

Decide purposes

It is important that key stakeholders agree on the main purpose or purposes of evaluation, and be aware of any possible conflicts between purposes.

The purposes of an evaluation will inform (and be informed by) the evaluation timelines, resources, stakeholders involved and choice of evaluation options for describing implementation, context and impact.

It is not enough to state that an evaluation will be used for accountability or for learning.

Evaluations for accountability need to be clear about who will be held accountable to whom for what and through what means. They need to be clear about whether accountability will be upwards (to funders and policymakers), downwards (to intended beneficiaries and communities) or horizontal (to colleagues and partners).

Evaluations for learning need to be clear about who will be learning about what and through what means. Will it be supporting ongoing learning for incremental improvements by service deliverers or learning about 'what works' or 'what works for whom in what circumstances' to inform future policy and investment?

It may be possible to address several purposes in a single evaluation design but often there needs to be a choice about where resources will be primarily focused.

Methods

Using findings

- [Contribute to broader evidence base](#)

Inform future policy and practice by others outside the organisation.

- [Inform decision making aimed at improvement \(formative\)](#)

Changing or confirming policies and practices.

- [Inform decision making aimed at selection, continuation or termination \(summative\)](#)

Identifying best value for money.

- [Lobby and advocate](#)

Justify expenditure and demonstrate achievements.

Using process

- [Build trust and legitimacy across stakeholders](#)

Develop better understandings of each other and demonstrate that expectations are being met.

- [Ensure accountability](#)

Holding someone to account to someone for something.

- [Ensure diverse perspectives are included, especially those with little voice](#)

Make explicit the experiences and values of key stakeholders, especially intended beneficiaries.

Resources

- [Exploding the myth of incompatibility between accountability and learning](#)

This chapter from Capacity Development in Practice (archived link) examines the conflict in the field of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) between the need for ‘accountability’ and the desire to ensure ‘learning’.

- [Purposes of assessment - Keystone guide](#)

This webpage from Keystone Accountability outlines the six major reasons that social organizations monitor, assess and report their performance and results.

The reasons identified include:

- [Seeking Surprise: Rethinking monitoring for collective learning in rural resource management](#)

This PhD Thesis from Irene Guijt draws on her extensive knowledge and experience in the field of rural resource management in Brazil.

- [Utilization-Focused Evaluation: 4th edition](#)

Useful for practitioners and students alike this book is both theoretical and practical. Features include follow-up exercises at the end of each chapter and a utilization-focused evaluation checklist.