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Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

TIPS

USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation

PREPARING AN EVALUATION SCOPE OF WORK

USAID's reengineering guid- ance requires the preparation of a scope of work as a crucial element in planning a useful evaluation activitiy.

This Tips offers suggestions for preparing a good evaluation scope of work.

What Is an Evaluation Scope of Work?

An evaluation scope of work (SOW) is a plan for conducting an evaluation; it conveys clear directions to the evaluation team.

A good SOW usually

- identifies the activity, results package, or strategy to be evaluated
- provides a brief background on implementation
- identifies existing performance information sources
- states the purpose, audience and use of the evaluation
- clarifies the evaluation questions
- identifies the evaluation method to answer the questions
- discusses evaluation team composition and participation of customers and partners
- covers procedures such as schedule and logistics
- clarifies requirements for reporting and dissemination
- includes a budget

Why Are SOWs Important?

A good evaluation SOW provides a clear blueprint that an evaluation team can follow to ensure management needs are met. Experience demonstrates that expending adequate time and effort in preparing a good SOW has big payoffs in terms of the evaluation's quality, relevance and usefulness. SOWs are as important for internal teams (composed of USAID and implementing partner staff) as they are for external teams (composed of contractors and grantees).

USAID's reengineering directives require that SOWs be prepared for all evaluations. The more formal and critical the evaluation effort, the more thorough the SOW should be. SOWs for external teams may require more detail on background context and on intended audiences and uses.

Elements of a Good Evaluation SOW

Consider including the following elements when preparing a SOW:

1. Activity, Results Package, or Strategic Objective to be Evaluated

Identify what is being evaluated. For example, is the focus on a single activity, a set of related activities in a results package, or a broader strategy for achieving a strategic objective? Use appropriate activity names, titles, authorization

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Use a Participatory Process

Reengineering guidance encourages using a participatory process in developing an evaluation SOW. Employ "joint planning" and "virtual team" principles by including staff from relevant USAID offices with an interest in the evaluation. Broaden participation by including partners, customers (or their representatives), and other stakeholders in, for example, evaluation planning meetings. Survey what their evaluation issues are or ask them to review drafts of the SOW. Participation in planning an evaluation ensures greater relevance of the results, allows participants to "buy in," and increases the likelihood that they will act on the evaluation's recommendations.

numbers, funding levels, completion dates, and short descriptions to specify what is being evaluated.

2. Background

Give a brief description of the history and current status of the activities or programs, names of implementing agencies and organizations involved, and other information to help the evaluation team understand the background and context of the activity or activities being assessed.

3. Existing Performance Information Sources

Identify the existence and availability of relevant performance information sources, such as performance monitoring systems and/or previous evaluation reports. A summary of the types of data available, the time frames, and an indication of their quality and reliability will help the evaluation team to build on what is already available.

4. Purpose of the Evaluation

Under reengineering, evaluations are only to be done when driven by a clear management need. Specify the need for the evaluation, its audience, and purpose.

- Who wants the information?
- What do they want to know?
- What will the information be used for?
- When will it be needed?
- How accurate must it be?

Agency guidance identifies some broad purposes that evaluations might serve. For example, an evaluation might

- assess why progress toward planned results has been unexpectedly positive or negative
- test the validity of hypotheses and assumptions underlying a results framework
- assess how well needs of different customers are being met (e.g., by gender, age, ethnic groups)
- identify and analyze unintended consequences and effects of assistance activities
- examine sustainability of activities and their results
- distill lessons learned that may be useful elsewhere in the Agency
- assess effectiveness of Agency strategies across countries

5. Evaluation Questions

Articulate the questions the evaluation will answer. Vague questions lead to vague answers. Limit the number of questions. Asking too many questions can result in an unfocused effort.

Ensure that questions are management priorities. One approach to selecting a few key questions is to ask the evaluation's "customers" (audiences or intended users) to state those questions they would like answered, and then ask them which are most important. Avoid questions to which people already know the answers.

Frame questions so they are answerable based on empirical evidence. Indicate that teams are expected to base their answers on empirical evidence, not subjective opinions, and identify any sources and standards of evidence required (for example, if information must be obtained directly from beneficiaries, degree of data validity and reliability sought).

It may also be useful to provide further context to the questions. If an evaluation concepts or issues paper has been drafted, it could be used to develop this section or be provided as an annex.

6. Evaluation Methods

This section specifies an overall design strategy to answer the evaluation questions and provides a plan for collecting and analyzing data. Several issues are addressed:

- the broad evaluation design strategy and how it responds to the questions

- from whom (or what), and how, data will be collected
- how data will be analyzed

a.) Select the overall design strategy

The choice of an evaluation design should depend largely on the nature of the evaluation questions. Different design strategies (case studies, sample surveys, comparative evaluation designs, analyses of existing data) have distinct features that make them either more or less appropriate for answering a particular type of question credibly.

For example, to answer a question such as "What percentage of farmers in county *x* have obtained credit from the USAID program?," a sample survey would be appropriate. If the question is "Why aren't farmers using the credit program?," use of a rapid appraisal method, such as holding focus groups of farmers, would be more appropriate. If the question is "Is activity *x* more effective in increasing farmers' yields than activity *y*?," then some comparative evaluation design would enable the most persuasive conclusions to be drawn.

The challenge is to chose a design that will answer questions in a credible way (that is, with high validity), subject to time and resource constraints.

In practice, designs may combine different approaches; for example, a sample survey may be combined with a few case studies. The purpose is either to improve the persuasiveness of an argument or to answer different evaluation questions.

(b) Prepare the Data Collection and Analysis Plan

Define:

- "unit of analysis" from which data will be collected (e.g., individuals, families, farms, communities, clinics, wells)
- data disaggregation requirements (e.g., by gender, ethnic group, location)
- the procedure to be used to select examples or cases to examine from this population (e.g., random sampling, convenience sampling, recommendations of community leaders)
- techniques or instruments to be used to acquire data on these examples or cases (e.g., structured questionnaires, direct observation, loosely structured interview guides, scales to weigh infants, instruments to measure water quality)
- timing and frequency of data collection
- how data will be analyzed (e.g., quantitative methods such as cross tabulations or regression analysis, or qualitative methods such as content analysis)

In some cases, an evaluation SOW will not select a design strategy nor provide plans for data collection and analysis in order to leave choices open to the evaluation team. SOWs that provide flexibility can include a requirement for submission and approval of the methodology the team develops.

7. Team Composition and Participation

Identify the approximate team size, the qualifications and skills team members collectively should have, as well as any requirements concerning participation. For example:

- language proficiency
- areas of technical competence
- in-country work experience
- evaluation methods and data collection skills
- facilitation skills
- gender mix and gender analysis skills
- participation of USAID staff, partners, customers, and other stakeholders

The evaluation focus, methods, and analyses required should determine the evaluation team composition. Use of multidisciplinary teams are encouraged, including technical specialists and at least one evaluation specialist. Facilitation skills may be needed if participatory evaluations are undertaken.

Broadening participation on teams is strongly encouraged under reengineering. Including USAID staff will strengthen the Agency's learning from its own experience. Host country participation facilitates evaluation capacity-building as well as increases the likelihood of their acting on evaluation recommendations.

In some cases, where there is a particular need for maintaining the objectivity and independence of an evaluation, special care should be taken to ensure team members have no evident conflicts of interest (i.e., no potential biases or vested interests in the evaluation's outcomes). This may, to some extent, limit participation of those with a direct "stake" in the activities being evaluated. Alternatively, care can be taken to ensure that the team as a whole is balanced and represents various points of view.

8. Procedures: Schedule and Logistics

Specify the various procedural requirements of the evaluation, including the schedule, logistical concerns, and USAID assistance to the evaluation team:

- the general schedule of the evaluation—duration, phasing and timing considerations
- work hours, holidays, any requirements for working 6-day weeks or on holidays

- preparatory work in the United States (e.g., document reviews, team planning meetings)
- weather, travel, and sociocultural conditions that may influence data collection procedures
- availability and provision of services— local translators, interviewers, data processors, drivers, etc.
- availability/provision of office space, cars, laptops, tape recorders, hand calculators, and other needed equipment
- procedures for arranging meetings, requirements for debriefings

9. Reporting and Dissemination Requirements

All evaluation activities should at their conclusion document the important findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The formality of reporting should depend on factors such as the type, importance, breadth, and resources committed to the evaluation.

Provide:

- dates when draft and final reports are due
- number of copies of report needed
- languages in which report is needed
- page limits and formats for the report
- any requirements for datasets, if primary data collection is involved
- requirement for submitting copies of the evaluation report, in electronic form, to the Agency's Development Information System (DIS)
- dates for oral briefings and any other requirements for communicating, marketing, and disseminating results that are the responsibility of the evaluation team

A suggested format for formal evaluation reports includes:

- executive summary
- activity identification sheet (if appropriate)
- table of contents
- body of the report
- appendices

(For additional information on evaluation report format and content, see Tips entitled *Preparing Evaluation Reports*)

10. Budget

Estimate the cost of the evaluation and give the source of funds. Cost estimates may cover items such as international and in-country travel, team members' salaries, per diem and expenses, stipends to customers or partners, and payments for translators, interviewers, data processors, and secretarial services.

There is no easy rule of thumb for estimating what an evaluation should cost. It depends on many factors, such as how broad or narrow the scope of the evaluation (that is, how many activities are included, how many evaluation questions are being asked), what evaluation methods have been selected, and the degree of validity (accuracy, reliability) being sought.

Reengineering guidance stresses that when planning an evaluation, cost should be viewed and justified in light of the value to management of the information it will produce. Costs can often be lowered by narrowing the scope or considering alternative, low-cost methods.

The reengineering guidance states that resource levels dedicated to performance monitoring and evaluation functions typically should amount to 3 percent to 10 percent of the overall budget for a strategic objective or results package.

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 Advisor, via phone (703) 875–4235, fax (703)875–4866, or e-mail. Copies of *TIPS* can be ordered from the Development Information Services Clearinghouse by calling (703) 351–4006 or by faxing (703) 351–4039. Please refer to the PN number. To order via the Internet, address requests to docorder@disc.mhs.compuserve.com