



MONTANA EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCOUNT EVALUATION APPROACH OPTIONS

PURPOSE

State statute directs the Board to evaluate the efficacy of funded services and activities. As pilot projects are implemented, establishing a clear and consistent evaluation approach will ensure programs are carried out as intended, outcomes are measured effectively, and meaningful data is collected.

Evaluation will also assess the impact of funded activities on providers, programs, and children to better understand what is working and where improvements may be needed. This information will support the Board in making informed decisions about future investments, including whether to expand, modify, or discontinue funded strategies.

INTERNAL EVALUATION

Evaluation activities are conducted by staff within the Department of Public Health and Human Services.

Pros:

- Lower cost
- Ability to monitor programs in real time
- Strong understanding of program operations and context
- Ability to quickly adjust implementation

Considerations:

- Limited staff capacity may affect the scope and depth of evaluation
- Less rigorous impact analysis compared to external approaches
- Could be perceived as less independent

EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Evaluation is conducted by an independent evaluator or research organization through a formal contract.

Pros:

- Independent and objective analysis
- Strong credibility with policymakers and stakeholders
- More rigorous evaluation methods
- Clear and comprehensive documentation of outcomes



Consideration

- Higher overall cost
- Requires state procurement (RFP process)
- Longer timelines to initiate and complete full evaluation
- Less flexibility once scope of work established through RFP

UNIVERSITY CONTRACT

Evaluation is conducted through a contract with a Montana university.

Pros:

- Access to research expertise and evaluation capacity
- Strong ability to conduct rigorous evaluation and demonstrate impact
- Does not require a full RFP or hiring process

Considerations:

- High indirect costs
- Similar overall as external evaluation
- Limited flexibility, work is generally confined to the defined scope
- Potential political considerations
- May require formal agreements and ongoing oversight