



ACET
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ACET's New Look!

We're celebrating the new year with a new look! Over the past 6 months ACET staff have retooled just about everything. As you can see, we have a new logo (above) with new colors. And we've incorporated the logo in to this newsletter, our office stationary, and newly designed business cards.

We have redesigned the ACET website which we will launch on January 1, 2012. As we redesigned the website we rearranged some of the content, so please feel free to explore the ACET website. And please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about the newly designed website or our new look!

Dear friends,

We feel very fortunate each year to be able to work with so many organizations that improve the lives of the youth, families, and communities they serve. As we continue our journey into another calendar year, we thought we would take the opportunity to reflect on the past year and what we've encountered along the way.

- We've been happy to learn of continued funding for many of the programs we work with—a testament to the great work they do.
- We've received positive feedback from many clients about the dedication of ACET staff and the high-quality work they do. And we are proud that our work has translated into real value for many of our clients.
- We've watched the professional development of ACET staff including an increasing emphasis on innovative ideas and thinking to help meet our clients' diverse needs.
- We are rolling out a new ACET brand and image—one that's been long overdue!

Although the current economy presents a challenging funding climate for many of our clients, we've been impressed with the creative and innovative approaches many have taken—all the while managing to preserve their core missions of providing value to youth, families, and communities. We at ACET continue to explore new ways to streamline and innovate as we meet the challenge of continuing to exceed clients' expectations on a limited budget. We've also identified new and fun ways to incorporate leisure and team-building activities into our work week as we strive to balance our staff's busy work life and personal time.

Once again, it's been pleasure to work with each and every one of our clients this year and we look forward to another year of enjoying successes and meeting challenges head on. We encourage all of you to continue to read ACET's newsletter and to participate in our blog. We hope 2012 brings wonderful news for you and your families.

Stella *Kirsten* *Joseph* *Dan*



ACET distributes newsletters twice per year electronically. If you would like to be on our newsletter mailing list, please contact Kirsten Rewey at kirsten@acetinc.com or 952.922.1811

Evaluating Under Pressure

by Daniel Regnier

Don't you wish you could double your budget sometimes? How about having 30 hour days so you could get more done? Unfortunately, we all have to work under constraints and evaluators are no exception. Generally, evaluators' face three major constraints while evaluating programs and services: time, budget, and data (Bamberger, Rugh, Church, & Fort, 2004). For example, let's say there is an evaluation project where you want to learn about the experiences of participants in a chemical dependency treatment program. The program spans three regions in the Midwest. The client and the evaluator decide the best way to learn about the experience of participants is to have small group discussions (focus groups) about the program and its outcomes. Unfortunately, the evaluation is facing three hurdles. First, there may not be enough time to physically travel to all three regions to conduct each focus group (time constraint). Second, a less than ideal budget might hinder the ability to conduct a focus group in each of the three regions (budget constraint). Third, one of the locations may not have a formal data collection process in place to implement the focus group (data constraint).

Understand the Client's Needs. Evaluators utilize a variety of methods to combat time, budget, and data constraints. Before addressing the specific constraints, it is often helpful to fully understand the client's needs (Bamberger et al., 2004). Fully understanding any client's needs will help the evaluator to determine which strategies might be effective to handle some of the constraints and will help the client prioritize their objectives. Let's see how this might work in the regional focus group example. After reviewing the needs of the chemical dependency program, it may be the case that one of the three regions is new or works on a separate set of funding sources and therefore does not fit the client's immediate needs. As a result, the client may decide that a focus group in the new region can wait until a later time. Understanding a client's specific needs and preferences helps an evaluator identify which components of the evaluation should be implemented now and what pieces might be integrated at a later time.

Eliminate the Unessential. Reviewing existing instruments can be very helpful to an evaluation. During a program review, the client and evaluator can verify that instruments are aligned with the logic model and evaluation plan and non-essential items are removed. Eliminating non-essential items will result in less time needed for the participant to complete the instrument and will also require less time for the evaluator to enter, clean, and analyze the data and report on the findings. Although clients are often lured by items that they are interested in, those items may not be considered essential and may therefore be eliminated (Bamberger et al., 2004). For example, if one focus group is eliminated, evaluators may discover that some discussion points of the focus group script may no longer align with the evaluation goals and the focus group script could be shortened. This would save time and money not only for conducting the focus groups, but there would also be less information for the evaluators to analyze and report on which would multiply the savings.

Consider All Data Sources. Although collecting new data may be considered more precise than a review of pre-existing information, sometimes pre-existing data (such as program websites, documents, etc.) may suffice rather than collecting new information (Bamberger et al., 2004). For instance, rather than collecting information through three focus groups, maybe some of the same information has already been collected and is represented internally in the chemical dependency program. Staff may have conducted exit interviews with participants in one region and that information may suffice in lieu of conducting all three groups. Additionally, key collaborating partners may be useful to address data constraints (Bamberger et al., 2004). For example, rather than conducting all three focus groups, performing telephone interviews with key collaborating partners who have significant participant contact might help not only save time and money, but also help to gather different types of data to assist with data constraints.

Maximize Evaluation Quality. Although various methods exist to reduce budget, time, and data constraints, one important issue to remember is that the potential reduction in evaluation quality must be minimized. The strategies outlined above provide some systematic methods to determine ways in which an evaluator might be able to help you save time, money, and data integrity while minimizing effects on the quality of the evaluation.

Bamberger, M., Rugh, J., Church, M., & Fort, L. (2004). Shoestring evaluation: Designing impact evaluations under budget, time and data constraints. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 25, 5-37. Retrieved from <http://aje.sagepub.com/content/25/1/5.full.pdf+html>