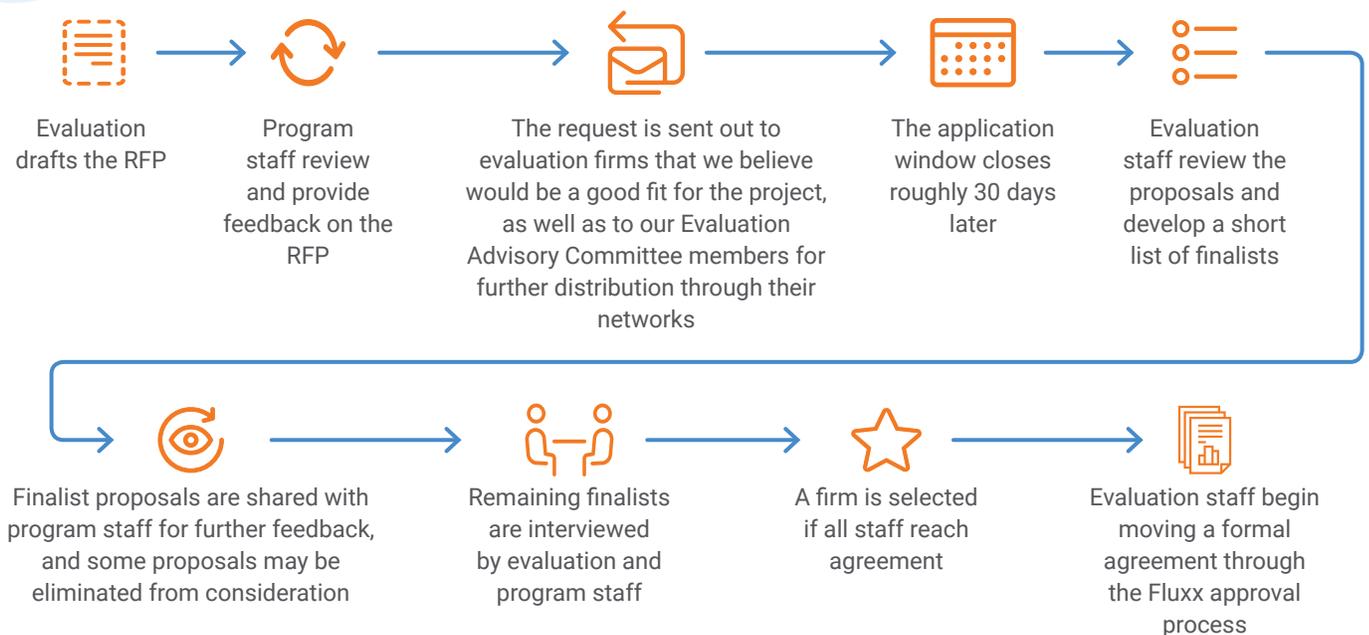
5 BUDGETING

Our guideline for TPE budgets is that total costs should represent roughly 3-5% of the Foundation's programmatic investment.

Based on that benchmark, we then adjust resource commitments depending on the types of evaluation work required by a project (see #4 above).

6 RFP PROCESS

Evaluation staff will lead the process for soliciting proposals from potential TPE partners. In general, the timeline will include the following steps.

Evaluation drafts the RFP → Program staff review and provide feedback on the RFP → The request is sent out to evaluation firms that we believe would be a good fit for the project, as well as to our Evaluation Advisory Committee members for further distribution through their networks → The application window closes roughly 30 days later → Evaluation staff review the proposals and develop a short list of finalists

Finalist proposals are shared with program staff for further feedback, and some proposals may be eliminated from consideration → Remaining finalists are interviewed by evaluation and program staff → A firm is selected if all staff reach agreement → Evaluation staff begin moving a formal agreement through the Fluxx approval process

7 KICK-OFF MEETING

We have found that holding an in-person meeting of key staff at the start of a TPE project greatly increases the odds of success. The agenda for these half-day meetings typically includes introductions, discussion of project specifics, and some preliminary work on clarifying theories of change, goals, assumptions, and hypotheses. By the end of the kick-off meeting, we expect to have an action plan detailing next steps for implementing the evaluation plan.

8 REPORTING

TRANSLATION

We have created a guide to actionable reporting that all TPE partners are expected to follow when creating their deliverables.

DISSEMINATION

Internal – All TPE deliverables are shared with program staff and relevant SLT members. In addition, we may post reports to Courtyard and/or host a Cookies & Conversation session when appropriate.

External - Our goal is to share evaluation reports as broadly as possible to inform the broader fields in which we work. However, given the sensitive nature of certain evaluation materials, decisions about dissemination will be made on a case-by-case basis in consultation with program staff.

ENGAGEMENT

Our experience has shown that facilitated engagements increase the strength and clarity of insights drawn from the results of TPE projects, which in turn generates better lessons for informing program improvements. As such, evaluation staff will generally seek to schedule a 30-60 minute meeting to review significant new deliverables from the TPE partner.