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What is the role of the evaluator of emerging programmes?

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A two year formative and process evaluation of five youth offender programmes was commenced in late 2003. The Maori service providers were new to working with youth offenders and had been contracted to cater primarily to Maori and Pacific young people and whanau. All five programmes were to deliver their services in different ways and this set the scene for a challenging evaluation.

Over the 2½ years the evaluators have been faced with ethical issues, changes in staff – both with the service providers and funder service contract staff - programmes with inadequate client information systems, providers who were ill prepared to work with youth offenders, and some community stakeholder tension about working with non-government organisations. These factors raised questions for the evaluation team about how to work effectively as an evaluator with providers in this challenging sector and in particular explore the role of an evaluator when evaluating new, emerging Maori programmes. This paper will present some of the challenges, questions, and how these were dealt with during the evaluation.

NB: This evaluation has yet to be completed and findings will be presented at a later conference.