Benefits of External Evaluation
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Strong evaluation can help faculty, program directors, and other stakeholders document their projects' successes and tell their essential stories. Most funding agencies require program evaluation, and though it can at times feel like a nuisance, the evaluation process often leads to project improvement and long-term funding. Below is a brief overview that highlights how IRC can help with your evaluation needs.

Situations that typically drive potential clients to contact IRC
1) Loss of funding due to insufficient attention to evaluation. These potential clients ask me to develop an evaluation plan for resubmitted proposals.
2) Other potential clients have funding but are frustrated with their current evaluation process. They have come to realize they need more useful information and input to help them understand and improve their program.
3) Preparation of a new proposal in response to a Request for Proposal (RFP).

Common mistakes faculty and program representatives make when undertaking an evaluation
1) Trying to do it all on their own.
2) Failing to develop a comprehensive evaluation plan that collects information at appropriate intervals from participants and other key stakeholders.
3) Developing surveys that have too many open-ended questions.
4) Surveying too frequently or not often enough.
5) Confusing evaluation (overall monitoring of project) and assessment (testing).
6) Not realizing the degree of "objectivity" and "distance from the program" evaluation requires.

Benefits of having an external evaluator
1) Professional evaluators have the expertise to develop evaluation plans, surveys, and interview protocols. The project team always has input and reviews all evaluation tools, but they do not have to design everything themselves.
2) Ongoing data collection throughout the project enables the project team to make adjustments as early as possible. Timely feedback can produce a superior program. When the project team makes improvements based on participants' feedback, this enhances the project experience for everyone involved.
3) Evaluators process and analyze data and write reports, relieving the project team of these time-consuming, complex tasks so they can focus their efforts on project implementation.
4) Evaluators offer greater objectivity since they are not employees or otherwise connected to the project. They listen to participants non-judgmentally while protecting individual confidentiality and providing candid feedback. Evaluators can recommend solutions that those close to the program may have missed. Evaluation findings also help confirm and support changes the project team may already have identified.
5) Finally, the evaluation provides extensive information that can be shared with the funder, helping to ensure continued funding or stimulating ideas for new initiatives. A client can utilize parts of or include full evaluation reports in the annual reports required by funders. IRC regularly works with clients who have projects that receive ongoing funding for years and who then develop spin-off projects that are equally well received.

In summary, the evaluator can become a "critical friend" to the project, helping program representatives and other stakeholders identify best practices, challenges, and aspects that may need modification. Such feedback can be essential in ensuring that a project is effectively meeting its goals.