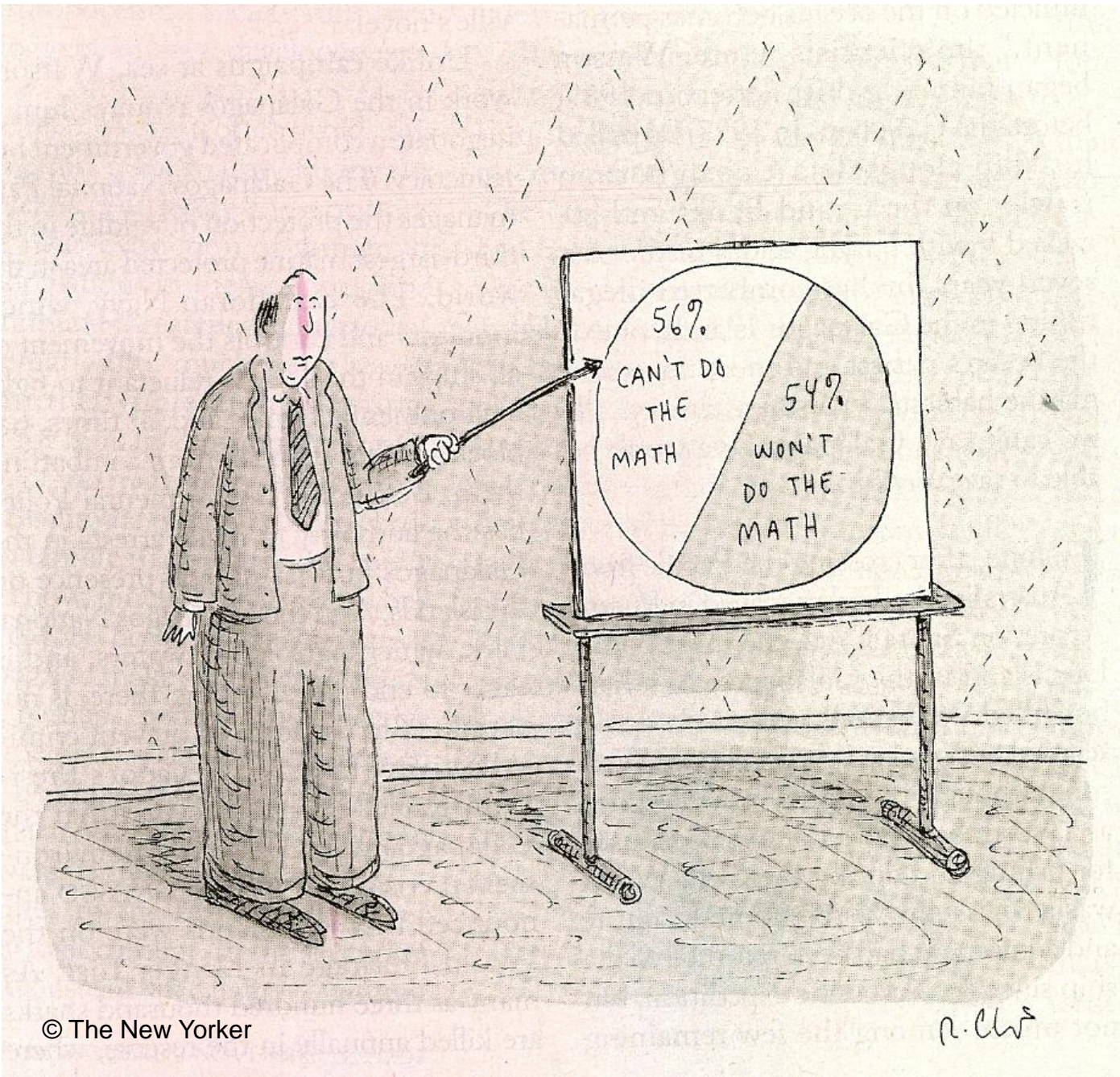




# Programmed for Trouble: Evaluation of Federally Funded Education Programs

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American Evaluation Association  
Evaluation 2007



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# Math Science Partnerships

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## Department of Education Mathematics and Science Partnership Program

- \$175+ million per year, all states
- Goals to improve math and science teaching (K-12), teaching careers, access of teachers to content professionals, curriculum
- Funding goes to state agencies for grant distribution (multi-year projects)
- Partnerships include at least institution of high education or local education authority

# Math Science Partnerships

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## National Science Foundation Math and Science Partnership Program

- \$200+ million per year, 50+ partnerships
- Research and development effort with goals to improve K-12 capacity, student outcomes, pedagogical practice; integrate higher education and content authorities
- Multiple grant streams with different program foci (projects up to five years)
- Partnerships include at least institution of higher education and local education authorities

# Authors' Experience with MSPs

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- Evaluation/design of five MSPs in last three years (Both NSF and ED)
- Projects with national, statewide, in-state regional scope
- Middle and high school levels
- 500 teachers, 60,000 students
- Teacher professional development (content knowledge and teaching practice) with student outcome improvement intended
- Total combined budgets of about \$15 million

# Sources and Methods

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- Multi-example case study using author experience of MSPs in practice
- Literature review of policy and process documentation
- Interviews with other evaluators
- Interviews/surveys of funder agency program staff

# The Role of Evaluation in MSPs

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- Independent/external evaluation required (NSF) or recommended (ED)
- Formative and summative evaluation activities required
- Evaluation plans needed as part of proposals and considered in funding decisions
- Evaluation reports part of overall reporting system
- Emphasis on evaluation designs incorporating randomized control trial studies or approximations

# Funding Agency Support & Additional Application of Evaluation

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- Program-wide evaluations or standardized cross-program reporting formats
- Support of building summative evaluation capacity through conferences and resource centers
- Funder support of evaluation tool development, exposure of PIs and project staffs to evaluation resources

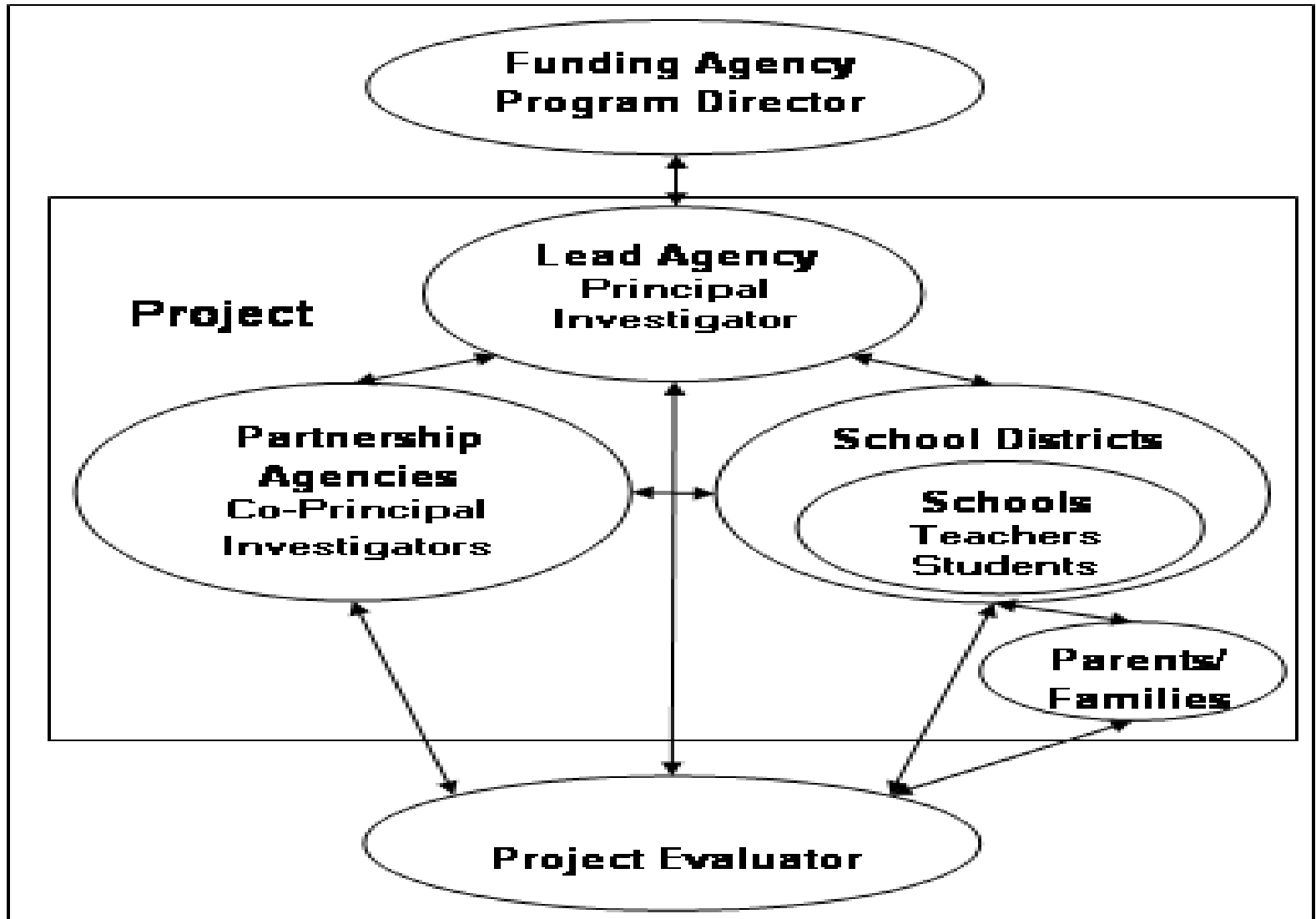
# Where Evaluation Fits in MSPs

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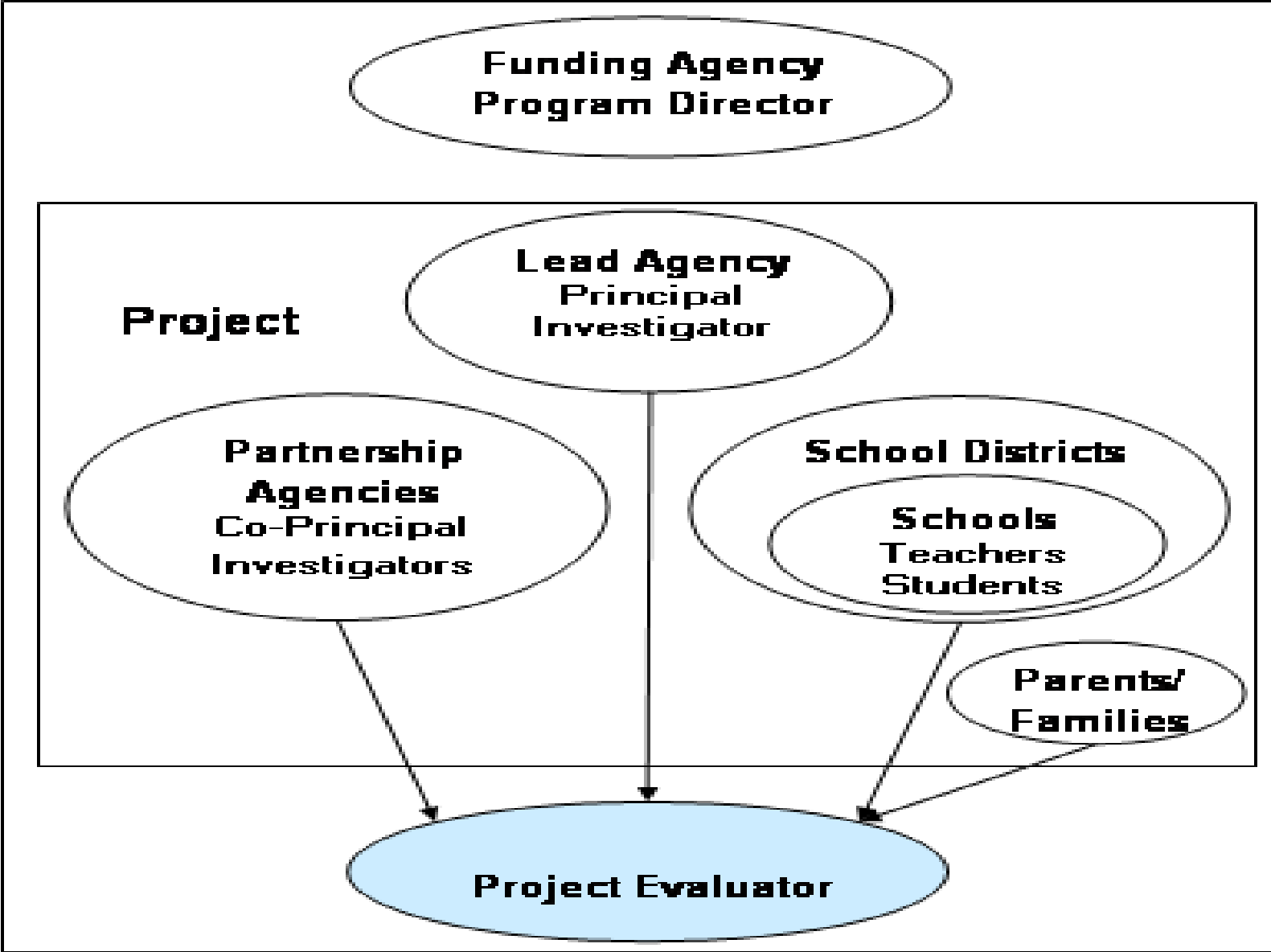
## Funder:

- Requires/recommends use of independent evaluator. Will recommend evaluators.
- Determines if evaluator and proposed plan is acceptable.
- Requires formative and process evaluation, ensuring fidelity.
- Communicates solely with project staff (lead agency).
- Does not permit confidential evaluator contacts (including cases of fraud).

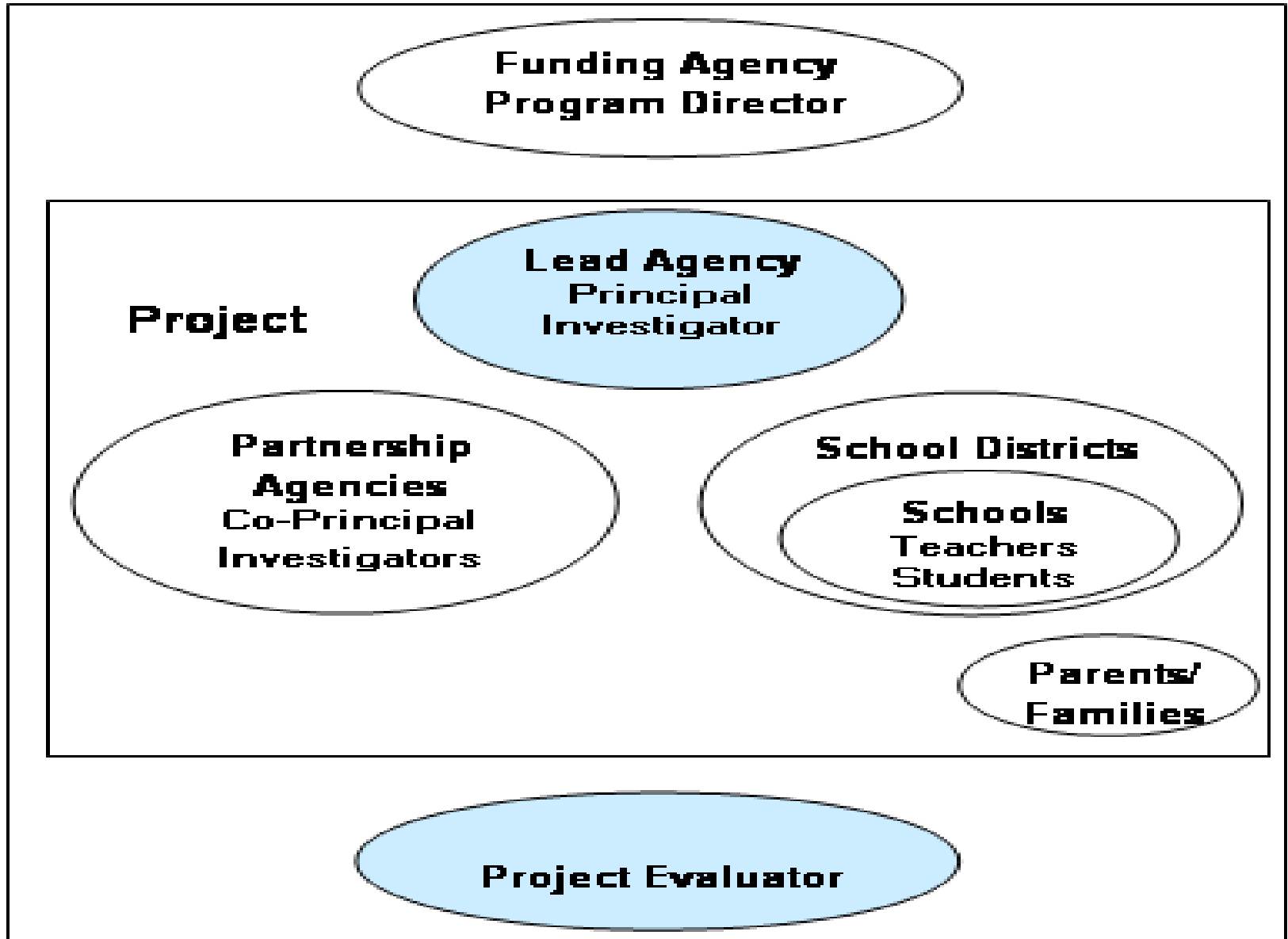
# General MSP Organization and Communication Flow



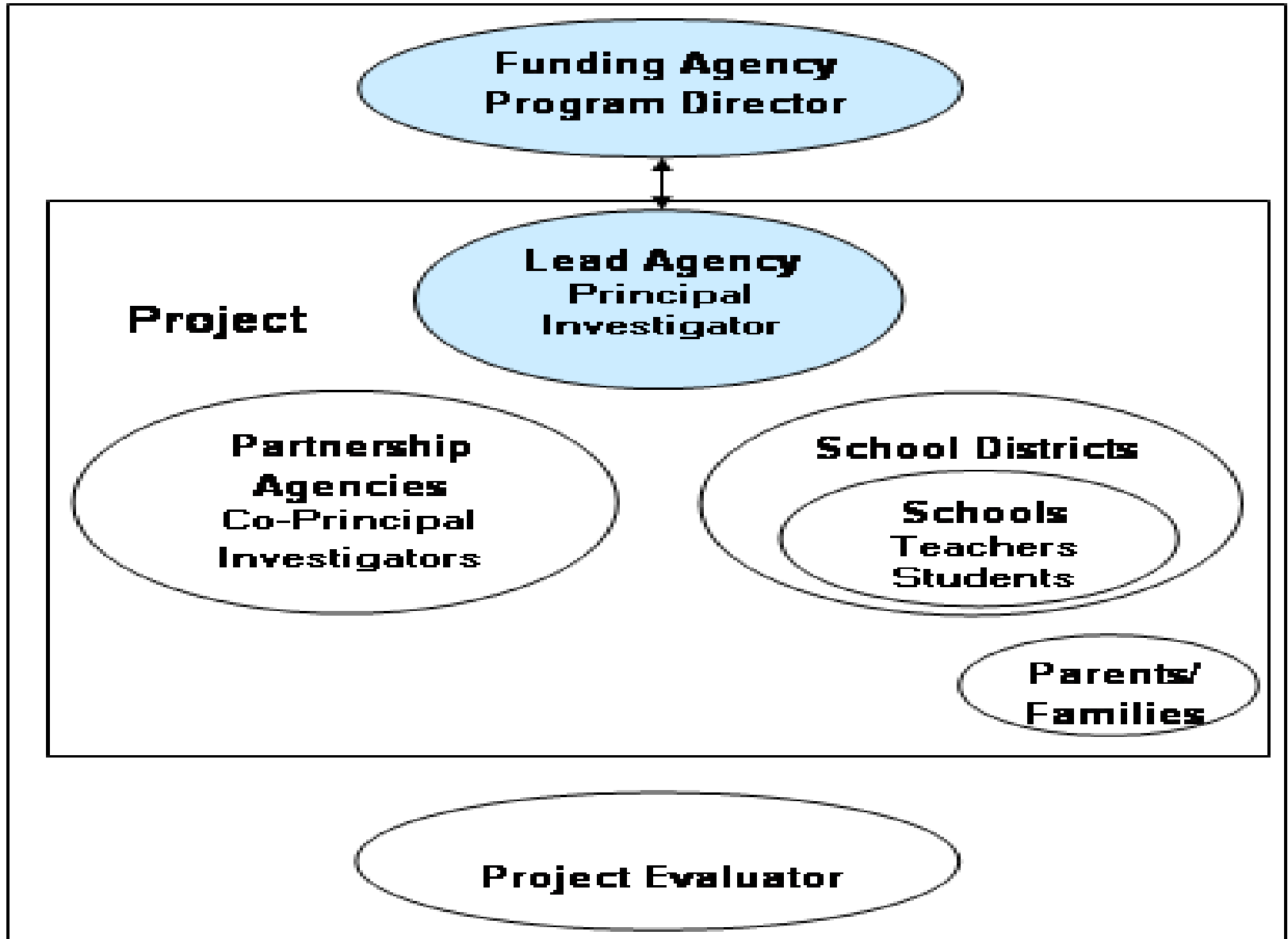
# MSP Data Collection



# MSP Project Report Generation



# MSP Funder-Project Communication



# Challenge: The Phantom Menace of Formative Evaluation

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- Complexity of project structure and implementation design (2+ stage treatment)
- Principal Investigators (University Figureheads, Content Authorities, Academic Education Faculty)
- Lack of project buy-in for research/evaluation design
- Lack of appropriate staffing
- Lack of funder support (research model overlays intervention focus)

# Challenge: Summative Subtractions

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- Impacts of implementation infidelity
- Cutting corners and cutting slack
- Drift in objectives and benchmarks
- The Positive Spin
- The “Fools-Gold Standard” of Random Control Trials in education projects (ED advice on cheap RCTs)
- Confusion of evaluation, assessment, research and auditing

# Challenge: Communications and Control

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- Evaluators: Required and abandoned
- Withholding of information
- Suppression of evaluation work products
- Confusion of external evaluation with internal assessment
- The familiar tensions

# Challenge: Funder-Generated Issues

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- Lack of integration between program and project evaluations: intrusions and confusions
- Lack of program officer knowledge of evaluation
- Bad advice to projects and systematic undermining of evaluative potential
- The dubious value of project evaluations to the funders
- The apparent influence of politics
- A matter of respect

# Implications of Unaddressed Challenges

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- Lost opportunities to secure or enhance intended programmatic outcomes
- Dilution and subversion of value of evaluation
- Systematic distortion of independent evaluation
- Project failure versus lack of results versus negative findings

# Recommendations

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- Opening communications and formalizing funder/evaluator relationships
- Better education on evaluation
- Better integration of program evaluation
- Support of formative evaluation/  
recognition of reality in the field
- Possible differentiation between  
formative/process and summative  
evaluation activities
- Budget implications

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