

What is it like to work with an evaluation consultant?

1. How much does it cost?

Evaluation consultants generally bill by the hour or deliverable. Hourly rates can range from \$75 to \$250, depending on size, focus, location, etc. Most evaluation consultants will share this if you ask (I currently bill at \$100 an hour). Most consultants will provide a free consultation to learn about your needs. After that, they will provide a proposal with a scope of work and budget for you to consider and discuss internally. Don't be afraid to negotiate, all parties are working with limited information and it's important to have a clear understanding. Admittedly, money can be a sensitive topic, but it's an important discussion for all parties, and you should feel comfortable having this with a potential consultant.

2. What role do I play?

Evaluation consultants have different approaches to supporting your agency, but I've found a few things to be consistent. In the early weeks/months of the engagement, the consultant will spend time learning and exploring your organization and the project. This often involves a longer kick-off meeting, document sharing, and involvement of a variety of staff. After this more intensive early stage, a consistent meeting schedule will be established. The consultant will facilitate these calls and prepare agendas. The meetings will serve as project updates, requests for clarification or resources, and troubleshooting.

Consultants generally position themselves as an extension of the team and will want to build comradery and familiarity, ensuring the evaluation isn't happening on an island. While experts in evaluation, we know you are the expert in your field and your agency. We will look to you for guidance, and you can do the same for us.

3. Who owns the products developed?

Almost always, you. Evaluation consultants and the agency they are working with will sign contracts that include the scope of work, budget, and ownership. Almost always, you will retain all ownership of developed products. Sometimes, evaluation consultants will ask if they can use a report or instrument as an example to show a potential client, but this should always be discussed first. Good communication starts before the contract is signed and will facilitate a successful partnership.

4. How long are typical contracts?

Nonprofits hire evaluation consultants for a variety of projects. Sometimes, they ask an evaluation consultant to help on a large federal grant that requires evaluation (these are often 3–5 years). Other times, a nonprofit wants help to develop something very specific, like a logic model (these are often 3–6 months). As shared in previous answers, no one size fits all, and communication and understanding are the most important element of the relationship.

5. What happens after the contract is over?

Once the contract is nearing completion, it is a good idea to have a direct conversation with the consultant. Talk about final deliverables and products, share all documents that the consultant has been working on (in .doc and .pdf formats), and specify what is needed for closeout. Most consultants will want to maintain some level of contact and relationship, and they may ask if they can occasionally reach out or be in touch. As evaluators, many consultants will also suggest some review or debrief of the project to talk about what went well and what could be improved. Just like the start of the project, open communication is important.