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Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

TIPS

USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation

THE ROLE OF EVALUATION IN USAID

Evaluation is a practical management tool for understanding and improving the performance of USAID programs and activities.

This TIPS addresses questions about the new role of evaluation in the reengineered Agency and outlines key steps operating units should follow in planning and conducting evaluations.

What Is Evaluation?

"Evaluation is a relatively structured, analytical effort undertaken selectively to answer specific management questions regarding USAID-funded assistance programs or activities." (USAID Automated Directives System, chapter 202.4)

Evaluation is a management tool that plays a vital role in Agency decision-making, accountability reporting, and learning. It is an important source of information about the performance of USAID activities, programs and strategies. Other sources include performance monitoring, research, customer surveys, and informal sources (unstructured feedback from customers and partners, or casual site visits).

To manage for results effectively, the regular collection, review, and use of performance information is critical. For example, performance information is used to

- Improve the performance and effectiveness of development activities
- Revise strategies
- Plan new strategic objectives, results packages or activities
- Decide whether to abandon failing programs, strategies or objectives
- Document and report findings on the impacts of assistance

How Is Evaluation Different From Performance Monitoring?

Two key sources of performance information—performance monitoring and evaluation—differ in ways discussed below.

Performance monitoring systems track and alert management as to whether actual results are being achieved as planned. They are built around a hierarchy of objectives logically linking USAID activities and resources to intermediate results and strategic objectives through cause-and-effect relationships. For each objective, one or more indicators are selected to measure performance against explicit targets (planned results to be achieved by specific dates). Performance monitoring is an ongoing, routine effort requiring data gathering, analysis, and reporting on results at periodic intervals.

Evaluations are systematic analytical efforts that are planned and conducted in response to specific management questions about performance of USAID-funded development assistance programs or activities. Unlike performance monitoring, which is ongoing, evaluations are occasional—conducted when needed. Evaluations often focus on why results are or are not being achieved. Or they may address issues such as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, or sustainability. Often, evaluations provide management with lessons and recommendations for adjustments in program strategies or activities. (See box 1 for more on evaluation purposes.)

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While performance monitoring and evaluation are distinct functions, they can be highly complementary if they are appropriately coordinated with each other.

Evaluations should be closely linked or integrated with performance monitoring systems. Performance monitoring information will often trigger or flag the need for an evaluation, especially when there are unexpected gaps between actual and planned results that need explanation. Depending on where the unanticipated trouble lies, evaluations may be needed at the level of individual activities, intermediate results, or strategic objectives. Not only failures to achieve targets but also unexpected successes deserve special evaluations.

Why Is Evaluation Important?

USAID operating units need to know not only *what* results were achieved (via the monitoring system) but also *how* and *why* they were achieved, and *what actions to take* to improve performance further (via evaluation). Thus, evaluation makes unique contributions to explaining performance and understanding what can be done to make further improvements. Evaluation is an important, complementary tool for improving program management.

BOX 1
Evaluation Purposes

Explain unexpected results (positive or negative).
Determine if customer needs are being met .
Assess net impacts of USAID activities.
Identify unintended impacts.
Explore special issues such as sustainability, cost effectiveness, relevance.
Make action recommendations for program improvement.
Distill lessons for application in other settings.
Test validity of hypotheses and assumptions underlying results frameworks.

What's New About Evaluation?

USAID reengineering guidance stresses

- Conducting more strategic evaluations
- Using collaborative and participatory evaluation processes
- Using rapid appraisal techniques

Conducting more strategic evaluations

Traditionally, most USAID evaluations focused on single projects or activities. Rarely were multiple activities evaluated together to determine their contribution to a common result or objective. Now, reengineering guidance calls for evaluation at any of three levels: activity, intermediate result, or strategic objective levels, depending on where a performance issue appears to lie.

While operating units should continue to use evaluation to understand operational problems and assess individual activities, with a clear results framework in place, units also need to evaluate *strategically*—that is, to assess the broader development hypotheses and assumptions underlying the framework. Such strategic evaluations assess the performance of entire groups of activities directed at a common strategic objective (or intermediate result), analyze causal linkages and the relative effectiveness of alternative activities and approaches. These broader evaluations are useful for strategic decision-making— for example, which activities, approaches, and strategies to promote and which to abandon to more effectively achieve objectives.

Using more collaborative
and participatory evaluation processes

USAID evaluations can be categorized into several types based on who is conducting them:

1. **Internal or self-evaluations** are conducted by the operating unit or agency implementing the activity or program being assessed.

2. **External evaluations** are conducted by an independent office or experts not directly associated with the activity or program.

3. **Collaborative evaluations** are conducted jointly by more than one office, agency, or partner. For example, a collaborative or joint evaluation might be conducted by a team comprising staff from the USAID mission, the World Bank, the recipient country, and an NGO.

4. **Participatory evaluations** are conducted by multiple stakeholders, often in a workshop format with the help of a facilitator. Stakeholders include representatives of customers or beneficiaries, as well as sponsoring donor agencies, implementing agency staff, and others with a stake in the program. The stakeholders have active participation in all phases of the evaluation, including planning, data collection, analysis, reporting, dissemination and follow-up actions.

Each type of evaluation has its own strengths and limitations. Some may be more appropriate than others under different circumstances and needs. For example, if objectivity and credibility are key requirements, an external evaluation may be the appropriate choice, whereas if stakeholder ownership and acting on findings are priorities, more collaborative or participatory approaches are usually better.

In general, however, the reengineering guidance requests that operating units consider using more collaborative and participatory approaches to evaluation—with good cause.

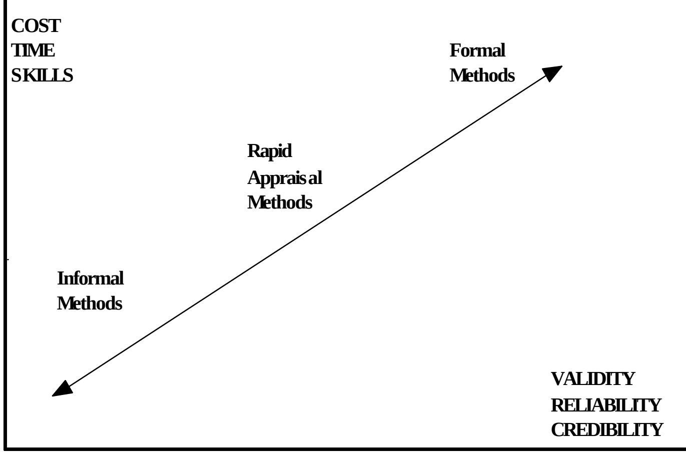
As strategic evaluations become common, so will the need for more collaborative evaluations conducted in partnership with other donors and with the recipient country. While USAID may contribute to the achievement of a strategic objective, rarely is USAID the only or even the key contributor. Thus, it makes sense to conduct these strategic-level evaluations jointly—where possible—with the other development partners active in a particular sector or program area. Advantages of these joint evaluations are that they will burden the recipient organization less than several individual donors' evaluations, have greater impact on shared lesson learning and decision-making, and be more cost-effective. A possible disadvantage may be less attention to each individual donor's contributions or accountability.

Reengineering calls for a more participatory approach to evaluation, involving customers, partners and stakeholders—as appropriate—in all phases of the evaluation process. While conducting more participatory evaluations is now Agency policy, its practice is not yet widespread. Experience has shown several advantages of participatory evaluations ultimately resulting in improved program performance. Listening to and learning from program beneficiaries, field staff, and other stakeholders who know why a program is or is not working is critical to making improvements. Also, the more insiders are involved in identifying the evaluation questions and in gathering and analyzing the data, the more likely they are to use the information to improve performance. Participatory evaluation empowers program providers and customers to act on knowledge gained. They have the added advantage of building evaluation capacity among the participants. However, they can have disadvantages, such as being viewed as less objective because stakeholders with vested interests participate, being less useful in addressing some technical issues, and requiring considerable time and resources. (See TIPs #1 for more on participatory evaluation.)

Emphasis on using rapid appraisal techniques

Reengineering guidance also emphasizes the use of rapid appraisal methods in evaluation work. These methods are quick, low cost ways of gathering data systematically in support of managers' information needs, especially questions about performance. They fall on a continuum between very informal methods, such as casual conversations or unstructured site visits, and highly formal methods, such as censuses, surveys, or experiments. While informal methods are cheap and quick, they may not be as credible with decision-makers as the more formal, rigorous methods. Whereas formal methods have high reliability, validity, and credibility, they typically are expensive and time consuming and require extensive technical skills. Between

Figure 1
Tradeoffs Among
Types of Methods



these two lie rapid appraisal methods. Being neither very informal nor fully formal, they share the properties of both, and that is their strength as well as their weakness. (Figure 1 illustrates tradeoffs between these types of methods.) Some of the most popular rapid appraisal methods include key informant interviews, focus groups, community interviews, direct observation, and minisurveys. (See TIPS #5 for more on rapid appraisal methods.)

Specific advantages of rapid appraisal methods include their relative low cost, quick turn-around time, and flexibility. They can provide in-depth information concerning an issue, process, or phenomenon. Moreover, they can be learned relatively easily, thus making them ideal for participatory evaluations. Their shortcomings include limited reliability and validity; lack of quantitative data from which generalizations can be made; and possibly less credibility with decision-makers. (Box 2 indicates when it is appropriate to use rapid appraisal methods.)

Key Steps in Planning And Conducting an Evaluation

USAID operating units should consider the steps discussed

BOX 2
Use Rapid Appraisal Methods When . . .

. . . Qualitative descriptive information is sufficient for decision-making

. . . Motivations and attitudes affecting behavior need to be understood—that is, when "how" and "why" questions need answering

. . . Quantitative data—for example, from the performance monitoring system—must be interpreted

. . . Practical suggestions and recommendations are needed for improving performance

below in planning, conducting, and following-up an evalu ation.

1. Decide if and when to evaluate.

The decision whether to evaluate should be driven by management's need for information about performance. Evaluations should not be treated as a formality that is just scheduled routinely. Rather, they should be planned when there is a distinct and clear need. This will help focus them and increase their usefulness.

Some triggers that may indicate an evaluation is needed include the following:

- Performance monitoring indicates there are unexpected results (positive or negative) that need to be explained.
- A key management decision must be made and there's inadequate information.
- Annual performance reviews have identified key questions that need to be answered.
- Customer or partner feedback suggests that there are implementation problems or unmet needs.
- The contribution of USAID activities to results is questioned.
- Issues of sustainability, cost-effectiveness, or relevance arise.
- The validity of results frameworks hypotheses and critical assumptions is questioned.
- Recommendations for actions to improve performance are needed.
- Extracting lessons is important for the benefit of other operating units or for future programming.

2. Plan the evaluation.

Planning an evaluation well involves careful consideration of a number of substeps:

Clarify the evaluation purpose and audience. Answer who wants the information, what do they want to know, what will the information be used for, when will it be needed, and how accurate must it be?

Identify the evaluation questions. Clarifying the questions the evaluation will answer is critical to a focused effort. Ensure they are management priorities and limited in number. Frame the questions so they can be answered on the basis of empirical evidence.

Select appropriate methods. The next challenge is choosing an evaluation design strategy or methodology (case studies, sample survey, comparative evaluation design, rapid appraisal methods, analysis of existing data, participatory workshop, and the like) that answers the evaluation questions in a credible way, subject to time and resource constraints. Different methods have distinct features that make them either more or less appropriate for answering a particular type of question credibly. For example, if the question is what percentage of the farm population adopted a new technology, then a sample survey would be most appropriate. If, by contrast, the issue is why didn't more farmers adopt a new technology, a rapid appraisal method would be a better choice. If the question is did a USAID activity contribute to the increase in agricultural production (that is, proving attribution), then a comparative evaluation design might be needed. In practice, designs may sometimes combine different approaches, either to improve the persuasiveness of a finding or to answer different questions.

Prepare a data collection and analysis plan. Once the basic design has been selected, detailed plans need to be prepared before data collection and analysis can begin. The plan should address what is the unit of analysis from which data will be collected; what are requirements for data disaggregation; what sampling procedures will be followed; what techniques or instruments will be used to gather data; what is the timing and frequency of data collection; and what methods of data analysis will be employed?

Decide on team composition and participation. Another planning task involves deciding team size, qualifications and skills, as well as issues concerning collaboration with other development partners and participation by customers and other stakeholders. Broad collaboration and participation on teams is strongly encouraged in USAID guidance. Important factors to consider when selecting the team include language proficiency, technical competencies, in-country experience, methods and data collection skills, facilitation skills, gender mix, and possible conflicts of interest.

Plan procedures: schedule, logistics, reporting requirements, and budget. Planning an evaluation also requires resolving various procedural issues, such as the schedule of evaluation activities; what logistical support is needed; what reports are required; how evaluation findings will be disseminated; and estimates of costs.

In formal evaluation efforts, it is useful to document these evaluation plans in a scope of work. (See TIPS #3 for more on preparing scopes of work.)

3. Hold a team planning workshop.

Usually evaluations are conducted by teams. Once fieldwork (data collection and analysis) begins, teams will typically have a lot to accomplish in a short time, possibly facing unfamiliar surroundings, logistical problems, data shortages, and internal “team” problems. Holding a team planning workshop will help the team get off to a good start. The workshop aims to a) create an effective team that shares common understandings of the evaluation purpose and plans and b) prepare them as much as possible for the fieldwork ahead.

A suggested agenda for a team planning workshop includes sessions on

- *Evaluation purpose and audience*. The team should gain a clear understanding of the evaluation's purpose, questions to be addressed, and the intended audience. It's often useful for them to hear first hand from key clients.
- *USAID program or activities*. In this session, the team becomes familiar with the program or activities to be evaluated by setting aside time for document reviews or having knowledgeable people brief them.
- *Evaluation plans (scope of work)*. This session gives the team the opportunity to review and if appropriate revise plans in order to develop a common understanding of the tasks ahead. In particular, the team should concentrate on data collection and analysis methods. If they haven't already been done, the team should develop a strategy for data gathering and prepare preliminary data collection instruments.
- *Reporting requirements*. The team reviews expectations for the evaluation report and plans for briefings.
- *Team workstyles, roles, and work plan.* The team discusses individual members' preferences for working in order to agree on effective ways of working together (such as work processes, decision-making styles, work hours, and handling disagreements). The team also discusses and agrees on how the overall evaluation scope of work will be divided among team members. They develop a workplan including a schedule of tasks.

4. Conduct data collection and analysis.

It is difficult to give general advice for conducting data collection and analysis because so much is specific to the evaluation method(s) selected. Scopes of work may specify the methods to be used or teams may be asked to chose appropriate methods themselves. Several TIPs have already been written for conducting specific rapid appraisal methods (TIPs #2, 4, and 10) and for participatory evaluations (TIPs #1). Others are planned.

Nevertheless, evaluations should always be based on empirical evidence and follow a systematic procedure for gathering and analyzing data—whether it's quantitative or qualitative—to maximize credibility and reduce possible sources of bias. Regardless of method selected, teams will be dealing with the following general elements, considerations, and issues:

- *Data collection methods.* There is a broad range of structured approaches to collecting data to chose from, whether it's quantitative or qualitative information that's being sought. Methods include the rapid appraisal techniques (key informant interviews, focus groups, community interviews, site observation, minisurveys), participatory workshops, sample surveys, case studies, and syntheses of existing documents. Which methods to select depends on factors such as the nature of the evaluation purpose and questions, whether quantitative or qualitative information is desired, the level of credibility required by the audience, and time and cost constraints.
- *Data collection instruments.* The data collection instruments determine the kind of information to be acquired. Their content should be directly related to the evaluation questions (that is, sufficient to answer them). Care should be taken to ensure data disaggregation needs (such as gender or other special characteristics) are identified in the instrument. Different data collection methods use different types of instruments. Surveys employ structured questionnaires; site observation techniques use observation forms; focus groups use loosely struc-

BOX 3
Some Practical Tips for Conducting Fieldwork

Plan regular team meetings. **While it makes sense for evaluation teams to split up from time to time to do some tasks individually, it is good policy to plan daily team meetings (such as at breakfast or in the evening) to share experiences and views, to review progress, and to decide on next steps. With continuous interaction, reaching team consensus on evaluation results will be easier.**

Maintain a calandar or schedule **for team members. Start by listing known events, such as prescheduled meetings, planned field trips, time reserved for regular team meetings, and debriefings. Then block out time required for key tasks, such as data collection, analysis, and report writing. Clarify on the calandar who will do what, and when, to get the job done.**

Keep good field notes. **Keeping good notes of interviews and observations pays off. Use instruments developed for this purpose whenever possible, since they help ensure all relevant information is included. If two team members are present during an interview or focus group, it is useful for one to do the speaking while the second concentrates on note taking. Soon afterward, notes should be typed up for later reference and analysis.**

Take steps to reduce error, bias, and misinterpretation. **For example, make a conscious effort to look for evidence that questions or contradicts preliminary findings. Assess the credibility and impartiality of data sources, and consider giving more weight to more reliable sources. Make sure no significant sources of information are overlooked. Take a second look at possible biases among team members, hired interviewers, and translators.**

Make sure translators translate word for word. **Paraphrasing or summarizing conversations means missing rich detail and may even be misleading.**

tured interview guides to record information. Other examples are scales to weigh infants and instruments to measure water quality.

BOX 4
Tips for Writing an Effective Report

Keep the report short—preferably under 20 pages— and always include an executive summary.

Enliven the report with true-to-life quotes, anecdotes, short case studies, questions-and-answers, and photographs.

Make the report more powerful by using active voice and present tense, featuring the most important information first, and highlighting key points (in boxes, bullets, bold fonts).

Use graphics—they can present lots of data in a small space, illustrate data patterns, highlight important comparisons, and have impact.

Make it appealing by using attractive layouts, desktop publishing, and high-quality materials.

Clearly specify the recommendations for action—they are the most critical component of the evaluation report. Effective recommendations don't simply happen—they must be carefully developed and presented. Try to avoid “surprises” and make recommendations realistic and easy to understand.

- *Unit of analysis*. The unit of analysis is the source of information. Sources should be knowledgeable about the issues or questions the evaluation wants to answer. Sources may vary considerably and may be people, objects, or events.

  For example, units might be individuals, families, farms, communities, clinics, water wells, or immunization campaigns.

- *Sampling techniques.* These are systematic procedures for selecting examples or cases from the population of units. Rarely will complete censuses of the whole population be called for, given time and resource constraints. Sampling techniques vary considerably, including random sampling, purposive sampling, convenience sampling, recommendations of community leaders, snowballing techniques, and others. Choice of techniques depends on how precise and representative of broader populations the results need to be.

- *Timing of data collection.* The timing or frequency of a data collection effort may be critical to getting reliable results. Obvious examples include sampling agricultural yields in the right seasons, or considering local holidays or lifestyle patterns when visiting health clinics or schools.

- *Data analysis methods*. Data must be analyzed to discern patterns, trends, or comparisons. Whether quantitative or qualitative data analysis is called for, well-established methods are usually available. Quantitative methods include use of descriptive statistics including measures of central tendency (such as mean, median, and mode) and regression analysis and analysis of variance to test existence of potential relationships. The most popular qualitative method is content analysis (a method for analyzing written material). Desktop computer software is increasingly available to make the analyst's job easier. Quantitative analysis pakages include SAS, SPSS, EXCEL, DBASE, and LOTUS. An example of packages for qualitative analysis is RE:SEARCH.

5. Communicate evaluation results.

Communicating evaluation results effectively is critical if they are to be used. Evaluators need to be *proactive* in seeking out opportunities to interject evaluation results into relevant management discussions and decisions. They also need to be *creative* in tailoring a communication strategy to fit the audiences' needs and in drawing from a variety of communications approaches.

Prepare the evaluation report. Reengineering guidance requires that evaluation reports be prepared for formal and critical evaluation activities. However, for less structured efforts, such as casual site visits or informal conversations with customers and partners, simple memos may suffice to document findings.

When formal evaluation reports are prepared, they should be succinct, appealing, readily understood, and useful. (See box 4 for tips on writing effective evaluation reports.)

Consider the following suggestions for the report format:

- **Executive summary**—concisely states the most critical elements of the larger report

- **Introduction**—relates the evaluation purpose, audience, and questions

- **Background of the problem**—explains the development setting and constraints USAID was trying to address

- **USAID's assistance approach**—describes the USAID program strategy and activities implemented in response to the problem

- **Findings**—are *empirical facts* collected by the evaluation team and are usually about performance or factors influencing performance

- **Conclusions**—are the evaluators' *interpretations and judgements* based on the findings

- **Recommendations**—are *proposed actions* for management based on the conclusions

- **Lessons learned**—are broader implications for similar programs in different settings or for future activities

- **Unresolved issues**—review what remains to be done or examines unanswered questions

- **Annexes**—useful for covering evaluation methods, data collection instruments, schedules, interview lists, and statistical tables.

Of these elements, several are required by reengineering guidance. *Executive summaries* must always be prepared. Also, evaluation reports should at a minimum address key *findings, conclusions,* and *recommendations*. They should be clearly identified and distinguished from each other. Making these distinctions enables readers to trace the reasoning used by the evaluators in reaching conclusions and proposing recommendations, thus making the evaluation more transparent. (Box 5 gives analogies from different disciplines for these evaluation terms to help clarify their distinctions.)

BOX 5

Analogies from Different Disciplines

Everyday Language	Evaluation	Law	Medicine
Facts	Findings	Evidence	Symptoms
Interpretations Judgments	Conclusions	Verdict	Diagnosis
Proposed actions	Recommendations	Sentence	Prescription

Share evaluation results. USAID policy is to openly share and discuss evaluation results with relevant customers and partners, as well as other donors and stakeholders (unless there are unusual and compelling reasons not to do so).

Such transparency enables others to learn and benefit from the evaluation's results and facilitates their broader use. Evaluation reports should be translated into the language of key counterparts and customers.

Use oral briefings. Briefings are almost always more effective than written reports for presenting evaluation results and their use is suggested whenever possible. By creating a forum for discussion among relevant actors, briefings create momentum for action. Most important, briefings fit the way busy managers normally operate; they rarely have time to sit and read lengthy documents and moreover are used to making decisions jointly with others in meetings. (Box 6 provides tips for giving an effective oral briefing.)

Use multiple communications techniques. Using written reports and briefings to communicate evaluation results is commonplace. But also consider using less traditional techniques that may be effective at feeding evaluation findings into ongoing decision-making or that aim at sharing evaluation results more broadly. For example, consider using senior managers' bulletins, memoranda, e-mail messages, question-and-answer statements, press releases, op-ed items in newspapers, speeches, written testimony, newsletters, articles in professional journals, brown-bag lunches, videotapes, or computerized evaluation presentations.

BOX 6
Tips for an Effective Briefing

Preparing for the briefing:

- **Invite a small, select audience**
- **Study the audience's special interests and likely questions**
- **Select only the most important information to present**
- **Prepare 6–10 large briefing charts (or use overhead transparencies or slides)**
- **Prepare briefing materials for all members of the audience**
- **Select a team of one presenter, one assistant, and one high-level liaison with the audience**

Delivering the briefing:

- **Explain the purpose of the briefing**
- **Immediately grab the audience's attention**
- **Avoid using a microphone or notes**
- **Encourage interaction at any time**
- **Provide a balanced picture of issues**
- **Limit the briefing to one hour—20 minutes for presentation**
- **Facilitate a lively discussion and help generate**

6. Review and use evaluation results.

Operating units have the primary responsibility for responding to and using an evaluation, including

- Systematically reviewing the key findings, conclusions and recommendations
- Identifying which are accepted and supported and which are not
- Identifying specific management actions and assigning clear responsibilities for undertaking them
- Determining whether any revisions are necessary in strategy, the results framework, or activities

The review of individual evaluation reports by regional or central bureaus is not required—in line with reengineering values of empowerment and accountability for results and to simplify review processes. However, evaluations should be drawn upon to analyze and explain performance in the *Results Report and Resource Request* (R4s), which is annually reviewed by USAID/W.

BOX 7
How to Submit Evaluation Documents to CDIE

1. Send documents in diskette form to

PPC/CDIE/DI
Document Acquisitions
Room 203J, SA–18
Washington, DC 20523–1820

2. Or send them as e-mail attachments to this box: cdie_acq@usaid.gov

The preferred form for documents is WP5.2, but other forms can be accommodated.

7. Submit evaluation reports to CDIE.

The Center for Development Information and Evaluation's automated development experience database —which includes thousands of evaluation reports—is a vital aspect of the Agency's capacity to learn and share experiences across operating units and with the broader development community. Operating units are required to submit to CDIE, in electronic form, all evaluation reports, executive summaries of evaluations, other documents prepared at the conclusion of an evaluation activity, operating unit's (or counterpart agency's) responses to evaluation reports, and action decisions arising from evaluation activities.

Project Evaluation Summaries (form AID 1330–5) is no longer required. (See box 7 for how to submit evaluation documents to CDIE.)

CDIE's TIPS series provide advice and suggestions to USAID managers on how to plan and conduct performance monitoring and evaluation activities effectively. They are supplemental references to the reengineering automated directives system (ADS), chapter 203. For further information, contact Annette Binnendijk, CDIE senior evaluation adviser, via phone (703) 875–4235, fax (703) 875–4866, or e-mail (abinnendijk@usaid.gov). Copies of TIPS can be ordered from the Development Experience Clearinghouse by calling (703) 351–4006 or by faxing (703) 351–4039. Please refer to