

## Resource F      Internal vs external evaluation – making the right choice

*Making a decision about conducting an evaluation ‘in house’ (internal) or commissioning it externally is about more than budget or available resources. Making the right decision here needs to balance up many pro’s and con’s. It will also set the parameters for what can be done, how it can be done ethically, and the quality and credibility of the evidence and findings.*

Type of evaluation	What and who is involved	Pro’s	Con’s
Internal or ‘self’ evaluation	An evaluation which is largely (or wholly) designed, delivered, analysed and reported by the organisation which is also delivering or funding whatever is being evaluated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheaper (although staff costs may be hidden or ‘lost’ in the delivery budget)</li> <li>• Less likely to suffer data-access constraints (e.g., Data Protection Act) since much of what is needed for evidence gathering (or access to participants) will be accessible in-house</li> <li>• Making use of ‘contextual knowledge’ with the evaluator likely to be close to the intervention, its delivery and policy context</li> <li>• Quicker, providing for a (usually) faster start (possibly vital for intensive evaluations)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation staff may not always be ‘hand-picked’ for their knowledge and evaluation experience (risking quality and credibility)</li> <li>• Evaluation staff may have limited skills and understanding of different evidence collection, analytical, validity and reliability testing options</li> <li>• Internal resourcing priorities may intervene, with the evaluation deprioritised, delaying findings</li> <li>• Evaluation staff may be regarded with suspicion by participants or customers, and there may be circumstances where it is unethical for operators to engage with vulnerable people such as problem gamblers or those at risk. Staff may be wary of sharing their views honestly with internal evaluators.</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders may see internal evaluators as 'conflicted'</li> <li>• Lacking independence and (perceived) impartiality with consequences for reduced confidence and credibility in findings</li> </ul>
External evaluation	Commissioned by the delivery organisation or direct funding body from outside, using non-aligned evaluators who may be consultants, academics or from independent research groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognisably independent evaluators, with no conflicts of interests (where screened out in procurement)</li> <li>• 'Expert' (if well selected) with access to specialist expertise/techniques which may provide for more robust and/or cost-effective evidence collection and analysis</li> <li>• Able to draw on wider comparative knowledge, perhaps about similar policy initiatives or interventions which may be of additional value to the evaluation analysis</li> <li>• External evaluators are more likely to be viewed with less suspicion by participants or customers who may be more open and honest about their experiences</li> <li>• Impartial and likely to provide for more confidence and credibility in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Likely to require formal procurement; may cause delays to start (and end) of evaluation and need a longer overall timetable</li> <li>• Requires an allocated budget and will cost more than internal evaluation</li> <li>• May encounter data access constraints such as data protection limitations to personalised data which could be difficult to overcome</li> <li>• External evaluators may be regarded with more suspicion by delivery staff (although not by participants or customers)</li> </ul>

		findings and be taken more seriously by third parties	
Hybrid evaluation	Evaluation is designed, delivered, and analysed by the delivery or funding organisation (i.e., internal) but an external and independent 'peer reviewer' is appointed to critically review method and/or findings – with their review taken into account by, and potentially published alongside, the final evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retains benefits of internal evaluation (cheaper, faster, few if any data-access constraints, and using 'close-to-intervention' contextual knowledge)</li> <li>• Introduces an external, independent and impartial validation (if peer reviewer is appropriately selected and not conflicted)</li> <li>• Draws in professional expertise and wider knowledge (although this may be after the event)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not overcome all 'internal evaluation' constraints and the process will still be at risk from changing internal priorities and delays to findings</li> <li>• Likely to require a (smaller) contracting budget and formal procurement to obtain an expert and impartial peer reviewer</li> <li>• Peer review process will result in some delays to the conclusion of the evaluation</li> <li>• Peer review process risks raising method weaknesses in internal evaluation and/or a contradictory assessment of findings which will need to be managed with third parties</li> </ul>