

Scope evaluation

It is important to take the time to consider carefully what the evaluation needs to do before thinking through possible evaluation designs.

Ensure all those who need to be consulted during this process are adequately involved.

Products

The following items are potential outputs from this step. Where possible, it might be useful to research other deliverables that have also been shown to be effective.

- Description of the programming that is going to be evaluated (the evaluand)
- Theory of change and/or logic model
- List of primary intended users and their uses for the evaluation
- List of agreed key evaluation questions
- Evaluation timeline
- Evaluator qualities
- Evaluation budget

These products inform the development of a formal Terms of Reference (ToR) or Request for Proposal (RFP) (see [Step 3](#)).

IDRC-specific information

IDRC staff and partners may wish to peruse previous evaluations, particularly in similar topic areas, to understand how scope can be delineated and defined in various circumstances. IDRC maintains, in its online open-access digital library, [a repository of evaluations](#) conducted throughout IDRC's history.

IDRC staff can also access a [repository of Evaluation Terms of Reference](#) compiled by the Policy and Evaluation Division.

Clarify what will be evaluated

An evaluation can focus on a project, a number of projects, a program, a policy, a strategy, an organization, a network.

It is helpful to produce a succinct statement about:

(a) *what is to be evaluated* – which may include information on:

- The rationale: the issue being addressed, what intervention is being done, who is intended to benefit from it, and what the intended results are
- The scale of the intervention, budget and resources allocated and stage of implementation
- The roles of partner organizations and other stakeholders involved in implementation

- The implications of contextual factors – geographic, social, political, economic and institutional circumstances which create opportunities or challenges
- Significant changes in the intervention that have occurred over time – because of changes in contextual factors or lessons learned

(b) *what is considered to be outside the boundaries of the evaluation* – For example, some activities or some longer-term impacts.

Checking this initial description with different stakeholders can be a helpful way of starting to identify where there are disagreements or gaps in what is known about the intervention and/or the boundaries of the evaluation.

Product

The following item is a potential output from this sub-step. Where possible, it might be useful to research other deliverables that have also been shown to be effective.

- Description of the evaluand

Describe the theory of change

This section explains how and why you might use a theory of change when commissioning and managing an evaluation.

It explains options for how it will be developed or revised, how it will be represented, and how it will be used.

You might be actively involved in these processes or oversight them. In either case it is important to be aware that there are choices to be made and that informed choices will produce more useful theory of change and better evaluation.

A theory of change explains how the activities undertaken by an intervention (such as a project, program or policy) contribute to a chain of results that lead to the intended or observed impacts. Other labels that your colleagues, partners and evaluators might use include: *results chain, logic model, program theory, outcome mapping, impact pathway and investment logic*.

A theory of change is often developed during the planning stage but can also be useful for monitoring and evaluation. A good theory of change can help to: develop better Key Evaluation Questions, identify key indicators for monitoring, identify gaps in available data, prioritize additional data collection, and provide a structure for data analysis and reporting.

Your intervention might already have a theory of change that was developed in the planning stage. You are likely to benefit from reviewing and revising the theory of change as part of commissioning an evaluation in the following circumstances:

- there is disagreement about how valid or comprehensive the current theory of change is
- there are gaps or errors in the current theory of change
- there is little evidence to support the current theory of change (either from the program or from other research and evaluation)
- your understanding of how the project or program works has developed further since the original theory of change was developed,

- the context has changed in significant ways
- the current version is adequate for planning purposes but needs more detail for an evaluation

As a manager, you might be directly involved in developing (or revising) and using the theory of change, or you might oversee the process which internal staff and/or an external evaluator conduct. Whatever your level of direct involvement, you will want to ensure the quality of the process and the product. A key part of this is ensuring there are informed choices made about the processes used to develop (or revise) the theory of change and how to represent it. These choices should take into account how the theory of change is intended to be used and any particular features of the intervention. The following sections discuss these in more detail.

The rest of this section provides guidance in terms of the following key issues:

1. Planning how the theory of change will be used for monitoring and evaluation
2. What the theory of change should cover
3. The process for developing or revising the theory of change
4. The scope of the theory of change
5. Explicit and appropriate change theories and action theories
6. The representation of the theory of change

1. Planning how the theory of change will be used for monitoring and evaluation

Depending on the timing, a theory of change can be used to anticipate what will happen, and establish data collection processes to track changes going forward, or used to make sense of what has happened and the data that have already been collected.

A theory of change can inform the development of a monitoring and evaluation.

Existing data (where available from the intervention and/or previous research and evaluation) can be mapped onto the theory of change then used to identify priority areas for collecting additional data. These might include:

- Assumptions on which the theory of change is based.
- Contextual factors that might be important to gather data on and use to investigate patterns in results – for example, does the intervention work particularly well at certain sites or for certain groups of people
- Indicators of the quality and quantity of inputs and activities to support effective management
- Early indicators of progress or lack of progress in achieving results. This can be particularly important when the intended impacts are longer-term and information about intermediate outcomes is needed to inform decisions
- Links where the causal chain seems to break – where achieving a particular intermediate outcome does not seem to lead to the subsequent outcome
- Causal links which are not well established
- Identifying outliers – “bright spots” that might inform learning and serious problems that need to be addressed immediately

A theory of change can provide a framework for a “performance story” – a coherent narrative about how the intervention makes particular contributions. This can be useful for communicating about the intervention to potential partners, participants and policymakers, and for also providing a consistent point of reference for those involved in implementing and managing it.

2. What the theory of change should cover

A theory of change is not just a list of activities with arrows to intended outcomes. It needs to explain how these changes are understood to come about and the role the intervention will play in this – and the role of other factors, including other interventions.

It therefore needs to include both:

While the core of the theory of change focuses on the links between activities and impacts, it is more useful if it does not only cover these. Check if the following elements are in place and, if not, if it is possible to add them either in the main diagram and narrative or in supplementary documents:

- **Change theory:** this identifies one or more causal mechanisms by which change comes about for individuals, groups and/or communities. (more guidance is provided below on this)
- **Action theory:** this explains how interventions are constructed to activate their theory of change in terms of the activities that will be undertaken and what level of success will be needed for each result to produce the final intended impact (more guidance is provided below on this)
- how **other projects and programs** contribute to producing impacts
 - those who are explicitly collaborating (these are referred to as ‘boundary partners’ in outcome mapping forms of theory of change)
 - others who have positive or negative influence
- how **the particular contexts in which the intervention is implemented** affect activities and results
- **potential unintended results**, both positive and negative,
- **assumptions** on which the theory of change is based – these are in addition to the cause-effect relationships shown in the logic model and often involve assumptions about the context
- how participants **become engaged** in a project, program or policy,
- how **results are expected to be sustained** after a project, program or policy ends or participants’ engagement ends.

A [negative theory of change](#) can also be developed to identify possible negative unintended outcomes in order to set in place risk mitigation strategies to avoid them, and data collection that will detect if they have occurred.

3. Process for developing or revising the theory of change

A sound theory of change draws on a range of evidence – previous similar projects and programs, previous research and evaluation, the mental models of stakeholders (including planners, managers and staff, partner organizations, and intended beneficiaries), and observation of the program and patterns in outcomes and impacts..It is important to ensure that the process is adequately inclusive of relevant perspectives, values and evidence. If the theory of change has only used a group meeting to build it, it is likely that some more systematic analysis and review of relevant research and evaluation will improve its quality

If you are developing a new theory of change, or reviewing an existing one, check if these different processes have been included and, if not, if it is possible to add them:

- A **situation analysis** – an assessment of the needs and problems the intervention is intended to address and of the resources and opportunities that might be drawn on to do this?
- Download some questions that can be used to structure this situation analysis.
 - [Questions to ask in a situation analysis to develop a theory of change](#)
[DOC](#)
[31.5 KB](#)
- A **review of existing documentation** which explains why an intervention was developed

- **Relevant research, evaluations and other evidence from** similar projects, programs or policies
- **Talking with stakeholders** about how they understand the intervention works or is intended to work – what are the intended outcomes and how do they think they might be achieved (their mental models of the intervention).
- Download some questions that can be used in individual or group interviews with key informants, including those who designed a project, program or policy, those who are currently working to deliver or manage it, and those who are involved in it in other ways.
 - [Sample interview questions to articulate the implicit theory of change of a project.doc](#)
[DOC](#)
[33 KB](#)

Check that the process of reviewing or developing the theory of change **involves the right people in the right ways** in the process of developing or reviewing the theory of change. In some cases it will be possible and desirable to involve a range of people in the whole process of gathering information and developing the theory of change; in other cases it will be better to delegate or hire someone to develop a draft and then engage the wider group in reviewing and revising the draft.

- Download this matrix of different people and groups and roles that can be used to support discussion of this issue and document the decisions made.
 - [Who should do what in developing a theory of change](#)
[DOC](#)
[40 KB](#)

If you are reviewing and revising an existing theory of change, talk with your staff, colleagues and partners and check previous documentation to review it in terms of these issues:

- What **evidence** was the basis for its development? What additional evidence should be used in the review?
- Whose **mental models** formed the basis of it? To what extent and in what ways were the perspectives and mental models of intended beneficiaries and partner organizations included?
- Were there **different views** about it – in terms of what the intended outcomes and impacts were and/or how these might be brought about?
- Has there been **more recent research and evaluation**, or similar projects and programs, that could inform the theory of change?

If there are gaps in the evidence that has been used to develop the theory of change, or indications that it has changed since being developed, draw on these different sources of evidence to revise it.

A theory of change has most benefit if it provides a common reference point for those working together. This means it needs to be accessible and referred to during discussions and decisions about the project or program. But sometimes it is ignored or forgotten after the initial planning stage, especially if new people come into the program or project and are not aware of what has been done.

Talk with your staff, colleagues and partners to find out:

- Is the current theory of change known, understood and currently used? What can be learned from this?
- If the theory of change isn't being used, is this because of perceived inadequacies?
- If the theory of change is being used, what has been learned about it in use?

4. Identify the outcomes and impacts to be included and who will be involved in producing these

It is important to be clear about the intended impacts of projects, programs and policies. Sometimes there will be different views among partner organisations about these.

The intended impacts might be for:

- Participating individuals – for example, increased skills or knowledge or changes in behaviour
- Other individuals affected by participants – for example, students taught by teachers whose skills have been improved by the project or program
- Organizations
- Communities
- Networks and systems of organizations and services

In some programs and projects there is clarity and agreement about the intended impacts. In other cases there is disagreement (for example, when different partner organizations have different agendas for involvement) or uncertainty (for example, in a capacity development project where the specific changes that will arise are not tightly specified in advance).

Talk with your staff, colleagues and partners and check previous documentation to find out:

- Is there agreement about the intended impacts or do different partners, organizations or individuals have different views, or is there uncertainty?
- If there are different intended impacts, is there tension between them or are they synergistic?

It is also important to be clear about how these intended impacts are expected to be produced – and who will be involved in doing this. In some cases, your project or program might be directly involved – for example, providing direct services. But in many cases, you will be working with other organizations either at the same time or in sequence to bring about the intended changes.

For example, you might work with participants to increase their knowledge and skills, and then they work directly with intended beneficiaries, or you support them to produce research outputs and then organizations are intended to use this research to inform and improve policy and planning.

Talk with your staff, colleagues and partners and check previous documentation to find out:

- Who is expected to be involved in bringing about changes?
- Should they also be involved in developing or reviewing the theory of change?

5. Explicit and appropriate change theories and action theories

For example, behavior changes (such as reduced drink driving or increased uptake of science research) can come about through one or more change theories:

- changing social norms
- changing incentives (higher risk of sanctions or increased rewards)
- capacity development
- increasing opportunities and/or removing barriers.

For each change theory, there are different possible action theories about what activities might be implemented to trigger the change theory. For example, changing incentives in terms of increasing rewards might involve:

- providing an individual monetary bonus for all who comply
- creating a lottery for all who comply with one or more winners drawn randomly

- providing public recognition and praise for high performers

Being explicit about change theories and action theories makes it easier to identify what are appropriate local adaptations of a program and what constitutes good quality implementation. It is likely that there will be different change theories and action theories at different stages of the project or program and at different sites.

Try to ensure that the theory of change has explicit change theories and action theories. Talk with your staff, colleagues and partners, check previous documentation and review relevant research and evaluation to find out:

- What are the change theories underpinning expected changes for individuals, organizations, and communities? How plausible do these seem?
- How well does the theory of change make explicit the change theories underpinning it?
- Are there different change theories at different stages of the project or program?
- Are there different change theories for different people? (For example, motivation for some people who already have capacity, and capacity-building for people who already have motivation)
- Would the theory of change be improved if additional change theories were added in key points?

The project or program activities are intended to contribute to the change process. How they do this can be understood as an action theory – a theory that if the project or program does particular things, these activities will trigger the type of change identified in the change theory.

Talk with your staff, colleagues and partners, check previous documentation and review relevant research and evaluation to find out:

- What are the action theories underpinning the different change theories for individuals, organizations, and communities? How plausible do these seem?
- How well does the theory of change make explicit the action theories underpinning it?
- Are there different action theories for different people? (For example, motivation for some people might be triggered by providing a tangible incentive of public recognition for their work; for others a financial reward might be needed to be seen as motivating)
- Would the theory of change be improved if additional action theories were added in key points?
- Download example change theories and action theories that could produce different types of outcomes and impacts at different stages of a program.
 - [Some example change theories and action theories](#)
[DOC](#)
[71.5 KB](#)

6. The representation of the theory of change

A theory of change is often represented in a diagram with an accompanying narrative. There are different types of diagrams that can be used. Diagrams should clearly show the direction of change and are most commonly drawn to be read from left to right, top to bottom, or bottom to top.

Sometimes it is useful to have several different versions – such as an overview diagram for general use with more detailed diagrams of particular components or for particular purposes. For complicated theories of change, it can be helpful to have different diagrams with varying levels of detail. An accompanying narrative can complement the diagram and be more accessible for some people.

There are many different options for representing a theory of change and it is important to choose a format which will communicate clearly. Four main options include:

- a simple, linear **results chain** – This has a series of boxes often in the form of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. It is most appropriate for fairly simple interventions, where activities are undertaken at the start and then the consequences flow through in a linear fashion.

Flow chart showing results chain from inputs on left to impacts on the right

- an **outcomes hierarchy** - This shows the sequence of results, from short-term to long-term. It is appropriate when the causal chain is complicated, with multiple strands. It focuses attention on the causal sequence and provides information about activities in a separate narrative or table

Flow chart how a hierarchy of outcomes could flow from left to right

- a **triple column/row** . This shows the causal pathway in terms of intermediate outcomes, activities which directly produce these, and the influence of other factors and programs. It can be particularly useful for showing activities that occur along the causal pathway, and for showing clearly the contributions of other partners and contextual factors

Flow chart showing activities flowing down and other factors flowing up into a horizontal outcomes hierarchy

- a **set of principles**. This is particularly appropriate for adaptive, emergent projects and programs, in terms of principles. For example, the following principles have been identified for strengthening research capacity in low and middle income countries (Add source):

Principles for strengthening research capacity in low and middle income countries

1. Network, collaborate, communicate and share experiences
2. Understand the local context and accurately evaluate existing research capacity
3. Ensure local ownership and secure active support
4. Build in monitoring, evaluation and learning from the start
5. Establish robust research governance and support structures, and promote effective leadership
6. Embed strong support, supervision and mentorship structures
7. Think long-term, be flexible and plan for continuity

Check the quality of the diagram in terms of its coherence, logic and clarity and revise it as needed:

- Does the diagram provide a **clear overall message** about how the project, program and policy contributes to the end results? If not, can the diagram be redrawn to emphasise the overall narrative?
For example:
 - If there are three main parallel elements, create a symmetrical diagram which conveys this message clearly.
 - If there is a lot of detail, provide a summary version that can then be expanded or further explored.
 - Avoid too much detail about the impacts and how they will be measured.
- Can the diagram be read as a **coherent story** about sequence and consequence? In particular:
 - check that every arrow is meaningful (one thing leads to or helps to bring about another thing) and that the wording in each box is appropriate.
 - indicate the direction of expected change (increased or decreased)

Talk with your staff, colleagues and partners, check previous documentation and review other theories of change to find out:

- What would be the best way to represent the theory of change?
- Would it be helpful to have different versions for different users and/or different levels of detail?

Identify who are the primary intended users of the evaluation and what will they use it for

In most cases, the evaluation will have multiple uses. By clarifying and making explicit the intended use(s) of the evaluation for each user, it is easier to have transparent and informed discussions and decisions about the priorities for the evaluation, to focus its attention, and to ensure that all methodological and procedural decisions are made with attention being paid to their likely effect on the utilization of the evaluation.

The primary **intended users** are *not* all those who have a stake in the evaluation, nor are they the general audience. They are the specific people, in a specific position, in a specific organization who will use the evaluation findings and who have the capacity to effect change. From start to end, the evaluation process should be designed and carried out around the needs of the primary intended users. They have the responsibility to do things differently (e.g., make decisions, change strategies, take action, change policies, etc.), because of their engagement in the evaluation process and/or with the evaluation findings.

Determining the **intended use(s)** of an evaluation typically involves a negotiation between the evaluator(s) and the primary intended user(s). By involving all primary intended users in this negotiation, the various perspectives are better represented and consensus can be reached about the priority use(s).

Product

The following item is a potential output from this sub-step. Where possible, it might be useful to research other deliverables that have also been shown to be effective.

- List of primary intended users and their uses for the evaluation

IDRC-specific information

See: [Identifying Intended Use\(s\) and User\(s\) of an Evaluation](#) – this IDRC guideline highlights the importance of identifying the primary intended user(s) and the intended use(s) of an evaluation and outlines a variety of methods that can be used to achieve this in the initial planning stage.

Resources

- [Identify primary intended users](#)
Clarify who will actually use the evaluation—not in vague, general terms (e.g. "decision makers") but in terms of specific identifiable people (e.g. the manager and staff of the programme; the steering committee; funders deciding whether to fund this programme or similar programmes in the future).
- [Decide purposes](#)
Clarify the intended uses of this evaluation—is it to support improvement, for accountability, for knowledge building? Is there a specific timeframe required (for example, to inform a specific decision or funding allocations)? If there are multiple purposes, decide how you will balance these.

Develop agreed key evaluation questions

Evaluation, by definition, must answer truly evaluative questions: it must ask not only ‘What were the results?’ (a descriptive question) but also ‘*How good* were the results?’ (an evaluative question).

Depending on the type of evaluation, causal questions also need to be addressed (to what extent were the results due to the intervention?).

An evaluation should be focused around answering a small number of high-level key evaluation questions (KEQs) which are about performance overall. Each of these key evaluation questions (KEQs) should be further unpacked by asking more detailed questions about performance on specific dimensions of merit (related to evaluative criteria such as relevance, equity, effectiveness, sustainability). The KEQs also need to reflect the intended uses of the evaluation.

Good KEQs are:

- Limited in number: 7 ± 2 questions is a good number in general. This allows for coverage of different aspects of the intervention, but is a small enough number of questions to not get overwhelmed.
- Open questions (not yes/no answers).
- Are specific enough to help focus the evaluation, but broad enough to be broken down further into more detailed questions to guide data collection.

Work with primary intended users of the evaluation to develop an agreed list of key evaluation questions.

Being clear about the intended use of the evaluation and the type of evaluation needed, can help with developing appropriate Key Evaluation Questions.

The following typology can be used to classify the type of evaluation and typical questions:

- Needs analysis
 - What is needed?
 - What are unmet needs?
- Intervention design
 - What is the best way to design the intervention?
- Monitoring
 - How is it going? (regular reporting of metrics)
- Process evaluation
 - Is the intervention being implemented according to plan (periodic investigations)?
 - What has been done in an innovative program?
- Outcome / impact evaluation
 - What results have been produced?
 - What has (and has not) worked for whom in what circumstances?
- Economic evaluation
 - Has the intervention been cost-effective (compared to alternatives)?
 - What has been the ratio of costs to benefits?

[Source: Adapted from Owen J with Rogers P (1999). Program Evaluation: Forms and Approaches. Sydney: Allen & Unwin/London: Sage UK.]

These evaluation types are cumulative: outcome / impact evaluation needs data from process evaluation, and economic evaluation requires data from outcome impact evaluation.

The level of existing knowledge will also be important in developing appropriate evaluation questions:

- When we know what works & why, it is sensible to...
 - ...ask if processes are being followed (describe activities compared to an agreed standard)
 - ...demonstrate value of what is being done (describe outcomes compared to agreed statement of goals and/or needs)
- When we don't know if it works, it is sensible to...
 - ...look at process outcomes / impacts (test theory)
- When we don't know which is the best way, it is sensible to...
 - ...document process & context & compare performance (outcomes / impacts, efficiency)
- When we don't know what could work, it is sensible to...
 - ...use action research/learning & share results (ask a series of questions about early indications of success or failure)

Product

The following item is a potential output from this sub-step. Where possible, it might be useful to research other deliverables that have also been shown to be effective.

- List of agreed key evaluation questions

Examples

- Download an example of key evaluation questions from an evaluation of the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS)
 - [Example of Key Evaluation Questions \(AIMS\)](#)
[DOC](#)
[36.5 KB](#)

Resources

- [Specify the key evaluation questions](#)
Articulate a small number of broad evaluation questions that the evaluation will be designed to answer. These are different to the specific questions you might ask in an interview or a questionnaire.
- [Good Evaluation Questions: A Checklist to Help Focus Your Evaluation](#)

Guidance developed by the National Asthma Control Program, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- [What are the key evaluation questions? \(Archive link\)](#)

Guidance developed by the Office for Learning and Teaching of the Australian Government.

Decide the timing of the evaluation

Monitoring (the routine tracking and reporting of priority information about an intervention) and **evaluation** (a discrete study to produce an evaluative judgement about merit, worth or significance of an intervention)

are distinct but highly inter-related activities.

Generally, monitoring and evaluation findings are used at different times, with different regularity, different resource needs and for different purposes. Both monitoring and evaluation are needed for effective program management and decision making. It is insufficient to conduct monitoring without any kind of evaluative reflection, and, given the episodic nature of most evaluation studies (with notable exceptions such as developmental evaluation), they are, by themselves, inadequate to support adaptive management of an ongoing intervention. Hence, it makes sense to plan for and implement M&E activities in a manner that draws on their respective strengths.

As part of a plan that integrates M and E, decide *when* an evaluation should begin and end.

Once the decision to evaluate has been made, deciding the timing is largely determined by what decisions the evaluation is intended to inform and when the evaluation findings will be needed to be able to do so.

Many organizations refer to mid-term and end-of-term (or final) evaluations. These terms should **not** be literally interpreted as ‘mid-way’ and ‘at the end’ of the intervention implementation period.

A mid-term evaluation often needs to be undertaken very early on (well before the mid-point of a project) –especially with new interventions where it is important to investigate and ensure the quality of implementation.

An end-of-term evaluation might need to be undertaken well before the end if it is intended to inform a decision about whether or not to continue the funding or scale up an intervention. Or, it might need to be undertaken some time after an intervention ends in order to follow up longer-term impacts and the sustainability of results achieved during implementation.

Managers should think through the use of the evaluation findings and decide when it is most appropriate to conduct the evaluation. Mid- and end-of-term/final evaluations can be usefully defined as:

- ***mid-term evaluation*** –primarily intended to inform improvement of implementation. The aim is to maximize the potential for achieving the intended results at the end of the intervention and identifying lessons learned about implementation to inform future interventions. These evaluations can identify (early signs of) unintended, positive and negative, results.
- ***end-of-term or final evaluation*** –primarily focus on project or program results and how and why they were achieved (or not) to inform decisions such as whether to continue the intervention, to improve it, to scale it up or replicate it elsewhere. They can also be used to identify lessons learned to guide implementation and improve results in future interventions.

Product

The following item is a potential output from this sub-step. Where possible, it might be useful to research other deliverables that have also been shown to be effective.

- Evaluation timeline

Resources

- [What is the timeline for the evaluation activities? \(Archive link\)](#)

Developed by the Office for Learning and Teaching of the Australian Government.

Decide whether the evaluation will be done by an external team, an internal team or a hybrid of both

Expertise, impartiality, cost, and time are key issues in deciding who will conduct the evaluation.

The section below lists specific trade-offs in the decision-making about engaging internal or external evaluators:

- Perspective
 - Internal evaluator(s): May be more familiar with the community, issues and constraints, data sources, and resources associated with the project/program (i.e., insider perspective).
 - External evaluator(s): May bring fresh perspective, insight, broader experience, and recent state-of-the-art knowledge (i.e., outsider perspective).
- Knowledge and skills
 - Internal evaluator(s): Are familiar with the substance and context of research for development programming.
 - External evaluator(s): May possess knowledge and skills that internal evaluators are lacking but it may be difficult to find evaluators who understand the specifics of research for development programming.
- Buy-in
 - Internal evaluator(s): May be more familiar with the project/ program staff and may be perceived as less threatening, and, thus, may have greater buy-in and staff involvement in the evaluation.
 - External evaluator(s): May be perceived intrusive or a threat to the project/program (i.e., perceived as an adversary) and, thus, may have more difficulty obtaining relevant information.
- Stake in the evaluation
 - Internal evaluator(s): May not be seen as an honest broker but may be perceived as having an agenda / stake in the evaluation.
 - External evaluator(s): Can serve more easily as an arbitrator or facilitator between stakeholders as perceived as neutral.
- Credibility
 - Internal evaluator(s): May be perceived as biased when perceived as 'too close' to the subject matter which may result in lesser credibility of the evaluation hindering its use.
 - External evaluator(s): May provide a view of the project/program that is considered more objective, not part of the organization's power structure, and thus, give the findings more credibility and potential for use.
- Resources
 - Internal evaluator(s): May use considerable staff time which is always in limited supply, especially when their time is not solely dedicated to the evaluation.
 - External evaluator(s): May be more costly and still involve substantial management time from the commissioning organization's staff.
- Follow-up / Use of evaluation findings
 - Internal evaluator(s): More opportunity and authority to follow up on recommendations of the evaluation.
 - External evaluator(s): Contracts often end with the delivery of the final product, typically the final evaluation report which limits or prohibits follow-up. As outsiders, do not have authority to require appropriate follow-up or action.

It is advisable to engage an external evaluator / evaluation team when:

- The scope and/or complexity of the evaluation demand expertise that is not internally available;
- A program or project is politically sensitive and impartiality is a key concern; or,

- Internal staff resources are scarce and timeframes are particularly pressing (i.e., there is little flexibility in terms of evaluation timing).

External evaluators may be an individual, a research institute or a consulting firm.

Planning and executing an evaluation is, in any case, a team effort. A critical decision to be made at this stage is who will lead the evaluation. Consider the following options for assembling the evaluation team:

- External evaluator(s) –one of them serving as the team leader– supported by program staff
- Internal evaluator(s) –one of them serving as the team leader– supported by program staff
- An internal evaluator –serving as the team leader– supported by other internal evaluators and program staff but also external evaluator(s)

Even if an external evaluator is hired to conduct the evaluation, the program manager and other staff must be involved in the evaluation process. Staff are not only primary users of the evaluation but also participants in data collection (such as providing access to records, educating the evaluator about the project/program or being interviewed as a key informant) and/or other evaluation-related tasks. Be realistic about the amount of time needed for this involvement so staff schedules do not get over-burdened.

Although hiring an external evaluator may seem costly, it may, ultimately, be less expensive than channeling considerable staff time into the evaluation. A careful analysis of staff time costs compared to external consultant costs is needed before making a decision.

For partnership evaluations (i.e., co-funded by more than one organization), double-check whether any of the co-funders have a requirement for using a ‘third party’ evaluator (i.e., someone who is not affiliated, in any way, with any of the organizations involved) (see also [Step 1](#)).

IDRC-specific information

IDRC uses internal (i.e., in-house staff) or external evaluators or a mix of both. See: [Selecting an Evaluation Consultant or Team. Evaluation Guideline, February 2012.](#)

IDRC external reviews between 2010 and 2015 included both a self-assessment and external review component.

Resources

- [Decide who will conduct the evaluation](#)
Clarify who will actually undertake the evaluation. This might include people who are involved in what is being evaluated (such as implementers, clients and community members), an internal or external evaluator, or some combination of these.

Determine the evaluator qualities

Different types of evaluation (e.g., impact assessment, action-oriented evaluation) will have different demands in terms of technical and other expertise and the degree of ‘distance’ between the evaluator and the subject.

The section below lists some essential evaluator characteristics or qualities matched to the main purpose (or use) of the evaluation - accountability, learning or innovation:

Accountability

When the main purpose of the evaluation is accountability, the emphasis is on determining the worth or merit of a project/program. Some essential evaluator qualities are:

- Should possess qualitative and quantitative expertise and experience.
- Independence and credibility is of central importance.

Learning

When the main purpose of the evaluation is learning, the emphasis is on facilitating project / program improvements. Some essential evaluator qualities are:

- Must be reflective, familiar and comfortable with concepts of adult education and organizational learning, and willing and able to take the role of facilitator.
- Should possess qualitative and quantitative expertise and experience.

Innovation

When the main purpose of the evaluation is innovation, the emphasis is on facilitating the design of new projects/programs based on what works. Some essential evaluator qualities are:

- Should be a strong leader, but also a team player.
- Should possess good analytical skills.

General qualities

Generally, the following basic qualities should be considered:

At the individual level:

- Quantitative and/or qualitative research skills
 - Evaluation experience and expertise
 - Sensitivity to the project's principles (e.g., empowerment, participatory action, capacity-building)
 - Ability to effectively communicate to the targeted users and audiences
 - Independence

Across the team:

- Quantitative and qualitative research skills
- Multidisciplinary skills (e.g., economic, demographic, environmental, sociological)
- Thematic and contextual knowledge and experience
- Research for development expertise and experience
- Gender and cultural balance
- Language skills
- Familiarity with the organization and its partners

Regardless of the specific evaluator qualities needed to support a quality implementation of the evaluation, there are also important general characteristics: flexibility, ability to problem solve, and credibility.

Product

The following item is a potential output from this sub-step. Where possible, it might be useful to research other deliverables that have also been shown to be effective.

- List of evaluator qualities

IDRC-specific information

Evaluators of IDRC programming typically need to have these types of knowledge and skills:

A broad knowledge of the relevant fields of research, policy and practice including issues, trends, institutions, networks and policy communities in the low-and middle-income countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America and/or the Caribbean.

Specific knowledge and experience in evaluating the results of development research and the contexts in which research programming takes place, for instance:

- the influence of research and other evidence on changing policy and practice
- capacity development in various aspects of conducting and using development research
- the quality of development research –going beyond traditional academic measures such as bibliometrics
- equity-focused research programming –being sensitive to different dimensions of marginalization
- research programming in conflict-affected settings
- scaling up innovations tested through research to products, processes, businesses
- results of research through a value chain
- research communications, knowledge translation

Identify what resources are available for the evaluation and what will be needed

It is important to develop an estimate of the resources that are available for evaluation and what will be required to do the evaluation well.

The resources needed for an evaluation include:

- Existing data
- Funding to engage an external evaluator or evaluation team or pay for specific tasks to be undertaken and for materials and travel
- Time, expertise and willingness to be involved of staff, partners, technical experts and the wider community, whether as part of the evaluation team, the evaluation governance processes and/or key informants and data sources

When considering what data are already available, look carefully at the quality of existing data and what format it is in.

Also, clarify the skills and availability of any people who will need to be involved in the evaluation.

There are five main ways of developing an estimate of the budget for an external evaluation:

1. **Calculating a percentage of the program or project budget – sometimes 5%-10%.** This is a very crude rule of thumb. Large programs with simple evaluation might need a lot less; small programs with large evaluations – for example, detailed testing and documentation of an innovation – will need much more. It is also better to target evaluation resources across programs where they will be most useful.
2. **Developing an estimate of days needed and then multiplying by the average daily rate of an external evaluator.** This is only useful for simple evaluations, especially those using a small team and a standardised methodology such as a few days of document review, a brief field visit for interviews and then a short period for report write up.
3. **Using the average budget for evaluations of a similar type and scope.** This can be a useful starting point for budget allocation providing that the amounts have been shown to be adequate in the past – otherwise this will perpetuate the problems of underestimates.
4. **Developing a draft design and then costing it, including collection and analysis of primary data.** This can be done as a separate project before the actual evaluation is contracted.
5. **Consider the following options if ongoing evaluation input is needed such as for a Developmental Evaluation:** retainer fee contracts; stepwise funding; or, speculate and allow for contingencies.
 - More information about these options can be found in this interview with Michael Quinn Patton:
 - [Budgeting for Developmental Evaluation PDF](#)
[98.49 KB](#)

Allow time to secure resources (for example, including them in an annual or project budget, or seeking someone with particular expertise). If the resources required for the evaluation are more than the resources available, additional resources will need to be found and/or strategies used to reduce the resources required, such as reducing the scope of the evaluation.

It may also be useful to consider ballpark figures for similar types of evaluations. For example, [a paper from the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy](#) suggests it may be feasible to run a randomized controlled trial for an impact evaluation which largely draws on existing data for \$50,000 to \$300,000.

Possible products

The following items are potential outputs from this step. Where possible, it might be useful to research other deliverables that have also been shown to be effective.

- Estimated cost of an evaluation (ideally including in-kind, cash, internal and external costs)
- Justification for expenditure on evaluation
- Statement of available evaluation resources (including budget)

Method

- [Strategies to reduce costs](#)

Reducing costs is something to consider if evaluation costs outweigh the predicted benefits or available resources.

Resources

- [A checklist for developing and evaluating evaluation budgets](#)
[PDF](#)
[42.64 KB](#)

This checklist, developed by Jerry Horn as part of the Western Michigan University Evaluation Checklists project, provides useful prompts about items that might need to be included and how they might be estimated.

- [Evaluation budget guide](#)
[PDF](#)
[100.9 KB](#)

Blank evaluation budget from CARE Uganda listing many items that might be included.

- [Developing an evaluation budget estimate](#)

Evaluation budget templates in Excel from the National Institutes of Health with different versions for different situations in terms of labour costing (with or without fringe benefits) and travel.