

The *Unappreciative Inquiry* Evaluation RFP Checklist

This 10 point checklist is for commissioners of evaluation to aid in developing and reviewing evaluation RFPs, particularly at the draft stage, prior to setting your evaluation RFP free into the wild. Please note...the items below are inherently subjective, mutually non-exclusive, and collectively inexhaustive.

10 perils to avoid in an evaluation RFP

The Evaluator

1. The mystery of the unknown evaluand

Will an evaluator reading the RFP understand what it is that they are evaluating? The evaluator should know the purpose, scale, scope, and coverage of the evaluand; what the goals are; who it intends to serve and how. You want the evaluator to expend effort on answering your questions, not scrambling to understand basic details.

2. The never-ending question list

Is the list of questions too long? If you are asking for everything, then you in danger of getting nothing. You need to tell your evaluator what is most important to you and what they should focus their attention on. Evaluation questions are not wish lists.

Evaluation Questions

3. Evaluating outside the realm of the researchable

Are you asking an evaluation question that really can't be answered with empirical evidence? Is the question so impossibly large in scope that an evaluation team could not possibly address it fully?

4. The empty question

The meaning of every word in your evaluation question should be clearly defined, particularly for abstract concepts like "efficient," "sustainable," and "effective." If you don't provide the clarity, the evaluator will fill the empty question with their own meaning.

5. The fantasy-land recommendation request

If you want the evaluation report to include recommendations, you should be clear as to what should be examined to inform the recommendation. If you just ask for a recommendation without asking for research to inform it, you will still get a recommendation, you just might not get an evidence-based one.

Methods

6. Methodological coyness or over-confidence

If you know exactly what methodologies you want the evaluator to use, then just say so. There's no point in making the RFP a test to see if potential evaluators can read your mind. On the other hand, don't assume you know the best and only way to conduct the evaluation. Give evaluators direction, but also flexibility.

7. Obfuscation-focused evaluation buzzwords

Evaluation jargon can be useful when it is a short-cut in discussing precise evaluation concepts, but beware of evaluation buzzwords that are vague and indeterminate. Evaluation buzzwords, particularly when discussing evaluation approach, can often just leave the evaluation team confused about what it is that you actually want.

The Evaluator

8. Pining for the improbable evaluator

Do you want a PhD with 20 years of experience with both quantitative and qualitative methods, fluent in three languages, and expertise in both a particular country or region and a particular technical field? If so, you might not get anyone. Overly specific qualification requirements can end up excluding many qualified evaluators.

9. The questions/methods mismatch

The relationship between proposed evaluation questions and requested methods should make sense. For instance, if you ask a question about frequency but request an evaluation that only employs qualitative methods, you have a question/method mismatch.

Putting it all together

10. The questions/resources mismatch

Will the expected budget or expected level of effort enable the evaluator to adequately address all of the questions you are hoping to get answered with appropriate methods and the expected level of rigor? If not, you have a questions/resources mismatch.