Our discussion today is about developing evaluation work plans.

The class will last for an hour, and include some small group, hands-on efforts to rough out a work plan for a hypothetical evaluation.

Please feel free to stop me if you have questions or observations about what we are discussing.
Major Stages in an Evaluation

- Preliminary Research
- Scoping and Planning
- Fieldwork
- Writing, Quality Assurance, and Publication

As you know, there are usually four major stages to an evaluation.

In most reviews, you begin with some preliminary research, which is often fairly broad, to familiarize yourself with the topic and the background of the specific request or directive.

Then, before you dive into gathering and analyzing information through fieldwork, you pause and organize your quest, your team, and your resources. This is the time to scope and plan your review, and to develop your evaluation plan.
Scoping and Planning

- Identify the specific questions or issues you will address
- Develop your evaluation plan and timelines
- Plan for internal and external communication throughout the evaluation

In this phase, you will ... [slide text]
Finding the Practical Balance

- How can we provide the **most** value in the time and with the resources we have available?
- How much do we **need** to do to be able to answer the questions?
- What will we be able to say with this information?
- What risks do we face by doing or not doing additional fieldwork?

As we get into the details of scoping and planning a review, it is important to keep a practical frame of mind.

Our office wants to provide the best product possible. But, it also operates under very real resource constraints. Your time **IS** money, and the office has a limited amount of resources to allocate among its work projects for the year.

So keep these questions in mind as you brainstorm and prepare your plan... [slide text]
Legislative evaluations can address many types of questions. Some of the main types are shown here.

Generally speaking, questions about the first two bullets, compliance and efficiency, are considered process evaluations.

Program effectiveness and economy questions, the next two bullets, are typically used for outcome evaluations.

And policy analyses focus on questions of how to implement or revise programs or compare multiple programs.

Some evaluations are hybrids. The bottom line is to get the information your legislature is requesting, regardless of what it is called!
Sample Process Evaluation Questions

- How much of the target population is being served?
- What services are they receiving?
- Are required background checks performed?
- Is the program hiring and retaining qualified staff?

Let's look at some of the variety of questions and issues that we may be called upon to address.

Here are some sample process evaluation questions.... [slide text]
Sample Outcome Evaluation Questions

- Do participants of the job-training program obtain and remain in targeted jobs for a specified period of time?
- Do drug court graduates have lower recidivism rates than similar offenders who were sentenced to prison?

And some sample outcome evaluation questions...
Sample Policy Analysis Questions

- How could the groundwater protection program be restructured to better achieve its legislative intent?
- What resources would be required for each option?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option?

And finally, some policy analysis questions. [slide text]

Two things that I really enjoy about our work are the variety of topics and the creative problem-solving that goes into refining and narrowing the possible questions and methods down to a specific plan.
In scoping, we delineate the boundaries of the project. What we decide to exclude is as important as what we will pursue during fieldwork.

From there we move to putting a plan down on paper. It should include specific details such as... [text on right side of slide].
Elements of a Finding (5 C’s)

- **Criteria** (what should be)
- **Condition** (what is)
- **Cause** (what happened)
- **Consequence** (significance)
- **Corrective Action** (recommendation)

If you are struggling with what to include and exclude in your plan, it is useful to consider the “5 C’s.”

Unless you have been directed to address a very specific and narrow question, most readers/legislators will want to know this about the topic at hand:

[slide text]

Let’s look at them individually for a few minutes.
Many possible sources to define the desired condition

- **Identify standards** (review law and rules, program authorization, contracts; literature for benchmarks for similar programs that are published through federal, state, local, or professional association sources)
- **Consult experts** (program and research) in the relevant substantive area

There are many possible ways to identify the criteria, or the way things should work.

Many times the criteria are specified in law. If not, you can consult other documents, including administrative code and contracts, or literature from other states or other levels of government.

Professional association sources are useful too, such as American Correctional Association Standards.

You can also consult audit topic experts in your or other states.
Develop Operational Definitions for Criteria

- For example, a unit of treatment will be one hour of multi-systemic therapy
- Will recidivism be measured by arrests or convictions and for how long after drug court completion?
- Will reading success be making specified gains or reading at a specific grade level?

Sometimes the operational definition of the criteria is also specified in law. If not, it will be important for the team to operationalize the criteria so that there is agreement and specificity about what your standard will be.

[slide text]
Identify Condition

- Is the program providing the contracted amount of multi-systemic therapy to clients?
- What is the recidivism rate for drug court graduates?
- Are participants making reading gains?

Condition, or the way things actually are, is important to legislators in almost any evaluation.

Some example of condition questions include... [slide text]
Members also want to know why things are the way they are. Examples of cause questions are...[slide text]

This can be one of the most difficult parts of the review because sometimes the cause is not clear.

You may or may not be able to get data you want, or you may get it and find it is incomplete. Another factor is that programs occur in a complex world. So, there may be more variables at play than what your project is measuring.

We still need to proceed to get the best information we can. However, your report should be clear about important data limitations. You should also remember that often we are able to demonstrate a CORRELATION rather than cause.
And finally, many evaluations need to answer the “who cares?” or “so what?” question to determine if action is needed.

Some examples of possible significance include...[slide text]

Also, because legislative evaluation shops operate in a political world, the perception of what is significant or important is sometimes fluid over time.
Data Collection

- Identify what you will measure, when, with what data, and how you will record results
- If an outcome evaluation will be done, ensure that required data exists (or will be collected routinely through time)

Once you have decided what your evaluation questions, issues, or hypothesis questions are, your team will need to decide what information it needs to collect.

[slide text]

Remember to stay focused; what will the information allow you to say? Get what you need but don’t spend time getting more.
How Many Sites?

- If program has multiple sites/providers, will you examine multiple sites or just one?
- Collecting data from a single site is cheaper, but limits extent to which findings can be generalized
- Collecting data from multiple sites is more expensive, but provides more ability to generalize and reduces risk of wrong conclusions
- Budget, time, staff resources, and deadlines drive these decisions!

Another thing you will need to decide to develop your plan is how many sites or providers you will study.

Is the universe so large that a sample is warranted?

[slide text]
Which Data?

Data collection can include multiple methods and information sources

- Client case files
- Electronic data files
- Interviews
- Surveys (mail, telephone, web-based)
- Focus groups (participants and/or staff)

What data will you need? [slide text]

Will you want to look at the entire universe of that data, or is a sample preferable?

If you choose to use a sample, think through how to select the set.

- Enough to allow statistically significant results?
- Geographic distribution?
- Where the largest number of participants or amount of money is found?

These decisions should be made now, in the planning stage, as you think through your time and resources.
Quantitative and Qualitative Data

- To the extent possible, it is better to use multiple data collection methods to ‘triangulate’ your major conclusions
- Example – Review case files, survey a sample of clients, observe field activities, review trend data
- Triangulation helps you pin down condition, cause, and consequence/significance

A key question is what methods you will use to collect the information you need.

What data is available? Is it reliable and valid? Do you have access to it?

Can you get qualitative data, such as interviews? Quantitative data, such as enrollment over five years?
What best suits this review?

How long will it take to get it, clean it, analyze it?

And, importantly, how much is enough?

[slide text]
The Hierarchy of Evidence

Let's talk about what KIND of information or evidence you should try to get.

What is the BEST evidence you can obtain? What is the weakest?
... get them to talk about this for a bit

Best to worst
- Data collected and analyzed by your office
- Other "audited" data
- Agency reports
- Literature reviews
- Respected newspaper articles, reputable Internet sites
- Blogs, dissertations, theses, Wikipedia [not acceptable]
Data Source Quality

Assess the credibility of secondary data

- Who collected the data?
- How were the data collected?
- When were the data collected?
- Why were the data collected?

We often need to use data from agency or other secondary sources.

Ask yourself these questions before deciding how it can be used. [slide text]
Timing of data and information is another thing to consider as you develop your plan.

Is it...[slide text]

What is most appropriate and realistic given your project timeframe and the data that is available?
Staff and Resources

- Generally a team should have the collective competence (knowledge and skills) to conduct the work
- The number of persons needed to get the necessary work done in the allocated amount of time

What kind of staff should be included in the project plan?

Yellow Book standards require that the team have the collective competence—knowledge and skills—to conduct the work.

You also need to think about how many people are required. More staff can sometimes speed up a project, but they also make it more expensive and divert people from other projects.
The Evaluation Plan

An evaluation plan should describe

- What information you need
- How you will collect the information
- How you will analyze the information, and
- How you will administer the evaluation

[slide text]

The plan should also describe **WHO** will do each task and **WHEN**.

It should allow everyone on the team to be clear about their responsibilities and those of their teammates.

The plan assures that the team and supervisors are in agreement about how to proceed and what the timeframes are.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researchable Question(s)</th>
<th>Information Required and (In Source)</th>
<th>Scope and Methodology</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
<th>What This Analysis Will Likely Allow us to Say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are OPS employees?</td>
<td>-defining what they are and what they do</td>
<td>review relevant literature and role definitions in literature</td>
<td>State agencies have OPS employees but not as critical as other agencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Why do state agencies hire them?</td>
<td>Agency-specific reasons (see next)</td>
<td>Survey of state agencies about hiring OPS</td>
<td>Not all state agencies have strong hiring reasons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How many OPS employees are there in the state government?</td>
<td>Total number of OPS employees in the state government</td>
<td>SMART data on OPS employees</td>
<td>OPS employment is not a growing segment of the state government workforce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What types of positions do OPS employees occupy?</td>
<td>Types of OPS positions identified in SMART data</td>
<td>SMART data on OPS positions</td>
<td>OPS employees occupy a range of positions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Why do agencies retain OPS?</td>
<td>Literature review of OPS retention and tenure</td>
<td>SMART data on OPS retention and tenure</td>
<td>OPS retention is important but challenging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here is another example.

The two columns on the right, “limitations” and “what this analysis will likely allow us to say” can be very useful as the team works out its approach.
Here is another template used by an evaluation shop.

Note that it begins with project administration so that this aspect of planning, and the time and tasks required, are not overlooked.
Here is that same template, filled out to address a specific evaluation question shown at top in blue.

The sections below describe the work planned to determine the 5 C’s and write a traditional finding.
Scheduling Evaluation Work

- Realistic time frames
- Plan backwards from completion date
- Designate progress points (milestones) and communication points
- Allocate adequate analysis time
- Take into account other events
- Revise and communicate as necessary

- Once you have your evaluation questions or issues and a good idea of the data you need and how you will get it, it’s time to think seriously about timeframes.

- Often at this stage you might need to pare back your original idea of what you would ideally do, to fit into the time you have.

- Writing the evaluation plan is a process of going backward and forward, like parallel parking, to find the best fit between aspirations and realistic planning. Start with your deliverable(s) deadline(s) and work backwards.

- If you can’t finish your plan on time, is it possible to add more staff? Can you extend the deadline? Would a sample work? How significant/necessary is each task? Time for serious discussion among the team members and supervisors.

- Build in a small buffer for things beyond your control. And, take into account other factors, such as holidays and other projects that will be coming in at the same time and compete for your supervisor’s attention.
A very handy tool for thinking through time allocations is the Program Evaluation Review Technique, or PERT chart. It was developed by the Navy in the 50's to manage development of Polaris submarine weapons system.

PERT articulates project activities, the time they require, and their deadlines, so that you can see which tasks can be run concurrently, and what the longest time, or critical path is (see gold boxes). (For more on PERT charts see http://web2.concordia.ca/Quality/tools/20pertchart.pdf )

If there is NO WAY to get it done, or no room whatsoever for unforeseen circumstances, revisit your plan and develop alternative methods or strategies.
Another useful tool for thinking through schedules is the Gantt chart, shown here on the bottom of the page. It helps you track major milestones and phases of our project so that you keep each portion of the project on time.

Remember, timeliness trumps all. The best report, delivered after the Legislature needed it, is virtually worthless.

Choose a team member who is good at staying on schedule to help keep the group on time and on track!
Communication

What to report when and to whom
- Identify key findings
- Interpret with stakeholders
- Communicate clearly and concisely
- Agree on timing of public info sharing

Finally, but very importantly, add communication to your evaluation plan.

Who will you need to talk to about the project, and at which stages of the review?

You should consider the communication within your office, with the agency, and with your legislative stakeholders.

To avoid confusion, and because these interactions can be sensitive, many offices direct that the team leader be responsible for these interactions, particularly those outside the office.
Your Turn! Scenario 1

The Department of Education is considering no longer offering summer school because many administrators think that online classes could meet the needs of students that traditionally take summer school classes. Moving from a summer school model to an online model may provide significant savings to the school system. However, there are several concerns, including the effect on high school graduation rates and the retention of many high quality teachers that count on their summer school salary as part of their annual income. In addition, many parents depend on summer school as a safe place for youth to spend time in the summer.

The Legislature has asked you to evaluate the summer school program and provide recommendations related to having some or all of the summer classes taught online. You have been given four months and a three-person team to conduct the review and prepare a written report.

Please describe how you would design and implement this evaluation. What key data sources would you use? What methods would you use to analyze them? Why? What are some of the challenges you would foresee, and how might you address them? Who are the key stakeholders and how will you communicate with them?

Now it’s your turn to develop an evaluation plan.

[Divide the class participants into small discussion groups]

Please take a few minutes to read the project scenario, then discuss with your team how you would proceed.

Feel free to use the big notepads provided.

We’ll get back together in 15 minutes to hear how your team plans to conduct the review.
Your Turn! Scenario 2

The Legislature has directed your office to evaluate issues at the agency that provides community-based residential services to the developmentally disabled. The agency has 12 residential sites in five counties and serves over 900 clients. There has been a high rate of turnover among counselors in the program; the average counselor is employed with the agency for 2.5 years. Counselors assist clients with life skills, such as employment and money management. In addition, there have been several stories in local papers of residents going missing for days at a time without the program contacting family members or law enforcement.

The Legislature is also thinking about reducing the number of sites and is interested in the results of your review before making this decision. Thus, you have been told to present your findings in 90 days. Your team of four has been asked to answer the following questions.

1) Why is there a high rate of turnover among counselors?
2) Are any sites following “best practices” for community-based residential services for the developmentally disabled?
3) Which sites are performing the best and which are performing the worst?
4) Are there problems with the management or leadership at any of the sites?

Describe how you would design and implement this evaluation. What data sources would you use? Why? What methods would you use to analyze the data? What are some of the challenges you foresee and how would you address them? Who are the key stakeholders and how will you communicate with them?

Instructors, this is another option you can use for class discussion.
Pitfalls to Avoid

- Spending too much time perfecting the plan
- Over-documenting the situation
- Letting your schedule slip
- Losing the big picture while in the details
- Insufficient communication, inside and outside of your team!!!
Questions or Comments?