



HOW-TO NOTE

Preparing Evaluation Reports

Monitoring and Evaluation Series

**Create
evaluation
reports that
are clear,
credible, and
useful.**

How-To Notes are published by the Bureau of Policy, Planning and Learning and provide guidelines and practical advice to USAID staff and partners related to the Program Cycle. This How-To Note supplements USAID ADS Chapter 203

INTRODUCTION

This Note supplements USAID Automated Directives System (ADS) Chapter 203 and provides current good practice in preparing evaluation reports, the main deliverable for most evaluations. Following these practices will help to establish clear expectations for evaluation reports during the preparation of evaluation statements of work and the in-briefing of the evaluation team. These practices also serve as a guide for reviewing the quality of draft evaluation reports submitted by the evaluation team. This Note is also a resource for USAID partners and independent evaluators of USAID programs and projects. An [evaluation report template](#) and [sample evaluation report covers](#) are available as additional resources.

BACKGROUND

The most important outcome of an evaluation is that it is used to inform decisions and improve USAID projects and programs. A key factor in using evaluation findings is having a well-written, succinct report that clearly and quickly communicates credible findings and conclusions, including easy-to-understand graphics and consistent formatting.

REQUIREMENTS

USAID's Evaluation Policy and ADS 203 provide guidance on evaluation report structure and content, and steps in the process of creating a report. These are listed in Table I. The report must present a well-researched, thoughtful and organized effort to objectively evaluate a USAID activity, project or program. Findings, conclusions and recommendations must be based in evidence derived from the best methods available given the evaluation questions and resources available. The evaluation methods, limitations, and information sources must be documented, including by providing data collection tools and the original evaluation statement of work as annexes to the main report. Finally, the findings should be shared transparently and widely, to ensure accountability and to promote learning from USAID's experience.

TABLE I: EVALUATION REPORT REQUIREMENT

(from the USAID Evaluation Policy and ADS 203)

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Report should be... | A thoughtful, well-researched, well-organized, and objectively evaluate what worked, what did not, and why. |
| Executive Summary | Include a 3 to 5 page Executive Summary that provides a brief overview of the evaluation purpose, project background, evaluation questions, methods, findings, and conclusions. |
| Evaluation Questions | Address all evaluation questions in the statement of work. |
| Methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explain evaluation methodology in detail. ▪ Disclose evaluation limitations, especially those associated with the evaluation methodology (e.g. selection bias, recall bias, unobservable differences between comparator groups, etc.). <p>NOTE: A summary of methodology can be included in the body of the report, with the full description provided as an annex.</p> |
| Findings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Present findings as analyzed facts, evidence and data supported by strong quantitative or qualitative evidence and not anecdotes, hearsay or people's opinions. ▪ Include findings that assess outcomes and impacts on males and females. |
| Recommendations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support recommendations with specific findings. ▪ Provide recommendations that are action-oriented, practical, specific, and define who is responsible for the action. |
| Annexes | <p>Include the following as annexes, at minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Statement of Work. ▪ Full description of evaluation methods. ▪ All evaluation tools (questionnaires, checklists, discussion guides, surveys, etc.). ▪ A list of sources of information (key informants, documents reviewed, other data sources). <p>Only if applicable, include as an annex <i>Statement(s) of Differences</i> regarding any significant unresolved differences of opinion on the part of funders, implementers, and/or members of the evaluation team.</p> |
| Quality Control | Assess reports for quality by including an in-house peer technical review with comments provided to evaluation teams. |
| Transparency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Submit the report to the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) within three months of completion. ▪ Share the findings from evaluation reports as widely as possible with a commitment to full and active disclosure. |
| Use | Integrate findings from evaluation reports into decision-making about strategies, program priorities, and project design. |

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

1. Define Report Requirements in the Evaluation Statement of Work and Final Work Plan

All evaluation statements of work (SOW) should clearly define requirements and expectations for the final evaluation report. All of the items in Table 1 must be included as requirements for the final report. Ensure that all requirements in the SOW are also included in the final evaluation work plan that is put in place once the evaluation team is on board. Adjustments can be made at this time, as long as the minimum requirements are met, and additions can be included such as defining when the first draft will be due, how many days USAID will have to review and provide comments, and when the final report will be submitted.

2. Review First Draft

Program Offices must ensure that evaluation draft reports are assessed for quality by management and through an in-house peer technical review and comments provided to the evaluation teams. USAID staff may consider including implementing partners and other direct stakeholders in the review process. Tools such as the USAID Evaluation Report Checklist can be used.

3. Final Draft and Statement of Differences

Evaluation reports are independent products and therefore the evaluation team leader reviews the comments and determines which to incorporate into the final draft. Once the final draft is submitted to the USAID mission or office, the content should not be changed without the permission of the evaluation team leader. USAID, other funders, implementing partners, and other members of the evaluation team can decide to include a *Statement of Differences* as an annex to the report, if there are differences related to the evaluation findings or recommendations.

4. Submit to DEC and Share Findings Widely

USAID Program Offices must ensure that evaluation final reports (or reports submitted by evaluators to USAID as their final drafts) are submitted within three months of completion to the Development Experience Clearinghouse at <http://dec.usaid.gov>. The actual submission can be done by USAID staff or by the evaluation team with USAID concurrence (once an opportunity has been provided for USAID or others to include a *Statement of Differences*, if appropriate). In addition to submission to the DEC, USAID should also consider how to share the evaluation report widely to facilitate broader learning. This could include posting the report on the USAID mission website, translating a summary into local language, and hosting presentations of the evaluation findings.

5. Use Evaluation Findings to Inform Decisions

USAID must integrate evaluation findings into decision making about strategies, program priorities, and project design. While the Program Office in a mission should ensure this happens, it is the responsibility of all USAID staff.

CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

General Style

When writing a report, the evaluation team must always remember the primary audience: project and program managers, policymakers, and direct stakeholders. The style of writing should be easy to understand and concise while making sure to address the evaluation questions and issues with accurate and data-driven findings, justifiable conclusions, and practical recommendations.

Report Sections and Content

At a minimum, all reports should include the following sections: Executive Summary (3 to 4 pages); Evaluation Purpose and Questions (1 to 2 pages); Project Background (1 to 3 pages); Evaluation Methods and Limitations (1 to 3 pages, with full version provided in an annex); Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations (15 to 25 pages); and, Annexes. Reports may include additional content, split the sections up differently, or present the sections in a different order.

- **Executive Summary**

The Executive Summary, between three to four pages in length, should stand alone as an abbreviated version of the report. All content of the full report should be summarized, and the Executive Summary should contain no new information.

- **Evaluation Purpose and Questions**

The evaluation purpose should be clearly defined at the beginning of the report. It should describe in about one page or less why the evaluation is being conducted now, how the findings are expected to be used, what specific decisions will be informed by the evaluation, and who the main audiences are for the evaluation report. The evaluation questions are linked to the purpose, and should be listed here. Good practice is to limit the questions to three to five that are clear, focused, and that will directly inform specific decisions.

- **Project Background**

This section should summarize the project being evaluated in one to three pages, including the original problem the project is designed to address, any changes that have occurred since

the project was started, a description of the beneficiary population, geographic area of the project, and the underlying development hypothesis, or causal logic, of the project or the broader program of which the project is a part. If a results framework (for strategies, objectives or programs) or logical framework (for projects) is available, this should be included here. For projects designed under the [project design guidance](#) released in 2011, the evaluation team should have access to the final Project Appraisal Document and related annexes (which includes a logical framework and original monitoring and evaluation plans, among other things). This information provides important context for understanding the evaluation purpose, questions, methods, findings and conclusions.

- **Methods and Limitations**

This section should provide a detailed description within one to three pages of the evaluation methods and why they were chosen. If more space is needed, additional detailed information on the methods should be provided in an annex. The reader needs to understand what the evaluation team did and why to make an informed judgment about the credibility of the findings and conclusions and the underlying evaluation design including the data collection and analysis methods.

Evaluation methods should correspond directly to the questions being asked and should generate the highest quality and most credible evidence possible, taking into consideration time, budget and other practical considerations.

This section should provide information on all aspects of the evaluation design and methods, including tradeoffs that led to selection of specific data collection and analysis methods, a description of data availability and quality, and sampling strategies (purposive, random, etc.), including how interview subjects or site visits were selected. Just as important as describing the evaluation methods is describing any limitations in data collection and analysis, data quality, access to data sources, or any other

factors that may result in bias. To show the relationship between the evaluation questions and methods, it is useful to include a chart that lists each evaluation question, the corresponding evaluation method to be used for data collection and analysis, data sources, sample sizes, and limitations.

- **Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations**

Findings, conclusions, and (if requested in the evaluation statement of work) recommendations, make up the main body of the report, synthesizing what was learned during the evaluation and presenting it in an easy to understand and logical fashion. Findings are empirical facts based on data collected during the evaluation and should not rely only on opinion, even of experts. Conclusions synthesize and interpret findings and make judgments supported by one or more specific findings. Recommendations, if applicable, are specific actions the evaluation team proposes be taken by program management that are based on findings and conclusions. The reader should be able to discern what evidence supports the conclusions and recommendations. Whenever possible, data should be presented visually in easy to read charts, tables, graphs, and maps to demonstrate the evidence that supports conclusions and recommendations. All graphics must have a title, be clearly labeled, and include a caption.

- **Annexes**

All evaluation reports must include the following as annexes: 1) the Evaluation Statement of Work, 2) Detailed description of the evaluation design and methods, 3) copies of the actual data collection tools such as survey or interview questions, 4) a list of information sources (including documents reviewed, sites visited, and key informants, assuming they gave permission to be identified), and 5) disclosure of any conflict of interest by including a signed statement by evaluation team members that attests to a lack of conflict of interest or describes an existing conflict of interest relative to the project being evaluated. Additional annexes can be included at the discretion of the evaluation team and USAID, and in some cases implementing partners, including, if applicable, any *Statements of Differences* with the evaluation conclusions.

FORMAT AND GRAPHIC STANDARDS

Reminder on USAID Graphic Standards

The USAID Graphic Standards Manual is available at http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADB334.pdf. Evaluation report authors and reviewers should be familiar with the USAID Graphic Standards and apply them consistently. These include requirements and guidance related to USAID branding, choice of typography, and color palette.

Cover

The cover of an evaluation report should be attractive and provide enough information that a reader can immediately understand what was evaluated. To make evaluation reports distinct from other types of USAID publications all evaluation report covers should:

- Follow USAID Branding and Graphics Standards.
- Include a title block in USAID light blue background color with the word “Evaluation” at the top and the report title underneath. The title should also include the word “evaluation.”
- Include the following statement across the bottom: “This publication was produced at the request of the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared independently by [list authors and/or organizations involved in the preparation of the report].”
- Feature one high-quality photograph representative of the project being evaluated. The photo should be high resolution, visually simple, colorful, and in focus. Include a brief caption on the inside front cover explaining the “who, what, when, where, and why” of the photo and with photographer credit.

Title and Title Page

While titles are determined by the evaluation team and the USAID Mission or operating unit commissioning the evaluation, all evaluations will be submitted to the DEC and therefore titles should be clear to the general reader. A review of recent evaluation titles leads to the following suggestions for good practice:

- Compose a title that is informative, clear and compelling (e.g., “Improving Community Health in Fredonia: Evaluation of the USAID/Fredonia Community Health Project”).
- Avoid acronyms and do not use implementing partner names (e.g., “XYZ LTD Evaluation”).
- Include the word “evaluation” in the title. This will help the DEC correctly archive the document.

The report title should be repeated on the title page, the first right-hand text page of the report. The title page also includes the subtitle, if any, and the standard disclaimer for publications by external authors: “The author’s views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.” It may also include the date of the report, a short abstract summarizing the report, or other information.

Acronyms

Keep the use of acronyms to a minimum, and define all acronyms used in the report by including an acronym list in the beginning of the report

Table of Contents

This comes before any content referenced in the table. Sufficient detail should be provided to guide the reader through the report, including page numbers.

Length

Evaluation reports should be no more than 30 pages in length, not including any annexes and three to four pages for an Executive Summary. This should be sufficient to provide a summary of the evaluation purpose and approach, key findings, conclusions and recommendations. Additional detail can be provided as annexes.

COMPANION PRODUCTS

USAID staff should consider other products to include in the evaluation statement of work that can complement the report and aid in disseminating evaluation findings to a broader audience. These could include photos documenting the evaluation, a short video that combines footage from the evaluation with a summary of the findings, a short fact sheet, a local language translation of the executive summary of the evaluation report, or a presentation via webinar of the evaluation report. Some products are not appropriate to ask as a deliverable from an evaluation team, such as “Success Stories” as this would put the evaluation team’s objectivity and independence into question.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources can be used as samples or templates, or provide more information on evaluation reports and on evaluation in general. Some other resources exist but are out-of-date with current USAID guidance. Where information differs, the USAID Evaluation Policy and the USAID ADS (Automated Directives System) 200 series take precedence over that in other resources.

- Evaluation Report Template: <http://tinyurl.com/SampleEvaluationReportTemplate>
- Evaluation Cover Samples: <http://tinyurl.com/SampleEvaluationCover>
- Sample Disclosure of Conflict of Interests Form: <http://tinyurl.com/DisclosureofConflictofInterest>
- USAID Graphic Standards Manual: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADB334.pdf
- USAID’s Center for Development Information and Evaluation Publications: Style Guide: Guidelines for Project Managers, Authors, and Editors, December 2001
http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNACN266.pdf