WORKING WITH AN EVALUATOR: STEPS FOR TELESAFE CLINICIANS

As described in ***Conducting an Evaluation: Steps for TeleSAFE Clinicians***, evaluations allow the intentional opportunity to assess a program's efficiency and impact. Programs seeking to conduct an evaluation may consider collaborating with or hiring a third-party evaluator to support the project for multiple reasons.

The Value of Working with an Evaluator

First, evaluators have experience coordinating efforts across multiple stakeholders with varying goals. This is particularly important for evaluations that have complex project dynamics, such as teleSAFE. For example, stakeholders may have differing priorities for the teleSAFE program, or historical challenges could affect certain stakeholders' participation. An evaluator may serve as an objective team member who can ensure that all perspectives are appropriately represented and raise topics that the teleSAFE implementation team had not yet considered.

Next, evaluators have access to a wealth of resources and tools that can support the planning and facilitation of an evaluation. Evaluators have specialized training in developing evaluation questions, identifying participants, developing and using data collection tools, and conducting data analysis. Evaluators likely have access to special software, templates, and other resources that can allow for more nuanced and program-specific findings. For example, an evaluator may be able to conduct advanced statistical analyses that can further explain findings or make infographics highlighting the successes of your specific project. Overall, leveraging an evaluator will allow a program to maximize the evaluation and produce high-quality, actionable findings.

Finally, planning, coordinating, and implementing an evaluation can be incredibly time-consuming, and clinicians may have limited availability depending on their day-to-day roles and responsibilities. Bringing in and collaborating with an evaluator guarantees that someone is responsible for ensuring that all evaluation activities are completed as intended.

How to Decide If an Evaluator Is Right for Your Project

You may consider bringing in an evaluator in the following situations:

- Your team does not have prior evaluation experience, including experience with data collection, data analysis, or report writing.
- Dynamics among project stakeholders are complex, so an evaluation team member may be able to mitigate potential challenges.
- Your team does not have the time to plan, coordinate, and conduct an evaluation without additional support.

How to Identify an Evaluator for Your Project

When seeking an evaluator for a teleSAFE program, an individual with patient-centered, trauma-informed evaluation experience should be prioritized. In addition, a good teleSAFE evaluator should be able to work

with multiple data types (i.e., quantitative and qualitative) and with diverse stakeholders (i.e., SAFEs, on-site clinicians, advocates, patients, law enforcement).

Evaluators often work for universities, government agencies, nonprofits, or themselves. If a university is nearby, consider reaching out to its evaluation, public health, or social work program; although the university may not have an evaluator who can support your project, it is likely aware of evaluators in the area who possess the skill set you seek (e.g., trauma-informed, working in a medical setting).

The Role of an Evaluation Team Member

The role of a third-party evaluator can be tailored to the program's needs. Although some projects have evaluators complete all evaluation activities without input from the rest of the team, others work with their evaluators more collaboratively. For example, a teleSAFE evaluation team could work with their evaluation team member to make project decisions regarding a variety of topics:

- Project design
- Development of evaluation questions
- Development of data collection tools
- Participant identification and recruitment
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Writing of a final report or other dissemination materials
- Coordination of all meetings and evaluation activities
- Protection of human subjects