

Tips for HJPs for working with external evaluators

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Health justice partnerships work with external evaluators and researchers in many ways: some secure the funding to commission an evaluation report, others receive advice or coaching for specific tasks related to evaluation, and some are fortunate to receive pro bono assistance. If you're engaging with external evaluators, here are some tips to make the most of their support.

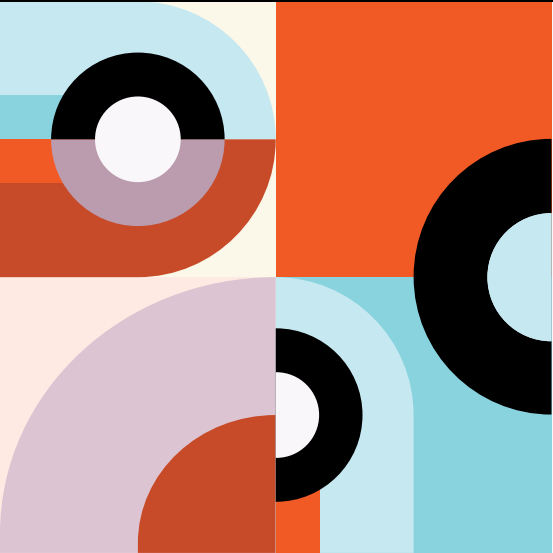
Consider how you will manage the evaluation of your partnership in partnership

No, that's not a grammar glitch! You might be focused on the evaluation of your partnership, but it's worth thinking about how to evaluate in partnership. Before you get too far into evaluation planning, consider what aspects of managing an evaluation could be a shared activity with your partnering organisation. If one organisation is holding the contract with the external evaluator, it can be useful to discuss and document how and to what extent the other organisation will be involved in decision making about the evaluation. This doesn't have to create a lot of additional work: consider how you could use your existing [collaborative governance arrangements](#) to provide oversight of evaluation activities, whether these arrangements are formal (e.g. steering committees, advisory groups) or informal (e.g. regular meetings, agreed communication pathways).

Time spent discussing evaluation with your partner organisation can be a great investment. Some examples: Have you discussed what each partnering organisation wants to know to inform their work? You might find that there's a question the evaluation should answer that you haven't considered (such as a question their funder or management

would like answered, which might help secure ongoing support for the partnership). Have you discussed what each organisation is able to bring to the table when it comes to evaluation? You might learn your partnering organisation has staff with research and evaluation skills that could help to review documents.

Apply partnership skills and concepts to partnering with external evaluators



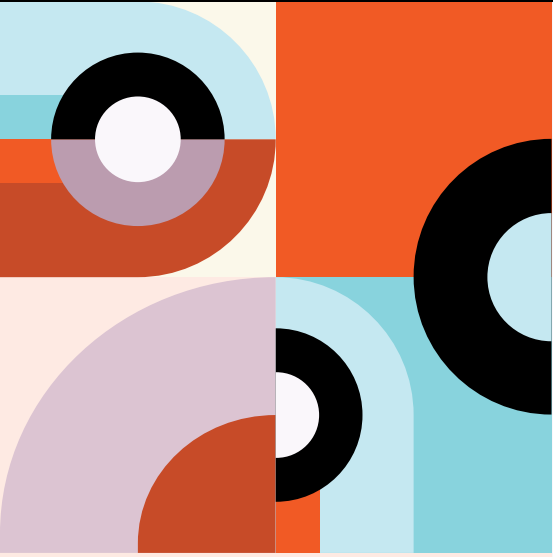
One of the [building blocks](#) for working in partnership is agreeing on how you'll work together, including having good conversations about your respective goals, needs and expectations. Similar conversations might also be useful to have with the external evaluator. For example, if you're working with researchers from a university, they may have the goal of answering some specific research questions, the need to comply with university processes such as Human Research Ethics Committee ethics approvals, and the expectation that they will be able to produce academic publications. Surfacing such goals, needs and expectations – and sharing your own – can set a great foundation for working well together.

Conversations about values and [power](#) are also relevant to partnering with an evaluator. For example, if your HJP provides trauma-informed services, you could ask about the evaluator's knowledge of trauma-informed approaches to research. Similarly, if your HJP includes people with lived experience in the design and governance of services, you could ask the evaluator about the role they would expect people with lived experience to play in the evaluation. These kinds of questions

could be included in your documentation (often called a 'terms of reference' or 'request for proposal') if you're seeking quotes from evaluation consultants.

Remember that [sometimes it just doesn't make sense to partner](#). If you're struggling to get aligned on shared goals and values, you might need to look at alternative arrangements, even if the evaluator is offering pro bono support.

Unpack your expectations and assumptions about evaluation



People from different backgrounds will have different perspectives on what evaluation is and how it should be done. Even within a group of evaluators there will be many different perspectives! Watch out for stealth assumptions that might lead to you, your partnering organisation, and the evaluator to be on different pages. For example, what do you think the role of the evaluator should be? A: an impartial, independent judge? Or B: a 'guide on the side' who supports you to understand and reflect on your work? These are both valid perspectives that reflect the ways different evaluators work – but you'll run into problems if you hire evaluator A and expect that they will work like evaluator B. Take some time to unpack your expectations and assumptions, and work with your partnering organisation and evaluator to do the same.

Develop a shared understanding of what the HJP will need to contribute

One of the mis-steps that we see organisations make when working with an external evaluator is expecting that, once the evaluator is on board, they won't have to think about evaluation again until the final report is delivered. We understand why this happens, given how busy HJP staff are. But it's usually not possible or desirable to entirely remove yourself and your team from the evaluation process.

It's usually not possible because you and your team will be a key source of data, whether being interviewed yourselves, providing existing data sets, or helping to distribute surveys and arrange interviews with clients. Many evaluators will also value your input and expect to hold workshops and meetings to collaborate on developing evaluation questions and tools. Spend the time up-front to ensure you have shared expectations about how much time and what kind of work will be needed from your staff and your partnering organisation, and ensure the evaluator is aware of your constraints.

It's usually not desirable because you will be the one using the evaluation findings to shape the future of your HJP, and you know your stakeholders, community and clients best. Be aware that you will benefit more from the evaluation if you make the time to take an active role and ensure that it meets your needs.

Think all the way through to the end of the project

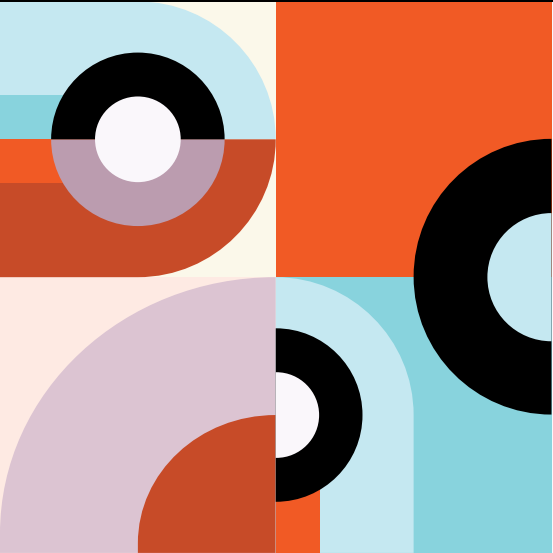
As part of unpacking assumptions and developing a shared understanding of the time and resources required, take a moment to think through the different stages of the project, including the final deliverables. For example, if the final product of an evaluation is a report for your stakeholders – do you have a shared understanding of what that would look like? If the evaluator usually produces long reports with technical details, and your management team needs a one-page summary, you might need to factor in the time for you or someone in your team to write a summary report. It can be worth asking the evaluator for examples of reports that they have prepared in the past to make sure you have shared expectations. Other examples of issues to think about with

reports include whether the report will be made public, whose branding will it use, whether it will include recommendations, and what the approvals processes will be.

Thinking through to the end of a project is also important if you're receiving external support to build your internal evaluation capability. For example, if you're receiving

support to set up a survey, have you thought all the way through to how you will analyse and use the survey findings? Make sure you have considered what will be sustainable for your organisation to maintain once the external evaluator has ended their work with you, and set up the project accordingly.

Don't let the jargon get in the way



Evaluation and research are full of jargon that can sometimes feel intimidating or create a barrier to communication. We all use jargon as part of our professional roles, and sometimes it's difficult to know when to adjust our language. When talking with an evaluator, don't be timid about asking them to clarify or define what they mean.

Similarly, unless you're sure the evaluator has experience working with community legal services, be mindful of the jargon you're using, and the background documents that might be useful for them to understand your service and your existing data (for example, you might share the [National Legal Assistance Data Standards Manual](#)).

Send them our way for more information on what's already out there!

Health Justice Australia maintains a database of evaluation reports and research on health justice partnership. We would be happy to connect you and your evaluator to existing research and thinking about the value of HJP – there's lots of room for innovation in evaluating HJPs, but there's also no need to start from scratch. Our website is a good place to start, and our research team would love to talk – you can get in touch at research@healthjustice.org.au.

Additional resources

We've written this document to provide some top tips on specific issues relevant to health justice partnerships working with external evaluators. Here are some good places to start if you need broader information about planning and commissioning an evaluation:

[Better Evaluation](#) is a knowledge platform that brings together a wide range of evaluation resources, and it's a great place to start for anything you need related to evaluation.

The [manager's guide to evaluation](#) steps through the whole process of managing an evaluation, including [hiring an external evaluator](#). The "GeneraTOR" steps you through the common sections of an evaluation terms of reference/request for proposal (you'll need to set up a free account for this feature).

AIFS has a series of useful practice guides, including tips on [commissioning an external evaluation](#), and on evaluation planning (including [basic principles](#) and [more detailed requirements](#)).



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