

PERFORMANCE MONITORING & EVALUATION

TIPS

PREPARING AN EVALUATION STATEMENT OF WORK

ABOUT TIPS

These TIPS provide practical advice and suggestions to USAID managers on issues related to performance management and evaluation. This publication is a supplemental reference to the Automated Directive System (ADS) Chapter 203.

PARTICIPATION IS KEY

Use a participatory process to ensure resulting information will be relevant and useful. Include a range of staff and partners that have an interest in the evaluation to:

- Participate in planning meetings and review the SOW;
- Elicit input on potential evaluation questions; and
- Prioritize and narrow the list of questions as a group.

WHAT IS AN EVALUATION STATEMENT OF WORK (SOW)?

The statement of work (SOW) is viewed as the single most critical document in the development of

a good evaluation. The SOW states (1) the purpose of an evaluation, (2) the questions that must be answered, (3) the expected quality of the evaluation results, (4) the expertise needed to do the job and (5) the time frame and budget available to support the task.

WHY IS THE SOW IMPORTANT?

The SOW is important because it is a basic road map of all the elements of a well-crafted evaluation. It is the substance of a contract with external evaluators, as well as the framework for guiding an internal evaluation team. It contains the information that anyone who implements the evaluation needs to know about the purpose of the

evaluation, the background and history of the program being evaluated, and the issues/questions that must be addressed. Writing a SOW is about managing the first phase of the evaluation process. Ideally, the writer of the SOW will also exercise management oversight of the evaluation process.

PREPARATION – KEY ISSUES

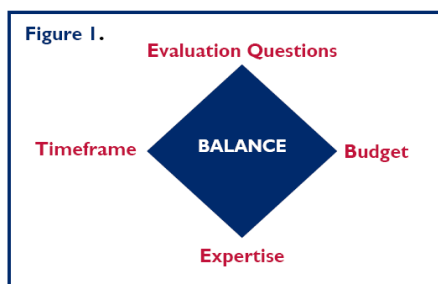
BALANCING FOUR DIMENSIONS

A well drafted SOW is a critical first step in ensuring the credibility and utility of the final evaluation report. Four key dimensions of the SOW are

interrelated and should be balanced against one another (see Figure 1):

- The number and complexity of the evaluation questions that need to be addressed;
- Adequacy of the time allotted to obtain the answers;
- Availability of funding (budget) to support the level of evaluation design and rigor required; and
- Availability of the expertise needed to complete the job.

The development of the SOW is an iterative process in which the writer has to revisit, and sometimes adjust, each of these dimensions. Finding the appropriate balance is the main challenge faced in developing any SOW.



ADVANCE PLANNING

It is a truism that good planning is a necessary – but not the only – condition for success in any enterprise. The SOW preparation process is itself an exercise in careful and thorough planning. The writer must consider several principles when beginning the process.

- As USAID and other donors place more emphasis on rigorous impact evaluation, it is

essential that evaluation planning form an integral part of the initial program or project design. This includes factoring in baseline data collection, possible comparison or 'control' site selection, and the preliminary design of data collection protocols and instruments. Decisions about evaluation design must be reflected in implementation planning and in the budget.

- There will always be un-anticipated problems and opportunities that emerge during an evaluation. It is helpful to build-in ways to accommodate necessary changes.
- The writer of the SOW is, in essence, the architect of the evaluation. It is important to commit adequate time and energy to the task.
- Adequate time is required to gather information and to build productive relationships with stakeholders (such as program sponsors, participants, or partners) as well as the evaluation team, once selected.
- The sooner that information can be made available to the evaluation team, the more efficient they can be in providing credible answers to the important questions outlined in the SOW.
- The quality of the evaluation is dependent on providing quality guidance in the SOW.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

Participation in all or some part of the evaluation is an important decision for the development of the SOW. USAID and evaluation experts strongly recommend that evaluations maximize stakeholder participation, especially in the initial planning process. Stakeholders may encompass a wide array of persons and institutions, including policy makers, program managers, implementing partners, host country organizations, and beneficiaries. In some cases, stakeholders may also be involved throughout the evaluation and with the dissemination of results. The benefits of stakeholder participation include the following:

- Learning across a broader group of decision-makers, thus increasing the likelihood that the evaluation findings will be used to improve development effectiveness;
- Acceptance of the purpose and process of evaluation by those concerned;
- A more inclusive and better focused list of questions to be answered;
- Increased acceptance and ownership of the process, findings and conclusions; and
- Increased possibility that the evaluation will be used by decision makers and other stakeholders.

USAID operates in an increasingly complex implementation world

FIGURE 2. ELEMENTS OF A GOOD EVALUATION SOW

1. Describe the activity, program, or process to be evaluated
2. Provide a brief background on the development hypothesis and its implementation
3. State the purpose and use of the evaluation
4. Clarify the evaluation questions
5. Identify the evaluation method(s)
6. Identify existing performance information sources, with special attention to monitoring data
7. Specify the deliverables(s) and the timeline
8. Identify the composition of the evaluation team (one team member should be an evaluation specialist) and participation of customers and partners
9. Address schedule and logistics
10. Clarify requirements for reporting and dissemination
11. Include a budget

with many players, including other USG agencies such as the Departments of State, Defense, Justice and others. If the activity engages other players, it is important to include them in the process.

Within USAID, there are useful synergies that can emerge when the SOW development process is inclusive. For example, a SOW that focuses on civil society advocacy might benefit from input by those who are experts in rule of law.

Participation by host government and local organizational leaders and beneficiaries is less common among USAID supported evaluations. It requires sensitivity and careful management; however, the benefits to development practitioners can be substantial.

Participation of USAID managers in evaluations is an increasingly common practice and produces many benefits. To ensure against bias or conflict of interest, the USAID manager's role can be limited to participating in the fact finding phase and contributing to the analysis. However, the final responsibility for analysis, conclusions and recommendations will rest with the independent members and team leader.

THE ELEMENTS OF A GOOD EVALUATION SOW

1. DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITY, PROGRAM, OR PROCESS TO BE EVALUATED

Be as specific and complete as possible in describing what is to be evaluated. The more information provided at the outset, the more time the evaluation team will have to develop the data needed to answer the SOW questions.

If the USAID manager does not have the time and resources to bring together all the relevant information needed to inform the evaluation in advance, the SOW might require the evaluation team to submit a document review as a first deliverable. This will, of course, add to the amount of time and budget needed in the evaluation contract.

2. PROVIDE A BRIEF BACKGROUND

Give a brief description of the context, 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 background and context. In addition, this section should state the development hypothesis(es) and clearly describe the program (or project) theory that underlies the program's design. USAID activities, programs and strategies, as well as most policies, are based on a set of "if-then" propositions that predict how a set of interventions will produce intended results. A development hypothesis is generally represented in a results framework (or sometimes a logical framework at the project level) and identifies the causal relationships among various objectives sought by the program (see TIPS 13: Building a Results Framework). That is, if one or more objectives are achieved, then the next higher order objective will be achieved. Whether the development hypothesis is the correct one, or whether it remains valid at the time of the evaluation, is an important question for most evaluation SOWs to consider.

3. STATE THE PURPOSE AND USE OF THE EVALUATION

Why is an evaluation needed? The clearer the purpose, the more likely it is that the evaluation will

produce credible and useful findings, conclusions and recommendations. In defining the purpose, several questions should be considered.

- Who wants the information? Will higher level decision makers be part of the intended audience?
- What do they want to know?
- For what purpose will the information be used?
- When will it be needed?
- How accurate must it be?

ADS 203.3.6.1 identifies a number of triggers that may inform the purpose and use of an evaluation, as follows:

- A key management decision is required for which there is inadequate information;
- Performance information indicates an unexpected result (positive or negative) that should be explained (such as gender differential results);
- Customer, partner, or other informed feedback suggests that there are implementation problems, unmet needs, or unintended consequences or impacts;
- Issues of impact, sustainability, cost-effectiveness, or relevance arise;
- The validity of the development hypotheses or critical assumptions is questioned, for example, due to unanticipated changes in the host country environment; and

- Periodic portfolio reviews have identified key questions that need to be answered or require consensus.

4. CLARIFY THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The core element of an evaluation SOW is the list of questions posed for the evaluation. One of the most common problems with evaluation SOWs is that they contain a long list of poorly defined or “difficult to answer” questions given the time, budget and resources provided. While a participatory process ensures wide ranging input into the initial list of questions, it is equally important to reduce this list to a manageable number of key questions. Keeping in mind the relationship between budget, time, and expertise needed, every potential question should be thoughtfully examined by asking a number of questions.

- Is this question of essential importance to the purpose and the users of the evaluation?
- Is this question clear, precise and ‘researchable’?
- What level of reliability and validity is expected in answering the question?
- Does determining an answer to the question require a certain kind of experience and expertise?
- Are we prepared to provide the management commitment, time and budget to secure a credible answer to this question?

If these questions can be answered yes, then the team probably has a good list of questions that will inform the evaluation team and drive the evaluation process to a successful result.

5. IDENTIFY EVALUATION METHODS

The SOW manager has to decide whether the evaluation design and methodology should be specified in the SOW.¹ This depends on whether the writer has expertise, or has internal access to evaluation research knowledge and experience. If so, and the writer is confident of the ‘on the ground’ conditions that will allow for different evaluation designs, then it is appropriate to include specific requirements in the SOW.

If the USAID SOW manager does not have the kind of evaluation experience needed, especially for more formal and rigorous evaluations, it is good practice to: 1) require that the team (or bidders, if it is contracted out) include a description of (or approach for developing) the proposed research design and methodology, or 2) require a detailed design and evaluation plan to be submitted as a first deliverable. In this way, the SOW manager benefits from external evaluation expertise. In either case, the design and methodology should not be finalized until the team has an opportunity to gather detailed

¹ See USAID ADS 203.3.6.4 on Evaluation Methodologies;

information and discuss final issues with USAID.

The selection of the design and data collection methods must be a function of the type of evaluation and the level of statistical and quantitative data confidence needed. If the project is selected for a rigorous impact evaluation, then the design and methods used will be more sophisticated and technically complex. If external assistance is necessary, the evaluation SOW will be issued as part of the initial RFP/RFA (Request for Proposal or Request for Application) solicitation process. All methods and evaluation designs should be as rigorous as reasonably possible. In some cases, a rapid appraisal is sufficient and appropriate (see [TIPS 5: Using Rapid Appraisal Methods](#)). At the other extreme, planning for a sophisticated and complex evaluation process requires greater up-front investment in baselines, outcome monitoring processes, and carefully constructed experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

6. IDENTIFY EXISTING PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Identify the existence and availability of relevant performance information sources, such as performance monitoring systems and/or previous evaluation reports. Including a summary of the types of data available, the timeframe, and an indication of their quality and reliability will help the evaluation

team to build on what is already available.

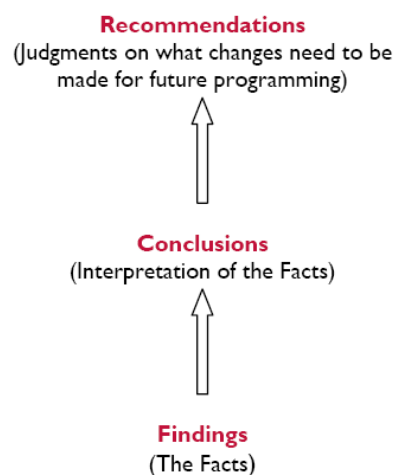
7. SPECIFY DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINE

The SOW must specify the products, the time frame, and the content of each deliverable that is required to complete the evaluation contract. Some SOWs simply require delivery of a draft evaluation report by a certain date. In other cases, a contract may require several deliverables, such as a detailed evaluation design, a work plan, a document review, and the evaluation report.

The most important deliverable is the final evaluation report. [TIPS 17: Constructing an Evaluation Report](#) provides a suggested outline of an evaluation report that may be adapted and incorporated directly into this section.

The evaluation report should differentiate between *findings*, *conclusions*, and *recommendations*, as outlined in Figure 3. As evaluators move beyond the facts, greater interpretation is required. By ensuring that the final report is organized in this manner, decision makers can clearly understand the facts on which the evaluation is based. In addition, it facilitates greater understanding of where there might be disagreements concerning the interpretation of those facts. While individuals may disagree on recommendations, they should not disagree on the basic facts.

Figure 3.
The Final Deliverable –
Organizing The Evaluation Report



Another consideration is whether a section on “lessons learned” should be included in the final report. A good evaluation will produce knowledge about best practices, point out what works, what does not, and contribute to the more general fund of tested experience on which other program designers and implementers can draw.

Because unforeseen obstacles may emerge, it is helpful to be as realistic as possible about what can be accomplished within a given time frame. Also, include some wording that allows USAID and the evaluation team to adjust schedules in consultation with the USAID manager should this be necessary.

8. DISCUSS THE COMPOSITION OF THE EVALUATION TEAM

USAID evaluation guidance for team selection strongly recommends that at least one team member have credentials

and experience in evaluation design and methods. The team leader must have strong team management skills, and sufficient experience with evaluation standards and practices to ensure a credible product. The appropriate team leader is a person with whom the SOW manager can develop a working partnership as the team moves through the evaluation research design and planning process. He/she must also be a person who can deal effectively with senior U.S. and host country officials and other leaders. Experience with USAID is often an important factor, particularly for management focused evaluations, and in formative evaluations designed to establish the basis for a future USAID program or the redesign of an existing program. If the evaluation entails a high level of complexity, survey research and other sophisticated methods, it may be useful to add a data collection and analysis expert to the team.

Generally, evaluation skills will be supplemented with additional subject matter experts. As the level of research competence increases in many countries where USAID has programs, it makes good sense to include local collaborators, whether survey research firms or independents, to be full members of the evaluation team.

9. ADDRESS SCHEDULING, LOGISTICS AND OTHER SUPPORT

Good scheduling and effective local support contributes greatly to the efficiency of the evaluation team. This section defines the time frame and the support structure needed to answer the evaluation questions at the required level of validity. For evaluations involving complex designs and sophisticated survey research data collection methods, the schedule must allow enough time, for example, to develop sample frames, prepare and pretest survey instruments, training interviewers, and analyze data. New data collection and analysis technologies can accelerate this process, but need to be provided for in the budget. In some cases, an advance trip to the field by the team leader and/or methodology expert may be justified where extensive pretesting and revision of instruments is required or when preparing for an evaluation in difficult or complex operational environments.

Adequate logistical and administrative support is also essential. USAID often works in countries with poor infrastructure, frequently in conflict/post-conflict environments where security is an issue. If the SOW requires the team to make site visits to distant or difficult locations, such planning must be incorporated into the SOW.

Particularly overseas, teams often rely on local sources for administrative support, including scheduling of appointments, finding translators and interpreters, and arranging transportation. In many countries where foreign assistance experts have been active, local consulting firms have developed this kind of expertise. Good interpreters are in high demand, and are essential to any evaluation team's success, especially when using qualitative data collection methods.

10. CLARIFY REQUIREMENTS FOR REPORTING AND DISSEMINATION

Most evaluations involve several phases of work, especially for more complex designs. The SOW can set up the relationship between the evaluation team, the USAID manager and other stakeholders. If a working group was established to help define the SOW questions, continue to use the group as a forum for interim reports and briefings provided by the evaluation team. The SOW should specify the timing and details for each briefing session. Examples of what might be specified include:

- Due dates for draft and final reports;
- Dates for oral briefings (such as a mid-term and final briefing);
- Number of copies needed;
- Language requirements, where applicable;

- Formats and page limits;
- Requirements for datasets, if primary data has been collected;
- A requirement to submit all evaluations to the Development Experience Clearing house for archiving - this is the responsibility of the evaluation contractor; and
- Other needs for communicating, marketing and disseminating results that are the responsibility of the evaluation team.

The SOW should specify when working drafts are to be submitted for review, the time frame allowed for USAID review and comment, and the time frame to revise and submit the final report.

11. INCLUDE A BUDGET

With the budget section, the SOW comes full circle. As stated, budget considerations have to be part of the decision making process from the beginning. The budget is a product of the

questions asked, human resources needed, logistical and administrative support required, and the time needed to produce a high quality, rigorous and useful evaluation report in the most efficient and timely manner. It is essential for contractors to understand the quality, validity and rigor required so they can develop a responsive budget that will meet the standards set forth in the SOW.

For more information:

TIPS publications are available online at [insert website].

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