



A Decision Framework for Selecting the Right Evaluator for Your ATE Project

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The National Science Foundation requires ATE projects to work with an independent evaluator. Ideally, grant seekers connect with evaluators during the proposal development phase to support the development of an evaluation plan. At other times, evaluators are sought after the grant is awarded. At either point, it's important for ATE projects to find an evaluator with the right mix of experience, skills, understanding, and approach. This decision framework can suggest what to look for and how to determine which evaluator is right for your project. Grant seekers, project teams, or grant professionals can use the questions and criteria below to find a qualified evaluator who is the right fit for their project.

1. Basic Qualifications

Can this person do the evaluation work?

Criterion	What to Look for
Relevant education or training in evaluation	Area of degree, evaluation certificate, or professional development in evaluation
Demonstrated experience conducting program evaluation	Prior evaluation work, not only research or assessment
Ability to serve as an external evaluator	Independent from your grant; not listed on another budget line in this grant
Availability within your project timeline	Confirmed capacity for your start date and key milestones

2. Contextual Fit

Does this person understand your world?

Criterion	What to Look for
Experience in relevant context	Prior work in STEM education, workforce development, or community college programs
Familiarity with ATE's unique demands and outcomes	Demonstrated knowledge or genuine willingness to learn the ATE context
Experience with NSF-funded projects or federal grant evaluation	Understands expectations for external evaluation in federally funded work
Accessible communication with varied interest holders	Can engage faculty, administrators, students, and industry partners clearly

3. Approach to Evaluation

Is their evaluation style the right fit for your project?

Criterion	What to Look for
Alignment with your project's goals and values	Skills, knowledge, and approach that reflects with the evaluation needs of your project and what you care about most
Evaluation design responsive to your project's context	An evaluation plan that is specific to your project rather than a one-size-fits all approach
Ability to make findings usable	Translates results into actionable information; ask whether they write recommendations or support use of findings

4. Partnership Potential

Can you work well with this person?

Criterion	What to Look for
Clear and responsive communication	How they communicate during selection often reflects how they'll communicate throughout the project
Asks good questions about your project	Questions that go beyond scope and budget; they're curious about your work
Genuine interest in your project's goals	Shows investment in the people you serve, not just the deliverables
Transparency about capacity and limitations	Honest about competing commitments and how they manage them

Quick Reference

Consideration	Core Question	Deal-Breaker Signal
1. Basic Qualifications	Can they do evaluation work?	No evaluation experience
2. Contextual Fit	Do they understand your world?	No STEM, community college, or ATE familiarity and no curiosity to learn
3. Approach to Evaluation	Do their skills match your need?	Cannot show examples or explain how findings will be used
4. Partnership Potential	Can you work well together?	Unresponsive, incurious, or opaque about capacity



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