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Post-Project Debriefings as Part of Performance Improvement

Hi! We're Laura Sefton, Judy Savageau, and Linda Cabral from the University of Massachusetts Medical School's [Center for Health Policy and Research](#) (CHPR). Often, performance improvement isn't built into an evaluation project because it can take time that we feel we don't have when the next project needs our attention. However, we have found that debriefing after a project alerts us to resources or processes that we excel at or need further development.

Cool Trick: Create and disseminate an agenda of discussion points prior to the debriefing. Our agenda lists the discussion areas and the number of minutes allotted for each topic in a 1-hour meeting. This allows participants to understand the purpose of the meeting. They'll also be prepared with feedback when you come together, making the meeting time more productive.

Hot Tip: Communicate topics in positive language. Rather than asking 'what went wrong?,' we talk about what surprised us, what we'd do differently, what did we expect to happen that didn't, and what did we not expect to happen that did. Through this, we get at the negative aspects without placing blame.

Hot Tip: Consider both internal and external debriefing meetings. Valuable insight can be gained by having a focused conversation with your client about aspects of the evaluation that went well and those that did not go so well. Some meetings might include all relevant stakeholders in addition to the main client. This feedback can then inform a subsequent internal project team debrief (e.g., identifying internal professional development or process improvement needs). Input from all perspectives can advise planning for future projects. We then circulate a summary of these discussions so that everyone can use them for their own internal or external quality improvement purposes.

Lessons Learned:

- **Outside stakeholders are willing to participate in debriefings.** Their participation is facilitated when they know they won't be put under a microscope or have blame for failures assigned to them. You may find that they will point out their own deficiencies. This gives both parties information that can inform the planning and implementation of future projects.
- **Review debriefing notes from several projects to identify common themes.** Looking at meeting notes from several debriefings can highlight areas that are consistently working well and resources that may need investment. For example, a common denominator across several projects might be the need to maintain a skills inventory of internal staff or what professional development is needed internally versus when it's cost-effective to bring in a consultant for ad hoc skills.

Rad Resource: Our colleagues in CHPR's Healthcare Innovation & Quality Unit discuss additional tools to build performance improvement processes in their July 2015 [post](#).