

Inside or outside researchers?

*What are the advantages and disadvantages of having research done from within the programme or organisation?
And what are the pros and cons of using outside researchers? The following issues were mentioned at the Following Footsteps workshop in Jamaica.*

| Using insiders – positive | Using insiders – challenges | Using outsiders – positive | Using outsiders – challenges |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bring inside knowledge and understanding of the project ■ Enable organisational learning ■ Enable processes of analysing and understanding within the project ■ Familiarity with and sensitivity to culture, norms, language ■ Familiarity with and acceptable to respondents ■ Have intuitive and intrinsic knowledge ■ Research will be truly 'owned' and applied ■ Can influence the programme ■ A clear immediate sounding board ■ Interpersonal relationship allows the insider to go deeper ■ Financial benefit to organisation ■ Awareness of political environment ■ Investment in the outcomes (double-edged!) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Danger of bias, for example, in favour of certain outcomes ☞ Familiarity/knowledge might hinder objectivity ☞ Possible over-identification with project ☞ Too close to the problem ☞ Could be too passionate, unable to separate issues ☞ Respondents might give the answers they think the project wants to hear ☞ Competing work loads ☞ Difficulty in shifting roles ☞ Could have blinkered approach to data ☞ Investment in the outcomes (double-edged!) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Challenge the thinking and what has been taken for granted ■ Bring broader and new perspectives and wider experience from other projects ■ Have expertise in research ■ Are objective ■ Have a fresh view – new eyes ■ Only commitment is to research, not to project implementation ■ Can see 'outside the box' ■ Bring new ways of understanding ■ Lack of bias ■ Optimal focus ■ Detachment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ May miss important knowledge or understanding through lack of information and being new to the subject ☞ May not be familiar with the culture, local language, jargon ☞ Will not be aware of hidden agendas ☞ Their questions may not be relevant ☞ There could be social distance because of background and expertise ☞ Specific researchers could be imposed by outsiders/funders ☞ Money spent on outsiders could be used for project development ☞ Outsiders can be resented because of bitterness about higher wages, 'stolen' information and suspicion from respondents ☞ Respondents may not respond to an outsider ☞ Additional time is needed for orientation ☞ May not be open about own assumptions ☞ Time is sometimes limited |
| <p>Possible solutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One solution could be insider research supported by outside resource persons/monitors. • A single perspective can be avoided by involving as many as possible insiders in the team and having a primary outside researcher guiding the research process. | | | |