

9

THE EVALUATOR IS IN CHARGE

Evaluating a Controversial Shelter Project

Chapter Preview

- Consider *interactive evaluation practice* (IEP) that entails an evaluator-directed study conducted by an external evaluation consultant
- Examine how *basic inquiry tasks* and the *evaluation capacity building* continuum shape decisions in this case
- Reflect on evaluation decisions and actions at various junctures
- Engage in a set of exercises—TIPS (*think, interact, practice, situate*)—at the end of the case description
- Apply the IEP principles to the evaluator-directed study in this case

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes an evaluator-directed study that an external evaluator conducts in a politically charged environment. The evaluator's client, the head of a city agency, needs a study completed in a timely manner that people will perceive as fair and accurate. Unfortunately, an interpersonal conflict between two intended users, coupled with difficulty collecting data from an important group of stakeholders, makes the evaluator's job problematic. She sincerely hopes her primary intended users (PIUs) will use the results of the evaluation. The presenting situation is this: In response to the high number of people who are homeless but unable to find space in local shelters—single men and women, couples, and families with children—a city agency in a large metropolitan area has asked Homeway, a nonprofit advocacy organization that runs shelters for the homeless, to pilot a 3-month temporary tent-city shelter on public property.

If successful, such temporary shelters could increase the number of available shelter spaces.

The Tent City Home Project (TCHP) builds on a successful program that Homeway staff had previously developed in response to the constant overcrowding of the city's shelters. For a month at a time, large tents become residences for a group of individuals who are homeless, referred to in Tent City parlance as "guests." Working with faith communities in the area, each month Homeway cosponsors Tent City on the property of a church, temple, or mosque in an accessible location (on a bus line or near social services), moving the tent infrastructure from site to site so there are a consistent number of beds available routinely. The guests live under a strict set of rules and, through elected representatives on the Tent City Governing Council, direct and manage all aspects of the program. One distinguishing feature of the Tent City concept is that couples and families may live together, which is not true in many of the city's other shelters, which are gender specific. Another essential feature is educational outreach and advocacy. The faith community that sponsors the Tent City not only organizes support for that month (meals, clothing, health services, etc.) but develops a set of interactions (conversations, lectures, panels, etc.) to engage both Tent City guests and community members in discussing issues surrounding the plight of people who are homeless and the possibilities for long-term solutions.

TCHP marks the first time that a shelter will be opened on public land, as opposed to the private properties owned and insured by faith communities. The proposed site is the parking lot of one of the city's most popular parks. If this pilot is a success, there are three other public sites in different parts of the city where TCHP will move; each site will host TCHP a total of 3 months a year. Centrally located midcity, the pilot site is near a large private university with an enrollment of 25,000 in a middle-class residential neighborhood. The neighborhood's property values benefit from access to the park and a shopping district where business is finally picking up after declines linked to the financial woes of previous years. When TCHP is set up at the pilot site, a sizeable number of parking spaces will be occupied for as long as the shelter is open.

In contrast to the traditional Tent City format that is a true collaboration, Homeway staff will be responsible for all aspects of TCHP, soliciting businesses, nonprofit organizations, and nearby faith communities to provide the necessary support for 3 months along with organizing educational activities and interacting with the elected TCHP Governing Council to ensure smooth operations. Although the Tent City concept has been operationalized successfully for 6 years and this pilot project may lead to a new format for expansion, Homeway staff members are clear that any form of tent city is only a short-term, transitional

option even though it may benefit both those who are homeless and those who learn about homelessness. It would be far better, to them, if stable affordable housing eliminated the need for temporary shelters altogether. Exhibit 9.1 outlines the grounding components of the TCHP evaluation.

Exhibit 9.1 “The Evaluator Is in Charge” Evaluation

Case Grounding Components	Description
Relationship of the evaluator to the organization	External
Interpersonal participation quotient zone (see Exhibit 2.3)	Evaluator-directed study
Evaluation capacity building continuum focus (see Exhibit 2.6)	Use of a single study’s process or results
Object of the evaluation	Tent City Home Project
The presenting situation	The head of a large city agency hires an evaluator to study the outcomes of hosting a temporary homeless shelter on public property

THE EVALUATION CONTEXT

In this large urban center, overall reaction to the need for homeless shelters is split between two broad views. On the one hand, in an era of economic turmoil and high unemployment, many community members are genuinely saddened by the growing numbers of people who are homeless and the fact that shelters are filled to overflowing on a regular basis. Two statistics—that many of those staying in shelters are working but unable to find affordable housing for their families and that children make up more than half the city’s homeless—have spurred a motivated group of advocates to go public in an effort to solve the problems of homelessness in the city. On the other hand, a small but ardent group of community members expresses a general lack of sympathy for those who are homeless, believing these are lazy individuals who are happy to live on the state’s welfare support, which is among the highest in the country. When asked the solution to homelessness in the area, they quickly reply, “Tell those people to get off their butts and look for a job.”

After a local newspaper published an article describing the proposed pilot, reactions reflected the divided nature of the community’s overall beliefs. Even

before the pilot began, letters to the editor both supported and decried TCHP. In cyberspace the advocates for the homeless blogged and tweeted enthusiastically about the pilot's potential. But in meetings of small- and large-business owners, the reaction to what they perceived as a highly controversial project was decidedly negative. Despite his wholehearted support for the pilot, in response to complaints from several constituents, city council member Brian Orman approached Gus Stein, the head of the city's Department of Social Services—TCHP's sponsoring agency—and proposed a formal evaluation of the effects, both positive and negative, of the TCHP pilot. He noted that the merchants in the area were especially worried about the effects of TCHP on their businesses, owing to the decreased number of parking spaces and the potential effect of the shelter on their customers' sense of security. People living in the neighborhood near the proposed TCHP were reportedly worried about security and safety, asking questions such as, Will petty crime and panhandling increase? Will children be able to walk to school safely? Will people be able to use the park without fear of personal harm? According to Orman, some neighbors were also concerned about the effect of TCHP on their long-term property values.

Given the controversial nature of TCHP, Stein knew an evaluation could be a good idea. The social services agency he headed was doing its best to address the needs of the city's population of people without stable housing, but funding to address homelessness was limited and, if anything, likely to decrease in coming years. Advocates were pushing for more permanent solutions, but in the meantime TCHP might efficiently increase the number of shelter beds. If the project could adequately address the concerns raised, he might have an additional short-term option available. Yet he remained ambivalent about the program evaluation. Could an evaluation really provide evidence supporting a decision whether or not to expand TCHP to other public sites in the city while keeping his political worries in check?

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS AS THE EVALUATION BEGAN

Evaluator Katharine McMahon submitted the winning response to the **request for qualifications (RFQ)**. Her successful experience evaluating social service projects made her a strong candidate, and she was pleased to get the job. In her preliminary planning, McMahon identified a lengthy list of stakeholders for this evaluation, but she knew fewer people would necessarily play critical roles in the study. She sensed that Gus Stein, the administrator who had signed her contract, was not entirely confident about the prospects for the study. He expressed concerns to her about two key actors: Homeway director Dawn

Phillips, whom he respected but feared had already decided the outcome of the evaluation (i.e., unless it hurt her staff or the guests, TCHP was a good idea), and Councilman Brian Orman, who, as a relatively new city official, wanted to be responsive to the concerns of his district's constituents. Exhibit 9.2 details the list of characters in this evaluation, along with their concerns and issues at the beginning of the study.

As additional preparation, McMahon reviewed materials about Homeway's earlier Tent City efforts on private property and spoke with an evaluator who

Exhibit 9.2 Selected Cast of Characters for "The Evaluator Is in Charge"

Evaluation Role	Name/Title	Concerns/Issues
External evaluator	Dr. Katharine McMahon	Dr. McMahon is a respected member of the city's evaluation professionals and wins the contract for this study with her response to the agency's RFQ. Familiar with issues related to homelessness in the city, she understands the importance of her status as an outsider to the political process and the need for an evaluation process and data people will see as unbiased.
Client/PIU	Gus Stein, head of the city Department of Social Services, which is sponsoring TCHP	Gus Stein has led his agency for more than a decade and in those years has become increasingly cynical about the work his staff performs. The one constant in his professional life is political actors, all of whom strive to look good. Although he knows the potential value of evaluation and has participated in many effective studies, given the choice he would not have created a formal process for TCHP. His gut will tell him whether or not this pilot works. Given the council member's request, however, he issued the RFQ.
PIU	Dawn Phillips, director of Homeway	People familiar with Dawn Phillips, who founded Homeway 25 years ago, always speak of her passion and commitment to the homeless. She is a force in the community, backed by a passionate group of staff and community advocates. She views program evaluation as a waste of time and money and believes the evaluation will squander precious resources that would be better spent on people. Dawn's view of Gus Stein is not highly positive, but she is pleased he asked Homeway to run the TCHP pilot.

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Exhibit 9.2 (Continued)

Evaluation Role	Name/Title	Concerns/Issues
Important stakeholders	Members of the TCHP Governing Council	Supported by the lead Homeway staff member, the 10 elected members of the TCHP Governing Council take their oversight job seriously. It is their responsibility to ensure Homeway Tent City rules are followed at this new site, to raise and then resolve concerns their peers share with them, and to take an active part in the evaluation, even though the process is new to them.
	Brian Orman, city council member	Newly elected to the city council, Brian Orman is the ultimate political actor who understands the importance of pleasing his constituents but also has a strong sense that his job is to represent the powerless at City Hall since their voices are rarely heard in the council chambers. As a businessman, he is familiar with quality improvement processes that rely on data to inform decisions.
	TCHP/Homeway staff	Ms. Phillips is the director of Homeway and a community icon, but the five staff members assigned to establish and manage TCHP are responsible for all the details involved in running a shelter for 100 men, women, and children who have no other home. In addition to other tasks, this includes connecting with and managing participation from community groups, organizing and providing three meals a day, fund-raising, and supporting the Governing Council. Evaluation is the least of their worries.
Other stakeholders	TCHP guests	The group of eventual guests at TCHP includes several couples and families with young children as well as individuals, primarily men. Most of the TCHP guests have been without stable housing for a number of months and have moved with the Tent City from site to site. All are eager to have their own home as quickly as possible. Strict rules govern how tents are assigned and who has access to them. About half the adult guests have jobs and need to get up and ready with sufficient time to get to work in the morning.
	Area residents	Many residents living near the park where TCHP will be set up consider themselves urban pioneers. Some have renovated houses that might otherwise have been torn down, and most work hard to keep their houses, lawns, and gardens in good shape. With the downturn in the economy, many of the houses have lost considerable value

Evaluation Role	Name/Title	Concerns/Issues
		and some people hold mortgages larger than the value of their homes. They do not look favorably on the prospect of additional decline in property value owing to the placement of TCHP near their homes.
	Owners of nearby businesses	Owners with businesses near the TCHP location complained to Councilman Orman about what they see as the likely effect of fewer parking spaces and their customers' security concerns when the site is up and running. Some enthusiastically support the efforts of Homeway but would prefer the tent cities continue only on private property—and, preferably, in another neighborhood.
	Volunteers/advocates for the homeless	Intrepid activists have been volunteering for a decade in the pursuit of affordable and stable public housing for city residents in need. These advocates for the homeless see the potential expansion of Homeway's Tent City efforts as good—the more available shelter beds, the better—but also as potentially bad since a short-term "fix" may slow efforts to create permanent housing. Many have training and experience in research or evaluation in one form or another and are fixtures on-site during the TCHP pilot.

had conducted a recent outcome evaluation that documented positive effects, including data on the Tent City Governing Council and lengthy quotations from appreciative guests. Living in the community, she had a sense of some of the issues, but she also went online to review newspaper and television coverage of the upcoming tent raising and studied the proposal for TCHP carefully. At last, she felt she understood the issues involved and began her evaluation.

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Initial Decisions/Actions

From her work on other evaluations, Dr. McMahon understood well the importance of establishing positive relationships early on while simultaneously learning about her intended users' information needs and perceptions of program evaluation. Her client, Gus Stein, seemed open enough to the evaluation process. There were no formal requirements from an outside funder (since there was none), and he was clear about his need to learn about the viability of

this new shelter option. Without hesitation he agreed to be her contact as the study proceeded. They decided she would touch base with him regularly to keep him informed about how things were going and to identify any potential logistical issues or political concerns. He told her his agency routinely collected data on all its homeless shelters and she could access whatever existing data she needed. Somewhat to her surprise, Stein identified the well-known head of Homeway as a second key intended user. He explained she was potentially a loose cannon who might react publicly if the pilot or its evaluation angered her for some reason. McMahan knew Dawn Phillips was famous for her passionate commitment to solving the problem of homelessness and for her quick temper when anyone disagreed with her. Given that reputation, McMahan sensed a relationship with her might be challenging.

In their initial meeting, Dawn Phillips, the head of Homeway, arrived late and out of breath. She could chat for only 15 minutes before rushing to another commitment. She explained that her experience with evaluation had always been as a last-minute addition to an already overwhelming programmatic to-do list and that she had little use for it. When McMahan asked her what she really wanted to know about TCHP, Phillips immediately raised two issues:

1. She wanted to see if this expansion, which relied entirely on her staff rather than on collaboration with another community group, could generate sufficient support for the entire month without overwhelming them.
2. She wanted to know if the TCHP guests felt they were treated with respect and dignity, worrying the city bureaucracy might somehow interfere with the traditional Tent City culture of caring. If the evaluator could include their voices in the study, she would feel much better about spending money on it.

Then, switching her cell phone on to make a call, she was off to her next meeting. McMahan realized that keeping Phillips in the loop—or getting her to respond to requests of any sort—might prove difficult. She asked Phillips's assistant for his contact information and arranged for him to be the liaison with his boss, who seemed constantly in motion.

Already, Katharine McMahan sensed the potential for interpersonal conflict between Gus Stein and Dawn Phillips, the two people who would most directly affect the course of the study. Gus Stein seemed pleasant enough, an agency bureaucrat trying to solve a difficult problem. Phillips's reputation as a powerful community leader made her a force to be reckoned with, and her insistent demand for additional support for people who found themselves homeless, well documented in the newspaper, put her in a possible adversarial role with Stein, the pragmatist looking to expand the number of beds available. Plus, the

success of TCHP might delay longer-term solutions. McMahon certainly recognized the importance of giving voice to TCHP guests through the evaluation process, but who else's voice mattered? Even though Councilman Orman would not be a primary user of the evaluation results, she decided to meet with him briefly to confirm that the study would provide him what he needed, since he was the one who had commissioned it. He was more than happy to meet and confirmed he was most interested in the reactions of his constituents—the business owners and nearby residents.

Within a week, McMahon had a good sense of what her PIUs wanted to know. They needed information on the feasibility and impact of TCHP, both on the guests living in the new shelter and on the surrounding neighborhood—in other words, on the pilot project's short-term consequences, good and bad. Her next concern was how viable this agency setting would be for conducting the evaluation. In this regard McMahon was cautiously optimistic. Through good fortune or divine intervention (she thought), she was able to schedule a joint meeting with Stein and Phillips to discuss their thoughts on how they might eventually use the data she proposed to collect. She watched body language and reactions closely. Leaning into the conversation, both PIUs suggested ideas for the use of the evaluation, especially the potential negatives. It became clear that three types of results, in this order, would lead to the pilot's being declared a failure: (a) if the implementation failed (e.g., staff couldn't find sufficient resources to support TCHP for all 3 months, if fund-raising failed, if costs to the agency were too high, and if no one attended the educational events), (b) if TCHP guests had negative experiences in this new format (a key indicator for Phillips), and (c) if there were negative environmental consequences (e.g., neighborhood crime statistics went up, businesses were adversely affected, neighbors felt uncomfortable). McMahon was ready to design the evaluation.

REFLECTION BOX I

How Is This Evaluation Going?

1. Who did the evaluator determine would be PIUs of the evaluation results? Do you agree or disagree with the evaluator's determination? Explain.
2. What actions did the evaluator take to establish positive connections with the PIUs in this study? How successful were these actions? What additional conversations with the PIUs may have been helpful? Explain.

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3. Were there other key stakeholders with whom the evaluator should have interacted during the initial stages of framing this study? With whom else would you have interacted? What might have been advantages in connecting with these other individuals? Explain.
4. Revisit Chapter 4, Exhibit 4.2. Review Conversation Goals 1 through 4, shown in the first column. In your judgment, how well did the evaluator accomplish these goals? Explain.
5. Revisit Chapter 7, Template 1 and Template 2. Apply these worksheets to this case. What does the evaluator clearly know and understand about the evaluation context of TCHP and the demographic dimensions of that program and the community in which it operates? What else does the evaluator need to know? Explain.
6. How might Dawn Phillips's deep concern for advocacy affect the evaluation in this case? What steps do you believe the evaluator should take to deal with this situation? Explain.
7. How might the evaluator constructively manage relationships among Gus Stein (head of the city agency sponsoring TCHP), Dawn Phillips (director of Homeway), and Brian Orman (city council member)? What are their respective issues? How might the evaluation fail if these issues and relationships go unattended?

Data Collection and Analysis Decisions/Actions

Despite elements of controversy, the TCHP evaluation was not an overly complex study. From her lengthy list of stakeholder concerns, Katharine McMahon developed two overarching evaluation questions:

1. How viable is TCHP as an alternative temporary shelter?
2. What are its short-term consequences, both positive and negative?

Measuring TCHP's viability required documentation of a number of variables, including its cost-effectiveness in comparison with the cost of other shelters, the feasibility of Homeway staff running it on their own, and the effectiveness of its associated outreach activities (e.g., opportunities for public education and engagement, volunteer opportunities, and positive interaction with the guests). Intended consequences included the increased number of beds

for individuals who were homeless, increased knowledge and empowerment for people—volunteers and guests alike—who participated in TCHP, and positive interactions with community members. Unintended consequences included largely negative possibilities related to crime, litter, loitering, neighbors' perceived safety, decreased sales at nearby businesses, and decreased property values in the neighborhood, among others.

McMahon always considered the Program Evaluation Standards as she thought about evaluation design. How could she conduct a high-quality study given the constraints she sensed in this context? As was often the case, she suspected there might be trade-offs among certain standards. She decided to propose a descriptive study that would detail and document the TCHP process, coupled with an outcome study looking at the short-term effects of TCHP, knowing the negative consequences might be the most important to capture for her two PIUs. Relying on McMahon's expertise, both Gus Stein and Dawn Phillips agreed with the proposed approach. The evaluator next determined what data to collect and how, again checking with her PIUs and making the minor changes they suggested. Ultimately, she identified eight methods of data collection, shown in Exhibit 9.3. She carefully considered all eight one last time

Exhibit 9.3 Data Collection Methods, Samples, and Those Responsible

Data Collection Method	Sample	Those Responsible
1. Analysis of existing data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Archival data (e.g., cost data, police records) 	Evaluator
2. Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key business leaders identified by Gus Stein, plus others they name A random sample of TCHP guests 	Evaluator
3. Data dialogues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business owners within a 10-block radius of TCHP 	Evaluator
4. Written surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All households within a 10-block radius of TCHP 	Homeway staff/volunteers (evaluator)
5. Electronic surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All TCHP/Homeway staff 	Evaluator
6. Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informal on-site visits at different times of day and night 	Evaluator
7. Group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The TCHP Governing Council 	Evaluator
8. Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those attending Councilman Orman's TCHP community forum on homelessness 	Evaluator

in light of the evaluation questions framing the study and felt good about her choices. Exhibit 9.4 summarizes the evaluation questions, the data McMahon needs to collect, and the methods she will use.

Exhibit 9.4 Summary of Evaluation Questions, Data Needed, and Data Collection Methods

Question	Data Needed	Data Collection Method
1. How viable is TCHP as an alternative temporary shelter?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost data • Police records • Perceptions of business leaders, TCHP guests/ Governing Council members, neighbors, TCHP/Homeway staff • Observations of TCHP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of existing data • Individual and group interviews • Data dialogues • Written and electronic surveys • Observations • Documentation
2. What are its consequences, both positive and negative?		

1. *Analysis of existing data.* Fortunately for McMahon, the city's data system included cost data on the traditional shelters for the homeless and archival data on community effects (e.g., police records of loitering, assaults, and vandalism before, during, and after the original Tent City placements). After meeting with the agency's data expert to better understand what was available, she gave Gus Stein a list of the data she needed, and he agreed to have his staff compile it and send her an electronic file by the date she proposed.
2. *Individual interviews.* Undoubtedly thinking of Councilman Orman, Stein had emphasized to McMahon the importance of garnering the perceptions of business leaders in the area. She asked him to compile a rank-ordered list of the people to interview one-on-one and decided to use a snowball sampling technique through which those interviewees suggested additional people to interview. Stein gave her an initial list, which grew longer with each interview. She met interviewees at their businesses. Because Phillips had emphasized the importance of understanding the perceptions of TCHP guests, McMahon also conducted one-on-one interviews with 20 randomly selected individuals at TCHP across the 3 months. She knew from checking her sampling table that for a population of 100, she would need to interview 80 people to ensure a sufficiently meaningful sample, but that was not possible. A sample of

20 seemed large enough, even if it wasn't technically adequate. Both Stein and Phillips agreed, and they reviewed and edited the interview protocols before she began.

3. *Data dialogue sessions (see Chapter 5, Strategy 7).* Knowing she could not conduct individual interviews with every business owner in the area, McMahon decided to hold three open sessions (one early morning, one midday, one after hours) for those owners within 10 blocks of TCHP (Stein's suggested range) who had not been individually interviewed. The sessions would be held in a private room at a restaurant near TCHP and use an adaptation of the individual interview questions.
4. *Written surveys of neighbors.* Again using the 10-block radius, McMahon decided to collect data from people who lived in the neighborhoods near TCHP. To save on costs, she had planned to send an electronic survey to every household in that area, but in reviewing the plan, Dawn Phillips objected because some households lacked Internet access. She volunteered to have Homeway staff and advocacy volunteers hand deliver TCHP descriptive materials and surveys and, if possible, engage the neighbors in short conversations about the project. Since resources were becoming increasingly limited and Phillips felt strongly about the value of this task, McMahon agreed.
5. *Electronic surveys of TCHP/Homeway staff.* The evaluator knew the staff were key respondents since they bore the brunt of the pilot's setup and implementation. An electronic survey would be quick, confidential, and easy to analyze since the data would come pretyped.
6. *Observations of TCHP in action.* McMahon thought it was important to see what TCHP looked like in operation and to document this with field notes and informal photographs at different times of day and night. Pictures would be included in reports only if guests signed release forms. She dressed appropriately for these observations—no business suit or high heels.
7. *Group interview of the TCHP Governing Council.* To capture the voices of guests in leadership positions, McMahon decided to conduct a group interview of the TCHP Governing Council during the final week of the 3-month pilot.
8. *Documentation.* Unbeknownst to the evaluator, Councilman Orman organized a community forum at the TCHP site, inviting representatives from the print and electronic media, the mayor, other members of the city

council, key community leaders, and every other person he believed should be there to visit and interact with the guests. Homeway staff went along with his arrangements, hoping positive press would help make their case. McMahon learned about the event when she found a flier during an on-site observation and decided to attend and take notes on what people said.

Since McMahon was in charge of most of the data collection, the process proceeded relatively smoothly. There were just two problems, only one of which could be solved. First, although she had rushed to put together her request for data from Stein's office, his staff missed her deadline by 2 weeks. It took three increasingly persistent e-mails to Stein before the electronic file arrived. Second, good intentions notwithstanding, the neighborhood survey process simply didn't work. McMahon had prepared a sufficient number of surveys (the required number plus 30 extra) and delivered them to the Homeway staff member in charge of the hand-delivery process. Although a self-addressed, stamped envelope was included with each survey, neighbors were told they could also stop by TCHP to drop off their surveys; not a single person did so. After 2 weeks, only 16 surveys had come in the mail, a response rate so low McMahon realized she couldn't use the data. It was too late to change the process, and, even if there were time, there was no money to redo the survey. Unfortunately, this meant there were virtually no data from Councilman Orman's neighborhood constituents.

With time running out, Katharine McMahon turned to conducting the data analysis, a task she always enjoyed because she liked working with data.

1. *Analysis of existing data.* First, she looked at the cost of regular shelters (per bed) and compared it to that of the original Tent City located on faith communities' properties and then to TCHP. The numbers looked good. Then she compared existing archival data on crime-related variables pre-TCHP and post-TCHP, comparing the rates in other neighborhoods that hosted Tent Cities as well as those in the pilot neighborhood, and found no differences.
2. *Individual interviews.* Having paid to have the individual interviews with area business owners transcribed, she conducted a qualitative analysis of their perceptions and was stunned by their negativity on virtually all counts. Although many reported never having set foot on the TCHP site, they felt free to say it was bad—that their customers complained about litter, having to park far away, and feeling uncomfortable seeing “those

people.” The interview data from the TCHP guests were far more positive. People were appreciative of the city’s attempt to create an additional shelter option, although a few guests said the social experience at TCHP was less positive than at the other Tent Cities because staff were always busy and couldn’t really take time to get to know them individually.

3. *Data dialogue sessions.* McMahon was less sure about what to do with the results of the data dialogue sessions with the other business owners. More than 150 had been invited, but only 37 participated in the three discussions. She had inadvertently scheduled one session on Rosh Hashanah, an important Jewish holiday, and decided to move it to another day. Those who did come had thanked her for the opportunity to speak their minds. Like their peers who had been interviewed individually, their perceptions were uniformly negative, but they provided far fewer details to support their claims. Their complaints were cast more as general issues about people who were homeless in our society. Were those data usable? She wondered what to do with them.
4. *Written surveys of neighbors.* Since the response rate was low, McMahon decided to exclude the neighbors’ survey data. She did glance at those submitted and was surprised to see positive responses and a few enthusiastic open-ended comments—quite a contrast to the business owners’ documented perspectives.
5. *Electronic surveys of TCHP/Homeway staff.* McMahon had a 100% response rate from the staff, perhaps thanks to the chocolate chip cookies she brought to the staff meeting where she introduced the survey. The results looked fairly positive. Staff noted glitches, but by and large their responses appeared to document the feasibility of TCHP. As she read through the data, she realized to her dismay that she hadn’t gotten input from the sizeable number of volunteers and advocates who regularly came and went at the site. “I won’t forget them next time,” she thought to herself.
6. *Observations of TCHP in action.* In contrast to the negative perceptions, when reviewing her field notes and the photographs she’d taken, McMahon was struck by the pervasive spirit of the pilot—TCHP had created a smoothly running, respectful, kind, and gentle environment with a few creature comforts for the guests who were experiencing major stress in their lives. McMahon sensed the atmosphere was positive, but she was concerned about making claims that were too strong, especially since the formal guest interviews were not entirely positive. She wrote a

description that gave specific details about how TCHP looked in operation. Most guests had been pleased to sign release forms for their photographs since they wanted others to know about their positive feelings.

7. *Group interview of the TCHP Governing Council.* Her notes from the Governing Council's group interview corroborated the observations' positive vibes, but one bit of data pointed to a possible concern. In the original version of the Tent City on private property, Governing Council members explained how members of the communities of faith who collaborated with Homeway staff made Tent City guests feel truly welcome. The guests got to know the volunteers over the course of the month and appreciated their support. Apparently, that wasn't the case in this public space. Homeway staff, who managed the pilot, had neither the time nor the resources to connect with guests in this special way. Despite volunteer participation, that aspect of Tent City seemed to have been lost in the TCHP implementation.
8. *Documentation.* Analyzing notes from Councilman Orman's community forum was a challenge because McMahan had a hard time keeping up with the fast-flying comments, most of them negative even though TCHP guests were present and willing to respond to any issues raised. The community members dominated the discussion, leaving the guests little room to speak. She summarized the themes of the questions and answers as best she could.

When she was finished, Katharine McMahan had a thorough analysis of the TCHP data. Her next challenge was to make sense of it.

REFLECTION BOX II

How Is This Evaluation Going?

1. What were the final evaluation questions that guided this study? To what extent do you believe these adequately dealt with the concerns of the PIUs? Explain.
2. How might an evaluation steering committee composed of several TCHP/Homeway staff have helped the evaluator plan for data collection and analysis? Would you have advised the evaluator to establish such a committee for input? Why or why not? Explain.

3. Revisit Chapter 5, Exhibit 5.3. Which one of these strategies did the evaluator use to collect data for this study? The evaluator chose not to employ any of the other strategies useful for collecting data. Was that a good choice? Explain your rationale. What other strategies might have been helpful in collecting data from various sources to address the evaluation questions adequately? How might you have used those?
4. What steps might the evaluator have taken to obtain the needed neighborhood data in timely and cost-effective ways? For example, might it have been feasible to request time at already scheduled community events or social gatherings to obtain such data, perhaps by quickly using the "fist to five" or "dot votes/bar graphs" methods (see Chapter 5, *Strategies 12* and *13*)? Brainstorm feasible options and explain which you would have pursued.
5. How important was it to obtain data from TCHP/Homeway volunteers? How might the evaluator have obtained those data? Brainstorm feasible options; also consider the evaluator's dozen of interactive strategies presented in Chapter 5. Explain your thinking.
6. What do you think about how the evaluator handled the surprise community forum organized by Councilman Orman? Should she have spoken with the councilman once she became aware of the event? What might have been the political effects of each of these choices? What would you have done in this situation in the best interests of the evaluation? Explain.

Data Interpretation and Reporting Decisions/Actions

Time was running short as the end of the pilot's 3 months approached. McMahon had experience interpreting data, but the challenge seemed to be the range of opinions on TCHP. She looked at the analysis of each type of data separately.

1. *Analysis of existing data.* The comparative cost data actually looked good. TCHP was a cost-effective option for the agency. The archival data also looked good, documenting that having a Tent City or TCHP in a neighborhood did not lead to an increase in crime or safety concerns. The rates before, during, and after the shelters' presence were virtually identical.

2. *Individual interviews.* The overarching themes from the business owner interviews were a list of reasons TCHP should not be allowed to continue. Their data detailed reasons for their strong opposition to the pilot; they honestly believed businesses had lost customers and their customers felt uneasy around TCHP. The guests' data painted a positive view of their experience, although they seemed to want more connection with Homeway staff.
3. *Data dialogue sessions.* Even though the number of participants was low, the themes from the data dialogues paralleled those of the individual interviews with business leaders. There seemed to be consistency from the business community, although the data dialogue data were fairly general and vague.
4. *Written surveys of neighbors.* McMahon winced as she wrote a statement explaining why she was unable to include the neighborhood survey data.
5. *Electronic surveys of TCHP/Homeway staff.* The interpretation of the staff surveys was straightforward since the staff by and large agreed that, with a few minor tweaks, the TCHP pilot was doable.
6. *Observations of TCHP in action.* How many times had she observed the shelter in action? Was that number of visits sufficient to make positive claims? She decided it was and she would include descriptions and photographs in reports.
7. *Group interview of the TCHP Governing Council.* The TCHP Governing Council represented TCHP's leaders—elected by their peers—but she had done just one interview with them. McMahon decided she would reference in passing the comment that TCHP was not as good an experience for guests who had experienced a Tent City elsewhere.
8. *Documentation.* What did the notes she had taken at the community forum mean? What did they add to the formal data she had collected? She decided to omit any of the content and mention only that Councilman Orman had sponsored such a forum.

At last, all the data were analyzed and interpreted, and McMahon triangulated her results. As often happens, the evaluation results were mixed, and, unfortunately, she did not have data from neighbors or from TCHP volunteers, even though they were important stakeholders in this process. What could she write in answering the evaluation questions?

1. *How viable is TCHP as an alternative temporary shelter?* Staff reported the new arrangement was workable, and the archival data suggested it was cost-effective and having TCHP in a neighborhood did not lead to increased crime. The observation descriptions of TCHP in action pointed to a generally positive experience for guests staying there.
2. *What are its consequences, both positive and negative?* McMahon thought the most important positive consequence was additional shelter spaces at a reasonable cost. The negative consequences included anger from area business leaders and the possibility that the new model might be less attentive to guests than were the earlier Tent Cities.

McMahon was relieved she could start writing the reports she and her two PIUs had agreed on: (a) a short (“executive”) summary and PowerPoint of the evaluation process and its key findings for Gus Stein, Dawn Phillips, city council members, and the TCHP Governing Council, and (b) a formal report for the city agency’s files.

Knowing the importance of keeping her intended users up to speed, McMahon scheduled a meeting with Gus Stein and Dawn Phillips to review a draft report of the findings to check that her interpretations made sense and to frame possible recommendations. Given their busy schedules, having them in a room together seemed like a victory. They both thanked her for having the draft ready in a timely manner and explained how eager they were to see the results and put them into action. Stein was clearly pleased with the answer to the first question but asked her where the data from the neighbors were to include in the answer to the second question. McMahon explained the problems with the written survey process and said she had done the best she could given the situation. “But what am I supposed to tell Brian Orman? The data from the business owners are weak, and you have no data from the neighbors. I can’t support expanding this pilot without that information.”

Phillips kept shaking her head and flipping through the report’s pages. She, too, liked the answer to the first question since she really wanted the pilot to be a success, but she asked in a pointed manner why there weren’t multiple quotations and anecdotes from the TCHP guests and the volunteers to answer the second question. “Didn’t I explicitly request that their voices be part of this evaluation? Didn’t we agree on that? I would love for this project to be a success, but I need to know guests are well treated. What evidence do you have of that?” Red-faced, McMahon could only explain her oversight in not including more interview data—she could certainly do that in the next version—and in failing to interview volunteers. She mentioned the negative comment she had

heard during the group interview with the TCHP Governing Council. The room became extremely silent.

“So what do we do now?” asked Gus Stein. Phillips thought for a moment and then said, “I may not be happy with what the data say, and I wish they came together better, but I think we can figure something out. Let’s look at what we know from the data.” McMahon took a marker and, as Stein and Phillips called out ideas, wrote the following list under the heading “What We Know”:

1. Homeway staff successfully supported the TCHP pilot
2. TCHP guests not unhappy, want more personal relations with staff
3. Community volunteers and advocates—don’t know what they think
4. Local business community—negative perceptions but no dollar data to support or refute
5. Cost and safety data—all positive
6. People living in the neighborhood—don’t know what they think

McMahon felt better. Perhaps there was a way to bring this all together.

REFLECTION BOX III

How Is This Evaluation Going?

1. Revisit Chapter 6, Exhibit 6.1. What interpersonal conflicts occurred during the evaluation? Did the individuals involved predominantly respond by forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, or problem solving? How effective were those various responses in dealing constructively with conflict? Explain.
2. Revisit Chapter 8, Exhibit 8.2. What unexpected events occurred during the evaluation that were beyond the evaluator’s control? Which broad categories did these unforeseen problems seem to exemplify? How did the evaluator respond? How effective were these responses in keeping the evaluation on track?
3. To what extent did the evaluator understand the politics inherent in this evaluation study? Was the evaluator blindsided when it came to political considerations? Explain.

4. Do you agree with the evaluator's interpretations of the study's findings? Why or why not? What specific recommendations would you make based on the findings? Explain.
5. At the end of this case, what conflicts do you see emerging between the evaluator and the two PIUs? How might the evaluator constructively acknowledge and deal with these conflicts? What tools in Chapter 6 might the evaluator employ?
6. If you were the evaluator in this study, what would you have done differently in the evaluation? Specify and explain your reasoning.

CASE STUDY TIPS: THINK, INTERACT, PRACTICE, SITUATE

This section contains four sets of exercises for further engaging with this case study. The first set involves *thinking* individually about various aspects of the case's evaluator-directed study. The second set entails *interacting* in small groups (consisting of two, three, or four people) on collaborative tasks that involve critical analysis, reasoned discussion, and decision making. The third set prompts *practicing* in the real world by carrying out field-based exercises related to the case. The fourth set prompts *situating* personal lessons learned from this case within your own context as an evaluator.

CASE STUDY TIPS

Think

1. What are the strengths and limitations of this evaluation study? Draw a chart with two columns; label one "strengths" and the other "limitations," and then list specifics for each. What might the evaluator have done to prevent or avoid the limitations? Explain.
2. In your judgment, did this evaluator-directed study adequately address the evaluation questions? To what extent? Explain.
3. Systematically review the evaluator's various decisions and actions in this case study. Which actions do you believe contributed most (vs. least) to a viable

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evaluation process? Which most contributed to producing credible/trustworthy (vs. implausible/untrustworthy) results? Which most enhanced (vs. diminished) use of the results?

4. Revisit the definition of interactive evaluation practice (IEP) and its grounding principles. In your judgment, how effectively did the evaluator facilitate IEP? How well did the evaluator use its principles to guide effective practice? Explain.
5. What interpersonal skills were especially important for the evaluator in this evaluator-directed study? How well did the evaluator apply those skills? What other competencies positively contributed to the evaluation process and product? Explain.

Interact

1. With a colleague, discuss your responses to each of the items above. Compare and contrast your thinking. Try to reach consensus on each item. Present and defend your collaborative conclusions to other groups that also engaged in this exercise. How did these discussions expand your understanding of evaluator-directed studies?
2. Consider the following statement: "The evaluator attended to issues of cultural competence in designing and facilitating the Homeway/TCHP evaluation." Discuss this statement by (a) forming a group of four, (b) assigning pairs within the group to either look for case evidence that supports this statement or refutes this statement, (c) present and listen carefully to the alternative arguments, (d) engage in open discussion to challenge arguments, (e) reverse perspectives, (f) drop advocacy of positions, (g) together consider all information that surfaced, and (h) reach consensus on the best reasoned response. Craft a team letter to the evaluator containing advice for dealing with cultural competence in this evaluation, especially as it pertains to people who are homeless and often marginalized in society.
3. At the end of the evaluation the evaluator and two PIUs generated a list, labeled "What We Know," toward crafting recommendations based on the study's findings. Role-play what happens next. In groups of three, determine who will be Katharine McMahon (the evaluator), Gus Stein (head of the agency sponsoring TCHP), and Dawn Phillips (director of Homeway). Consider what

you know about IEP and what matters as you play your role toward completing a useful evaluation.

4. Form groups of three and use *Strategy 4: Cooperative Interviews* (described in Chapter 5) to address the following question: "From your perspective, what was the best decision the evaluator, Katharine McMahon, made in this case study? Why? Explain." Use the "Interview Response Sheet" (presented in Chapter 5) to record responses and identify key group ideas (similarities/themes/insights) across responses.
5. In a larger group of 10 to 20 people, use *Strategy 6: Making Metaphors* (described in Chapter 5) to complete the following stem: "**A successful evaluator-directed evaluation study is like a . . . because . . .**" Next, use *Strategy 10: Concept Formation/Cluster Maps* (described in Chapter 5) to identify common qualities or characteristics across all the metaphor responses. How did this exercise deepen or expand your understanding of evaluator-directed studies? Explain.

Practice

1. Interview an evaluator who primarily conducts evaluator-directed studies (or someone within an organization or program who is responsible for evaluation projects). In what field does this evaluator primarily work—e.g., education, business, health, government, nonprofit, social services, etc.? What does this evaluator believe are the most important skill sets for successfully conducting evaluations in his or her context? To what extent do interpersonal skills play a critical role? What advice would this evaluator give to others conducting evaluator-directed studies?
2. Use the Internet to locate evaluation studies conducted on shelter projects, transitional housing programs, or social services for people who are homeless. Read one (or several), and take note of the evaluation questions that frame the study, types of issues that emerge, political considerations, samples, data, and conclusions. How are these the same as or different from those presented in this case study? What advice might you give those conducting future studies of this type? Explain.
3. Arrange to shadow, assist, or intern in an evaluator-directed study in an organization or program in your content area within the community. Observe various

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components of the study. How do the basic inquiry tasks unfold? What are the framing questions of the evaluation? How were these determined? With whom does the evaluator stay in contact throughout the evaluation? How does the evaluator interact with various stakeholders? Which decisions and actions seem to facilitate constructive evaluation processes? What challenges surface, and how does the evaluator respond? How does the evaluator make decisions about data collection and analysis? Seek permission to participate in various components of the study whenever appropriate. Reflect on lessons learned each step of the way.

4. Prepare and facilitate a professional development training activity that presents the foundations of IEP from an evaluator-directed perspective. Involve participants in activities that illustrate the usefulness of the basic inquiry tasks, interpersonal participation quotient, and evaluation capacity building frameworks when interacting with evaluation clients, funders, and other stakeholders.

Situate

1. Reflect on an evaluator-directed study you recently conducted (or in which you are currently involved). Compare and contrast the issues you faced to those in this case study. Draw a Venn diagram to record the similarities and differences.
2. What aspects of this case particularly inform your current evaluation practice? Explain.
3. What skills do you possess that make you particularly well suited to conducting evaluator-directed studies? Refer to evaluation standards, guidelines, and/or competencies in self-assessing your strengths and determining additional professional development.
4. What helpful lessons did you learn from this case? What are your main takeaways? How will these enhance your future work as an evaluator?

CHAPTER REVIEW

As a professional evaluator with a constrained timeline—Tent City Home Project (TCHP) would function for only 3 months—Katharine McMahon knew she had to work quickly and thoughtfully. Once she signed the contract, her first concerns were to develop positive relationships with Gus Stein and Dawn Phillips, her primary intended users (PIUs); to learn

what they wanted or needed to know, along with their perceptions of evaluation; and to examine the TCHP context both for potential evaluation pitfalls and for the eventual use of the data she would collect. Next she designed the study, deciding what data she needed and how to collect them, as well as what analyses made sense. Once she had the data in hand, she had to interpret what she had analyzed and develop two reports. At every step of the process, she consulted with her PIUs and reflected on how things were going. Her reflection on the interactive evaluation practice (IEP) principles, shown in Exhibit 9.5, highlighted places where she might make different decisions the next time around.

Exhibit 9.5 Applying IEP Principles to “The Evaluator Is in Charge” Evaluation

IEP Principle	Positive Application	Negative Application
1. Get personal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified PIUs and other important stakeholders • Involved PIUs in important decisions throughout the evaluation • Respected a PIU's busy schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failed to collect data from two important stakeholder groups: (a) neighbors and (b) community volunteers and advocates
2. Structure interaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held joint PIU meetings • Conducted multiple one-on-one interviews • Used data dialogues to increase the number of businesspeople who could participate in the evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not take advantage of TCHP site visits to collect data from volunteers and advocates
3. Examine context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed pertinent newspaper and television coverage before beginning • Used credible data from existing sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failed to appreciate the importance of data from community participants (neighbors, volunteers, advocates)
4. Consider politics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognized the potential for politics to affect the evaluation • Sought to pay attention to Councilman Orman's concerns • Agreed to let TCHP staff deliver surveys in the neighborhood to please Phillips • Attended the community forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failed to collect data from a stakeholder group that mattered to the councilman • Lost data as a result of the hand-delivered surveys

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Exhibit 9.5 (Continued)

IEP Principle	Positive Application	Negative Application
5. Expect conflict.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognized the potential conflict between Stein and Phillips and worked to respect their separate concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have precipitated a potential conflict at the conclusion of the evaluation between the evaluator and the two PIUs
6. Respect culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved the date of a data dialogue session to avoid scheduling it on a culturally specific holiday • Wore appropriate attire when observing at TCHP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failed to get feedback from TCHP guests during the evaluation process
7. Take time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed a study she could conduct within the time available • Managed to get existing data within a reasonable time (made requests appropriately) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ran out of time to collect data from the neighbors