

C-5: Checklist for Deciding to Evaluate

This checklist is designed to assist USAID program and evaluation managers to determine whether and when to evaluate a given project or program. It should be used as part of a front-end analysis to determine the potential benefits, costs, stakeholders, purpose, and context of a prospective evaluation.

1. Evaluation Triggers

Evaluations should not be conducted solely for the purpose of conducting an evaluation. The decision to evaluate should stem from requirements in USAID’s ADS 203 or a management decision-making imperative. You should identify whether or not the following “triggers” apply to the project you are considering evaluating:

Triggers		Source
<input type="checkbox"/>	All major programs require at least one performance evaluation ¹ . The performance evaluations should be timed so that findings will be available as decisions are made about new strategies, program design and procurements. ²	USAID’s ADS 203 Guidance
<input type="checkbox"/>	Any project or program involving an untested hypothesis or demonstrating new approaches that are anticipated to be expanded in scale or scope by USG or other sources will, if feasible, undergo an impact evaluation . If it is not possible to effectively undertake an impact evaluation, operating units may instead undertake performance evaluation, provided that the final evaluation report includes a concise and detailed statement about why an impact evaluation was not conducted. The evaluation will be integrated in to the project or program design. Any program designated as a “pilot” or “proof of concept” will fall under this requirement.	↓
<input type="checkbox"/>	Within the 3-5 year Country Development Cooperation Strategy, mission leadership will identify at least one opportunity for an impact evaluation for each Development Objective.	↓
<input type="checkbox"/>	A key management decision is required, but there is inadequate information available to make it.	ADS 203.3.6.1
<input type="checkbox"/>	Performance information indicates an unexpected result that should be explained.	↓
<input type="checkbox"/>	Feedback suggests that there are implementation problems, unmet needs, or unintended consequences or impacts.	↓
<input type="checkbox"/>	Issues of sustainability, cost-effectiveness, or relevance need to be explored.	↓
<input type="checkbox"/>	The validity of the Results Framework hypotheses or critical assumptions is questioned.	↓
<input type="checkbox"/>	Periodic Portfolio Reviews have identified key questions that need	↓

¹ A major program is one that equals or exceeds in dollar value the median program size for the operating unit. This ensures that the majority of resources under management will be subject to evaluation.

² This often means that the evaluation will be designed and commissioned early in the fourth year of a five year program.

	to be answered or that require consensus.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	In the absence of the triggers listed above, a DO evaluation should be conducted towards the end of DO implementation to examine the intended and unintended consequences of the program and to document lessons that can be shared throughout the Agency to contribute to development learning and improve future programming.	↓

2. Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation will largely determine which type of evaluation should be conducted. Based on your answers to the below questions, you will have a better idea of which type of evaluation you should consider.

Performance Evaluation		Impact Evaluation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you evaluating why or how results are being achieved?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you determining the cause and effect and specific magnitude of change ?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the evaluation planned for a specific time to answer management questions and/or for accountability purposes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you testing new development hypotheses, proving concepts, and/or informing scale-up decisions?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Will this evaluation be used to inform thinking about relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and impact (without the cause-and-effect test)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Will this evaluation be used to inform USAID policy and learning about what works and what doesn't in the broader development community?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you comparing program design features to actual performance and making judgments about the value of the program?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you comparing actual impacts against projections?
<input type="checkbox"/>	The evaluation purpose is clearly stated in terms of decision-making utility for the key users		

3. Stakeholders

A crucial element to ensure a successful evaluation is identifying and involving stakeholders to understand their information and decision-making needs. Understanding how the evaluation will be used by them and how the evaluation will affect these groups is critical. When deciding whether and when to evaluate, make sure the following conditions have been satisfied.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Key evaluation users and their information/decision-making needs have been identified
<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluation clients and other key stakeholders have been identified and their interests in the evaluation have been defined
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stakeholders have had an early opportunity to raise potential issues

	for the evaluation to address
<input type="checkbox"/>	An evaluation stakeholder analysis has been conducted to determine likely supporters and opponents of the evaluation
<input type="checkbox"/>	There is real demand for the evaluation among intended key users

4. Context

A good evaluation must take into account contextual factors. Use the following questions as a base to determine how context will affect your evaluation. See your CD for more factors to consider related to the evaluation context and evaluation design considerations.

<input type="checkbox"/>	How will the stage of the program or policy implementation affect the evaluation?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How much time is available to complete the evaluation?
<input type="checkbox"/>	What is the nature and extent of resources for the evaluation?
<input type="checkbox"/>	What is the political climate of the evaluation?

5. Costs vs. Benefits

In order to decide whether or not this project should be evaluated and when, use the previous responses to guide your understanding of potential costs and benefits of conducting an evaluation.

Potential Benefits	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Evidence-based decision making leading up to sound decisions, including what to replicate, scale up, improve, or cut back
<input type="checkbox"/>	Contributions to streams of knowledge about what works, what doesn't, and why
<input type="checkbox"/>	Building local capacity

Potential Costs	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cost of evaluation vs. cost of the program
<input type="checkbox"/>	Burden of the evaluation on beneficiaries, implementers, stakeholders
<input type="checkbox"/>	Political costs to USAID and implementing partners if results are controversial
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reputational costs if there are insufficient time and resources to conduct a comprehensive evaluation