**Tips for a Distributed Evaluation Approach**

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**Developing a foundation for collaboration**

**Get to know each other and try to incorporate a number of face-to-face meetings.**

* Getting to know one another in person at the beginning of the project will help you work over the phone later on. Share and discuss your individual working styles, communication preferences, and approaches to evaluation.
* If possible, include a fun evening activity to keep it casual. Joking about terrible bowling skills can really break the ice.
* Face-to-face meetings at key points of the project are important for keeping things moving and developing the essential shared vision for different parts of the project.

**Have clear roles and expectations for each person**.

* Discuss your strengths and challenges as a group.
* If your project is flexible, discuss who would like to take each role. Feed from each other’s strengths (e.g. “I really like project management, so I’d like to volunteer to own the timeline!”)
* Assign someone to lead the weekly calls – send out the agenda, set up the conference call or skype, keep the group on schedule during the call, etc.
* Identify someone who will take notes during calls and distribute them after the meeting. This could be done using collaborative software, such as Google docs.
* Have clear action steps between calls.

**Use technology to work collaboratively while at a distance.**

* **Share your desktop when reviewing documents or data on calls. Work together on your documents using applications such as GoToMeeting, Google Docs, or Adobe Connect.**
* **Skype or other videoconferencing tools can allow you to see nonverbal communication amongst team members, which can be particularly helpful at the beginning stages of collaboration.** However, it can a while to set up each time (because of video freezing, etc.), and you should probably have a conference line to do the audio to keep the conversation going.

**Work to develop a shared vision and understanding of the project.**

* Although it may come as a surprise, people coming together to work on a project collaboratively may have very different understandings of the purpose, scope, and timeline for the work. Making sure everyone has a shared vision for the evaluation plan – and checking in periodically about the alignment of that vision across the different members of the group – can save a lot of time throughout the life of the project.

**Data collection, handling, storing, and organization**

**Be prepared for technology to be challenging during data collection.**

* For example, conducting focus groups using Skype can be difficult at times. Some participants may be unfamiliar with Skype, videos can freeze, and audio can produce feedback. You may want to use a separate phone line for audio and factor in extra time to troubleshoot with individuals. You may also want a backup note-taker and audio recorder at all times.
* Some collaborative software is still in the development phase and all the kinks are not worked out. This means you should always store back ups of your files outside of the collaborative environment, if at all possible.

**Share your documents in a collaborative manner.**

* Use a combination of online tools, such as Google docs and Dropbox, to share project documents, data, instruments, and report drafts. Keep this more organized by moving older versions into a “drafts” folder.
* Consider IRB issues when storing and sharing data online.

**Organization takes vigilance.**

* With so many people updating files simultaneously, things can get messy quickly. There are a variety of things you can do.
  + Come up with a naming system to keep track of file versions.
  + Create tracking spreadsheets and make sure everyone knows the process of updating (e.g. who/when/how to update). Remember that someday you will want to archive and look back at this information. Make this easy on yourself!
* It helps to have someone who oversees the organization of the files and folders if using an online file sharing system.

**Complex data analysis & report writing as a team**

**Share the workload, but be realistic.**

* Group writing and editing can be a rewarding but brutal process. For example, you may want to split up report writing into sections (methods, findings, and conclusion) so that individuals can dive into the data available. For the final version of the report, one person can go through to make sure it uses a consistent voice and that the sections flow well together.