

November 14, 1991

AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20523

MEMORANDUM

TO: CDIE/E Publications Board

FROM: Joseph Lieberman, Publications Board Chairman

SUBJECT: Guidelines for the review and dissemination
of CDIE evaluation reports



The Publications Board agreed on a proposal that would simplify and speed the review and editing of evaluation publications. The Board also agreed on the need to reduce the number of CDIE publications series. A set of procedures was reviewed by the Board and at a CDIE/E staff meeting.

I have revised the proposed Guidelines to reflect the suggestions received from the Board and CDIE staff:

1. I have removed the Working Papers Series from the list of key publications. Working Papers will still exist but they are really "non-papers" that are technically flawed--we do not need to give them major attention. The Bulletin and Highlights are important dissemination tools and they have been added to the list. (See section 5, page 5.)
2. As suggested by Annette, I have prepared an annex which summarizes the audience, characteristics and procedures for each of the four evaluation publication categories. This is useful as a condensed synopsis that compares and contrasts the four publication types. (See Annex.)
3. At the CDIE staff meeting we discussed the possibility of the ETS contractor having a major role in some evaluations. On the bottom of page 3, the alternative of a contractor-led team is included.

Since there seems to be general agreement with the proposed Guidelines we should adopt and use them. They could be included in the CDIE/E Publications Style Guide and the CDIE/E Procedures Notebook. We should also send a memo to all CDIE/E staff and to senior CDIE management, letting them know about the new Guidelines.

Please review the attached Guidelines and let me know if there are any errors or omissions.

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GUIDELINES FOR CDIE EVALUATION PUBLICATIONS

The types of products CDIE produces and how they are reviewed, edited and published

The hard part of any evaluation is designing a sound scope of work, selecting qualified people, doing the actual field work and then drafting the final report. The easy part should be getting the evaluation report cleared, edited and published. In order to produce quality products on a timely basis, the approval and editing process must be clear and straight-forward. This paper establishes the types of reports CDIE will produce and the procedures for reviewing, editing and disseminating those reports.

Over the last year the number of evaluations processed by CDIE has not been overwhelming. As a result, ad hoc decisions were often made on questions dealing with type of report, review, clearance, editing, and dissemination. As CDIE prepares to increase the number of evaluations published it runs the risk of extra costs and delays if it does not formalize the review process. This paper provides the procedures adopted by the CDIE Publications Board. It starts with the question of who the evaluation audience is and then lays out the principles that guide the review process. It reduces by more than half the number of CDIE publications series. In the future there will be these key publication series---one for the technical experts, another for more general managers (a special studies and methodology series), and special marketing reports designed to disseminate findings. A simplified process for clearance and editing is included along with the use of editing tracks.

1. Objectives of the CDIE review and editing system

The following are a list of key principles and objectives for the CDIE review/editing/publications system:

Timeliness. The process is designed to move evaluations rapidly from draft to final dissemination

Quality. The review process must assure that all published evaluations are rigorous, objective, technically accurate, and analytically sound.

Relevance. Evaluations must relate to the solution of specific A.I.D. problems and the reports should have a problem focus.

Targeting. Evaluations must be of immediate and direct use to specific A.I.D. management or operations groups.

Management burden. CDIE management should only have to review an evaluation at one or two stages on its way to publication and the review should be completed promptly. Highly technical and longer reports will be reviewed at the CDIE Division level while papers designed for senior A.I.D. management will be reviewed at a higher level.

Editing. The editor must produce quality products that reflect the above principles.

2. Audience

It is important to identify the market or readership for each evaluation report. In the past, CDIE evaluation reports often tried to be all inclusive---They were directed at "all decision makers." Designing products for such a broad variety of technical experts and managers is usually a mistake.

To be successful, an evaluation report must address the information needs of a specific set of decision makers. This could include: (1) A.I.D. program and project managers (the technical experts); (2) policy makers responsible for budget and program decisions; (3) senior level A.I.D. managers responsible for program strategy; and (4) Congressional, OMB and other external actors. Each audience has different interest and different information needs. The way a report is written and the way it is marketed will depend upon the type of audience that CDIE wants to reach. A report designed for a health program manager should be quite different from the report prepared for a country desk officer. The same would apply for the type of report prepared for an A.I.D. Mission Director or an Office Director. Before an evaluation is launched, and before a report is drafted CDIE must be clear on the type of audience it wants to reach. Once an evaluation is completed CDIE should carefully consider various marketing strategies or spin-offs to target products to specific audiences.

3. Evaluation publications for both technical experts and generalists

Traditional CDIE evaluation reports included a thorough technical, economic and management analysis but were often 60-100 pages long. The audience for such a report was very limited; a USAID Mission, the country desk, and technical experts were interested but other Missions and most A.I.D. managers did not have the time or interest to wade through a highly technical report.

In an attempt to deal with those problems, CDIE developed the 15-page Impact Evaluation Reports. These reports included the findings and lessons, but not the detailed analysis. Senior managers liked the new approach but the technicians and program managers thought the reports were superficial and inadequate.

There are clearly two different markets which require different marketing techniques. The Publications Board has decided that each evaluation should generate two or three targeted reports: an Evaluation Highlight (an 8-12 page abstract of findings); a Program Assessment (a 15-30 page synthesis of findings); and a Technical Evaluation Report (up to 100 pages of country, project, and technical analysis). The Highlight and Assessment would receive a thorough CDIE and Regional Bureau review, a comprehensive edit, and wide dissemination. The Technical Report would receive only a technical review (by A.I.D. and external technical experts), a lighter edit, and a limited distribution.

4. The approval process

Since it is important to produce quality products, CDIE management has devoted much of its time and energy to closely reviewing and examining each evaluation product as it moved from first draft through a number of stages toward final publication. This has often meant a number of reviews by a number of managers---the process took many months (sometimes a year or more) to complete. Based on past experience three or four CDIE managers could end up reading and approving a report at least four times as it passed through five or more stages of the editing/approval process---White Cover, Yellow cover, Pink Cover, Blue Cover, Final Copy. If, at one of those stages, a report required a major reorganization or rewrite, managers might have to review it several more times. An additional problem has been editing cost. At an early stage a report would be reviewed and edited. However, if at a later review stage the author had to do a major rewrite, the report would have to be edited again. If there were several rewrites, and several re-edits, editing costs would mount and the process of moving a paper toward final publication could drag on for many months.

The objective of the new procedure is to minimize the number of times that CDIE management must review an evaluation report, reduce the number of managers that must review an evaluation, and reduce the editing cost. This will reduce the time required to publish an evaluation.

The process will follow these stages:

- 1.) After an evaluation team returns from the field it will put the technical report and Highlight into a clean first draft. If it was a contractor-led team the contractor will

draft the reports, which will then be reviewed by the CDIE team leader or topic coordinator. If the team was led by a CDIE team leader, the team leader will draft the reports.

2.) It will then be reviewed by a CDIE peer review group, chaired by the POA Chief or Deputy Chief. This will allow CDIE to see if there are any major problems and to offer suggestions on how to organize and improve the draft.

3. The team leader/topic coordinator will redraft the technical report and Highlight and send both out for A.I.D. review (Regional and Central Bureaus). This is also time to consider using an external panel to review the technical draft.

4. When the A.I.D. and external review review is completed the team leader/topic coordinator will redraft the report and put it into final draft. It will then go to the POA Chief or Deputy for final approval.

5. After the POA Chief approves the final draft technical report and Highlight they will go to Conwal for editing. Technical Reports will receive a very light edit (formatting and grammar) while Highlights and Assessments will received a more comprehensive edit.

6. After it is edited the Topic Coordinator and POA Chief (or POA Deputy Chief) should review it lightly one last time for format and structure, and then it is ready for desk top publishing. At this point, senior CDIE management (AAA/CDIE, DAAA/CDIE and CDIE/E) will have a last chance to review the report before it is published.

This approach has a number of advantages: Instead of having all of CDIE management involved, only one manager (the POA Chief) is in the review process. Instead of 4-7 reviews, there are only two key review points---when the first draft is completed, and when it is put into final draft, before it goes to the editor. The processing time and cost is reduced since there are fewer reviews, fewer reviewers and the paper is not edited until it has been cleared in final by the external A.I.D. offices and CDIE. Based on past experience, having four people read and reread a report many times over did not always improve quality. Under the proposed approach the topic coordinator and the POA Chief (or his designee) will read it very carefully, but only two times.

5. Number of CDIE evaluation series

CDIE produces evaluation reports that are published in different CDIE publication series. There were previously 13 different categories (e.g., Impact Evaluations, Special Studies, Highlights, Occasional Papers, Methodology, etc.).

Each category was created to serve some specific purpose but, after many years and the addition of more and more categories, there was duplication and overlap. Even more telling was the fact that everyone in A.I.D. (and most people in CDIE) were not sure what the different categories included. With so many different categories, each with its own numbering system and cover design, it was confusing to all concerned.

To clean up the situation the new system will have only four categories:

1. Bulleins and Highlights--A summary of findings and lessons.
2. Program Assessments--A synthesis or sector evaluation.
3. Technical Reports--The country study or technical research.
3. Special Studies--Methodology or "how-to-do-it" papers.

A Highlight will be prepared on all Program Assessments and some Technical Reports and Special Studies. A Senior Manager's Bulletin will be prepared on most Program Assessments. The Highlight and Bulletin will receive wide distribution within A.I.D., to promote the findings and lessons learned. The other reports will have a more limited distribution to interested technical offices.

6. Editing tracks

In the past all CDIE publication went through a thorough and comprehensive edit which covered spelling, grammar, style, logical organization and internal consistency. The process generated a high quality product but it required much time and effort. Under the new system there will be different editing tracks for different publications. Only a few documents (such as the Highlight and Bulletin) will go through the most comprehensive edit, Program Assessments will receive a less comprehensive edit, and all others will receive a more minor edit.

For each evaluation report, a decision on the editing track will be made early, ideally at the start of the study when the Concept Paper is approved. The Deputy POA Chief, should recommend the track for each paper, and then follow-up to make sure that the track is appropriate.

The attached tables describe the audience, characteristics, and preparation requirements for each type of publication.

CDIE EVALUATION REPORTS

Bulletin and Highlights

Audience

Senior Policy Makers, Planners,
Office Directors, Congress, OMB

Purpose

A short synopsis of key issues,
findings, lessons and recommendations
from CDIE studies.

Focus/Context

Focus on issues and key findings
with just enough background for
context.

Format/Length

Bulletin--two pages, double column
format with bullets and key points
highlighted. Much like a press
release.

Highlight--8 to 12 pages, double
column, With user-friendly graphics
Emphasis on findings but includes
some technical analysis.

Review

Comprehensive review by appropriate
external A.I.D. offices, CDIE/E and
Senior CDIE management.

Edit

Thorough and most comprehensive edit

Dissemination (300 copies)

Targeted to senior program managers
and policy planners within A.I.D.
and to a senior external audience.

Program Assessments

Audience

Office Directors, Technical
Experts, Program Officers

Purpose

A sector report on program impact.
Often a synthesis of program
findings or a final report that
summarizes a series of country
evaluations

Focus/Context

A cross-country analysis of results
and performance. Program and
policy lessons backed-up with
summary data from each country
case study. Usually based upon
the results of CDIE Technical
Reports.

Format/Length

Limit of 15 to 30 pages, double
column, with graphs and charts.

Review

CDIE peer review, and review by
CDIE/E, Regional and Central
Bureaus, and external review.
Review to ensure that findings are
supported by Technical Reports.

Edit

Depending on the topic, a moderate
to thorough edit.

Dissemination (1,000 copies)

Wide distribution within A.I.D.
Washington, A.I.D. field Missions,
and the development community.

CDIE EVALUATION REPORTS*

Technical Reports

Audience

A.I.D. and host country technical specialists. A.I.D. program and budget officers.

Purpose

To document the data and findings from individual country and desk studies. Includes the analytical approach that generated the findings.

Focus/Context

Focuses on a country program or issue. May be a desk study. Provides detailed technical analysis, extensive data, and a full methodology discussion. Provides the technical basis for the conclusions in the Program Assessment.

Format/Length

No limit on length but usually 100 pages. A scholarly and professional style, without columns and minimal graphics. May include extensive data and statistics.

Review

CDIE peer review, external review, and technical Bureau and Mission review. The review is designed to ensure technical and analytical rigor.

Edit

No edit or a light edit of spelling, grammar and a check for major omissions.

Dissemination (50 to 200 copies)

A limited technical audience.

Special Studies and Methodology

Audience

Evaluators and special target groups.

Purpose

To disseminate knowledge on new techniques and approaches

Focus/Context

Focuses on methodology and "how-to-do-it" approaches. May include unusual and special studies that fail to fit in regular CDIE categories

Format/Length

No limit on length but usually under 50 pages.

Review

CDIE peer review and where appropriate, review by other A.I.D. offices and external reviewers.

Edit

No edit or a very light edit of spelling, grammar and content.

Dissemination (50 to 200 copies)

A limited audience of evaluators and technical specialists.

Note: There is one other publications series---"Working Papers." These are studies that failed. They failed to answer major technical questions, they have major analytical problems, or are poorly written. They are not edited and there is no formal distribution. Copies may be sent to a limited technical audience (usually 20 copies or less).