

## Lessons Learned: The RACI Diagram Tool

Program evaluations are complex. As the number of stakeholders increases, knowing who is responsible for different parts of the program evaluation can be challenging. Establishing a decision-making process before the evaluation begins is essential because decisions must often be rapid, in real time, and with limited information or input from other team members. One way to address this challenge while maintaining momentum for time-sensitive tasks and resource-constrained stakeholders is to define who is responsible for a task and understand who needs up-to-date information on or be made a part of different decisions. A tool like a RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) diagram can help.

### The RACI Diagram Tool – What Is It and How to Use It?

During Fall 2019, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), sponsored a formative evaluation to assess the impact and implementation of two sexual risk avoidance (SRA) curricula aligned with the Systematic Method for Assessing Risk Avoidance Tool (SMARTool; CRE, 2019).<sup>i</sup> OASH engaged an evaluation team to lead the study, and two community-based organizations (CBO), Be Strong International (BSI) and Operation Keepsake (OK). BSI and OK partnered with a total of 14 secondary schools in 11 school districts.

Given the number of stakeholders on the project, the OASH evaluation team used a project management tool called a RACI diagram, similar to the one shown in Table 1, to define who was **Accountable** or **Responsible** for a task, and identify which team members needed to be **Informed** or **Consulted** about a decision.

**Table 1. Sample RACI Diagram**

Activity	Lead	Dep. Lead	Analyst	Team Member	Sr. Advisor	Advisor	Program Manager	Dept Head
Internal reporting to senior management	C					A/R		
Cross-pollination across Tasks	C				C	A		
Risk management	C					A		
Team calls (materials, invites)	A	R	I	I	C	I	I	I
OASH meeting notes	A	R			C	I	I	I
CBO meeting notes	A			R				
Monthly reports	A	R				C		
Monthly invoices	A/R	I				C		

**Table 2. RACI Diagram Roles and Descriptions**

Role	Descriptions
Responsible (R)	People or stakeholders who do the work. They must complete the task or objective or make the decision. Several people can be jointly Responsible.
Accountable (A)	Person or stakeholder who is the “owner” of the work. This individual must sign off or approve when the task, objective, or decision is complete, as well as make sure that responsibilities are assigned in the RACI matrix for all related activities. Success requires making only one person Accountable, which means that “the buck stops there.”
Consulted (C)	People or stakeholders who need to give input before the work can be done and signed off on. These people are “in the loop” and active participants.
Informed (I)	People or stakeholders who need to be kept “in the picture” (e.g., carbon copied or included on meeting invites). Although they need updates on progress or decisions, they do not need to be formally consulted, nor do they contribute directly to a task or decision.

## Recommendations

OASH compiled the following recommendations for CBOs to consider if they plan to use this tool to support task and decision management:

**Designate a Lead** for work on a project. This person will be the “decider” and collect data from relevant parties to make a final decision, making them the **Accountable** party. For example, the Evaluation Team Lead worked with OASH to establish a process to (a) share issues that seriously threatened the quality or feasibility of the project in a timely fashion, (b) incorporated OASH input by a set deadline, and (c) made a decision in the absence of timely input. This example made OASH the **Consulted** party, ensuring proposed work met its objectives and signing off on the work’s direction.

**Assign and ensure all staff members are aware of their role** and level of responsibility, as defined by the RACI diagram. For example, the **Accountable** party should be someone who understands the types of concerns and considerations each stakeholder might have, as well as understands the overall goals and quality targets for the evaluation. In the event of a critical decision about logistics, for example, this knowledge will help this “decider” make the best tradeoffs possible while preserving the essentials for project success.

**Communicate early and often with the evaluation team** to clarify roles and responsibilities. Draft and share a RACI diagram during the planning phase, and make adjustments as roles and responsibilities evolve. This can help establish expectations and identify potential gaps in staffing or responsibilities early.

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<sup>i</sup> The SMARTool is a technical assistance guide for use by schools, youth-serving organizations, and other agencies interested in delivering SRA education to youth.