

REACHING IN: SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH REQUESTS FROM STUDENTS AND FACULTY

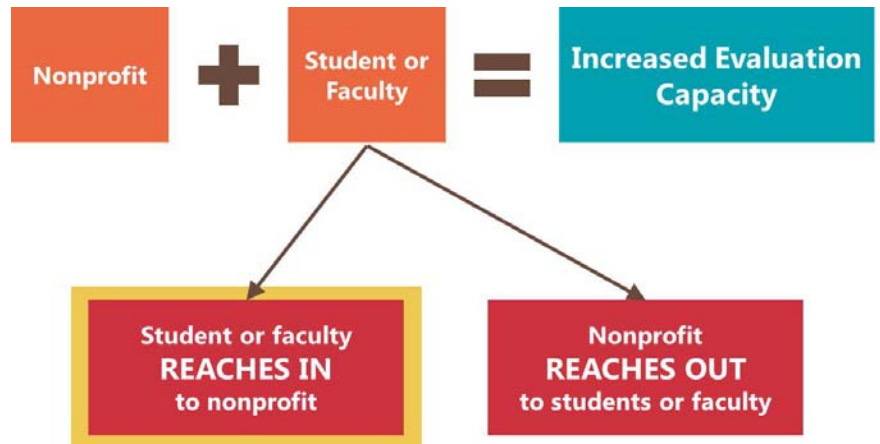
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PANEL OVERVIEW

Nonprofit organizations often have limited resources for evaluation; nonprofits can increase their evaluation capacity through collaborations with students or faculty at academic institutions. Initiation of these collaborations can occur in two ways:

(1) Utilize students or faculty who are looking to collaborate with community-based partners—they “reach in” to the nonprofit. Nonprofits can prepare themselves to take advantage of these requests by developing a process to review and approve research requests from students and faculty. Laura Beals, Senior Program Evaluator at Jewish Family and Children's Service, discussed this topic at the American Evaluation Association's 2013 Annual Conference in Panel 515, “Increasing Nonprofit Evaluation Capacity through Academic Partnerships;” this handout reflects this portion of the panel.

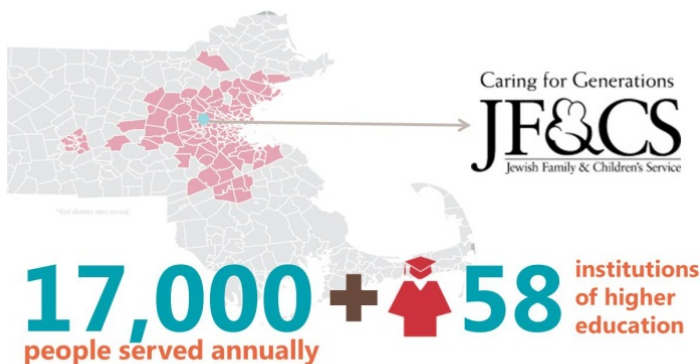
(2) A nonprofit can proactively “reach out” to students or faculty with specific projects. Jennifer Lowe, Director of Research and Evaluation at Crittenton Women's Union, addressed this topic in the panel. More information about this topic can be found in Jennifer's handout.



THE BOTTOM LINE

Requests for research collaborations from students or faculty can be a great way to increase evaluation capacity, but all nonprofit organizations should have a process for reviewing and approving.

BACKGROUND



Jewish Family and Children's Service (JF&CS) is a large social service agency located just outside of Boston, Massachusetts. JF&CS serves 17,000 clients a year in the areas of senior services, parents and children, community services, and disabilities. JF&CS has an internal evaluation and research department, called Performance and Quality Management (PQM). In metropolitan Boston alone, there are 58 institutions of higher education, with an estimated 250,000 students and several thousand faculty. Thus, JF&CS receives numerous requests for research collaborations from students—graduate or undergraduate—and faculty; each of these requests represents an opportunity for the agency to increase its evaluation capacity.

EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH REQUESTS FROM STUDENTS AND FACULTY

Examples of requests include:

- Students or faculty requesting staff assistance to distribute flyers or notify agency clients of the availability of a research project.
- Students requesting access to agency staff or clients to observe a program session, distribute a survey, or take part in an interview for a class project.
- Students or researchers asking for access to agency administrative or managerial staff to study nonprofit management practices.
- Academic researchers wishing to gain access to client data or to current clients for scholarly research governed by an IRB.¹
- Practitioners or researchers wishing to gain access to clients to validate a clinical evaluative tool.

RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH REQUEST PROCESS

In order to leverage these opportunities, JF&CS developed a research request process and corresponding policy that specifically aims to:

- Strengthen the agency’s role as a site for community-based research that supports the agency’s mission.
- Ensure the ethical treatment of clients at the agency, specifically in regard to Institutional Review Boards.
- Protect the privacy of clients and confidentiality of client data.
- Protect the reputation of the agency, both with respect to the types and quality of research collaborations and in publications resulting from research collaborations.
- Streamline the research request process at the agency, with a specific aim to remove the burden of vetting research requests from program staff/directors.
- Centralize the research process in order to monitor the volume of requests and associated resources—both staff and facilities—that are being spent on research collaborations throughout the agency.
- Facilitate the use of data and results from these collaborations to further the agency strategic plan of being an exemplar of evidence-based, innovative, high-quality programs.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH REQUEST PROCESS

Before engaging in a research request, it is important to consider the benefits and risks in doing so—and make sure the benefits outweigh the risks.

BENEFITS

Capacity
Tackle a project that might have been on the back burner

Knowledge
Learn more about your program and the field it operates

Inspiration
Be inspired by the methods or tools used

Reputation
Improve your organization’s reputation through collaborations with well-known researchers or universities

RISKS

Ethics
Clients may not be treated in an ethical manner

Privacy
Client data privacy may be breached (e.g., HIPPA)

Resources
Staff or facilities may be overburdened

Reputation
Organization’s reputation may be damaged through bad collaborations

¹ Though JF&CS does not currently have its own Internal Review Board, JF&CS does have a Federalwide Assurance (FWA) which allows JF&CS to “be covered” by the IRBs at academic institutions, should JF&CS be considered engaged in research (as determined by the governing IRB). Please contact Laura for more information about the FWA/IRB process.

STEPS IN THE RESEARCH REQUEST PROCESS AT JF&CS

The department of Performance and Quality Management (PQM) at JF&CS must approve all requests for research. This is often a non-linear process, but for simplicity, is presented as such below.



PQM receives the request—may come directly from student or faculty, forwarded from program staff, or through the agency’s website contact form.



If JF&CS has the population needed, PQM sends the researcher an electronic application. The application process acts as an initial gatekeeper—only researchers who are serious about the request will take the time to complete it.



The researcher submits the application to PQM.



PQM reviews the application, reflecting on key questions (see below), and determines the level of risk.

*Example of low-level risk: student asks to distribute a flyer with information about her study at a support group.
Example of high-level risk: faculty member wants to pilot an intervention on site with a vulnerable population and requires space and staff resources; would be considered “engaged in research” per an IRB.*

On occasion, PQM asks the researcher to “revise and resubmit” after addressing PQM’s questions and concerns.



The level of risk of the proposal determines who needs to approve it. The more risk, the more high-level the staff needed to approve (e.g., Vice President of Operations, Vice President of Programs, CEO, etc.).

Then, PQM, the program director, and other senior-level staff weigh the benefits and the risks in order to decide whether request is approved or rejected.



PQM communicates the decision to the researcher.



Before research can begin, the researcher (and all other associated researchers) must sign a Research Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which specifies expectations regarding ethics, data use and storage, publications resulting from the research, etc. Once the MOU is signed, PQM connects researcher to the program contact.



PQM enters all requests into a database that is updated as the research progresses. PQM shares this database with the senior leadership once a quarter so that they are aware of the research occurring at the agency.

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE REVIEW PROCESS

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| LOGISTICS | <p>Do we have the population they need?</p> <p>Does the program director think this is a good idea?</p> <p>How much staff time will this take? What other resources will they need from us?</p> |
| METHODS | <p>Does the research seem to be methodologically sound?</p> <p>Do you feel comfortable with what they are asking clients to do?</p> |
| BENEFITS | <p>What benefits will there be to the organization if we were to participate?</p> <p>Will collaboration with this person/center/school benefit our agency?</p> <p>Do the benefits outweigh the risks?</p> |
| RISKS | <p>What are the risks to the agency?</p> <p>Has the research been approved by an IRB?</p> <p>Does the researcher require access to HIPPA-protected or other sensitive data?</p> |

Questions or comments? Interested in more information about the research policy, research application, or research Memorandum of Understanding? Please contact Laura Beals, Senior Program Evaluator at Jewish Family & Children’s Service at lbeals@jfcsboston.org or via Twitter @laurabeals.