



HOW-TO NOTE

Evaluation Statements of Work

Monitoring and Evaluation Series

Evaluation statements of work should clearly communicate why the evaluation is needed, how it will be used, and what evaluation questions will provide answers managers need.

How-To Notes

are published by the Bureau for 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 How-To Note addresses key issues for USAID staff who are developing a Statement of Work for an externally contracted evaluation. Following these practices will help to establish clear expectations and requirements for the evaluation team. These practices also serve as a guide for reviewing the quality of evaluation statements of work for internal peer review processes. While the information in this Note is applicable to both performance and impact evaluation, the complexity of an impact evaluation and multi-stage evaluations will be addressed with additional guidance for SOW development.

BACKGROUND

An Evaluation Statement of Work contains the information that those who conduct the evaluation need to know:

- purpose of the evaluation and how it will be used;
- background and history of the activities, projects, or programs being evaluated;
- questions that must be answered, and how they might be answered;
- expected deliverables;
- expertise needed to do the job; and
- time frame and budget available to support the task.

KEY ISSUES IN PREPARING THE SOW

INTERRELATED ELEMENTS

Drafters need to ensure that evaluation questions are consistent with the evaluation purpose, that the evaluation methods are appropriate for answering the evaluation questions, and the evaluation team members have the requisite skills to employ the proposed evaluation methods.

STRIKING A BALANCE

A SOW must balance the number and complexity of the evaluation questions with the time allotted to conduct the evaluation and the availability of funding. Finding the appropriate balance often requires an iterative process in which the drafter revisits, and sometimes adjusts, each of the elements of the SOW.

FLEXIBILITY

There will always be unanticipated problems and opportunities that emerge during an evaluation. It is helpful to build in flexibility to the SOW, particularly in the methodology section, to accommodate ideas from the evaluation team and necessary changes during the evaluation process.

ADEQUATE TIME

The drafters of the SOW are, in essence, the architects of the evaluation. It is important to commit adequate time and energy to the task, including time to gather and analyze information, build productive relationships with stakeholders, and incorporate stakeholder feedback into the SOW. It is recommended that the drafters draw on an evaluation expert when drafting an SOW.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Ensuring SOWs are of the highest quality and adhere to the standards of the USAID Evaluation

Policy requires collaboration between the program office and technical offices of a mission. Each mission's Evaluation Mission Order should specify roles and responsibilities for the preparation of an evaluation SOW. Typically, but not always, evaluation questions originate from the technical offices, while program offices (as the eventual managers of most evaluations) finalize the SOW.

Program offices take the lead in ensuring that final SOWs for external evaluations adhere to the standards in the Evaluation Policy and organize in-house peer reviews to assess quality of evaluation SOWs, engaging regional and technical bureaus as needed. Technical offices should participate in the peer reviews.

USAID encourages participation by national counterparts and country-level stakeholders in the development of evaluation SOWs. Stakeholders may encompass a wide array of people and institutions, including policy makers, program managers, implementing partners, other relevant US government agencies, host country organizations, and beneficiaries. Involvement by stakeholders can both improve the list of questions to be answered as well as increase acceptance of the evaluation purpose and process, leading to increased utilization of the evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

THE SOW IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Initial planning for an evaluation should long precede the drafting of the SOW. Preparation of the SOW itself should begin at least six months prior to the planned award date to allow time for various actions needed to complete a quality SOW and award the contract. Steps in procuring an external evaluation:

1. Reviewing and preparing background material about the activity/project/program to be evaluated;
2. Determining the appropriate evaluation questions, suggested methods, and evaluator qualifications;
3. Drafting the SOW;
4. Preparing a budget and independent government estimate;
5. Choosing a mechanism;
6. Conducting an in-house peer review of the SOW;
7. Sharing the SOW with relevant stakeholders;
8. Revising the SOW based on the peer review and stakeholder feedback;
9. Submitting to OAA for approval and RFP preparation;
10. Proposal preparation and submission by external evaluators; and
11. Selection of the evaluation team and award.

THE ELEMENTS OF A WELL WRITTEN EVALUATION SOW

DESCRIBE WHAT IS TO BE EVALUATED

Evaluations can focus on activities, projects, or programs being implemented within a single country or across multiple countries. In some instances the focus of an evaluation may be a single innovative intervention within a project. An SOW introduces the activities, projects, or programs that USAID wishes to evaluate, stating the title(s), start and end dates, funding levels, funding sources (e.g., mission, regional office, or Washington accounts), implementing partners, and sectors or topics.

PROVIDE BACKGROUND AND PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

This section of the SOW should give a description of the context, history, and current status of the activities, projects, or programs, and other information to help the evaluation team understand background and performance. State in detail the specific problem or opportunity the activity, project, or program was designed to address. State the development hypothesis(es) and clearly describe the theory of change that underlies the project or program's design. Include the CDCS results framework and project design logical framework. If the evaluated project or program operates in particular geographic areas of a country and/or with particular target groups, these should be identified as well. Maps are highly recommended.

Specify what project documents will be available to evaluators. In particular, identify the existence and availability of relevant performance information sources, such as performance monitoring indicators 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.

STATE THE PURPOSE, AUDIENCE, AND USE OF THE EVALUATION

A good SOW states why an evaluation is being conducted (the purpose), who will use the results of the evaluation, and how they will do so. In

SOW ELEMENTS AT A GLANCE

1. Description of Program/Project/Activity to be Evaluated
2. Background
3. Purpose
4. Questions
5. Methods
6. Deliverables and Timeline
7. Team Composition
8. Scheduling and Logistics
9. Budget

general, evaluations at USAID have two primary purposes: accountability to stakeholders and learning to improve effectiveness. In this section of the SOW, though, drafters should provide a more specific purpose that explicitly links the evaluation to future decisions to be made by USAID leadership, partner governments, and/or other key stakeholders. The clearer the purpose, the more likely it is that the evaluation will produce credible and useful findings, conclusions, and recommendations that can be used to achieve greater effectiveness and results.

The purpose of the evaluation should be consistent with, but not replicate the evaluation questions. The purpose should also be consistent with the timeframe of the evaluation in relation to the project or program's life cycle. For instance, an evaluation whose main purpose is to inform a follow-on project should ensure that the evaluation will be conducted after the project has generated enough evidence to inform the follow-on project, but prior to the main design decisions for the follow-on.

IDENTIFY THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The core element of an evaluation SOW is the list of questions posed for the evaluation. These questions should be aligned with the evaluation's purpose and expected use. Each question should be answerable using the best methods appropriate

to the questions to generate the highest quality and most credible evidence possible.

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 limited, manageable number of key questions, generally between three and five questions. Keep only those questions of essential importance to the evaluation purpose where USAID is willing to provide the management commitment, time, and budget resources. Not every aspect of a project or program needs to be, or should be, the focus of the evaluation.

While keeping the number of evaluation questions limited is important, the content of those questions is equally if not more important. Questions should be precise in what is being asked. Vague terms which can be defined or applied in a variety of ways, such as “relevance” and “effectiveness,” should be clearly defined in this section or in the methodology section of the SOW. Questions should also be researchable, that is, they should have an answer that can be obtained through the use of social science methods and tools rather than evaluator specific judgments.

In addition to specifying which questions the team should address, a well-written SOW indicates the priority assigned to each evaluation question. An SOW can accomplish this by arranging questions in order of importance (and stating that it has done so) or it can estimate the likely level of effort expected to be invested in answering each question.

Finally, the evaluation questions section of the SOW should identify all evaluation questions for which gender-disaggregated data are expected and questions for which an examination of gender specific effects of the activity, project, or program are expected.

IDENTIFY METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This section of the SOW should clarify any expectations the drafter of the SOW may have with respect to the evaluation’s design and methodology. As noted in the Evaluation Policy, the methodology should “generate the highest quality and most credible evidence that corresponds to the evaluation questions being asked.” Drafters should also consider the purpose and resources when determining the level of rigor required.

USAID evaluation SOWs vary considerably in the degree to which they prescribe an evaluation design and methodology. At minimum, the SOW should state whether the evaluation will be a performance evaluation or an impact evaluation as defined in the Evaluation Policy. Preferably, it should include some suggestions about the design and methods to be used or the overall methodological approach, while also soliciting the evaluator’s input on what might be most appropriate. The details of illustrative methods can be worked out workplaning with the evaluation team.

Regardless of the specificity of the suggested methodological approach or design, it is helpful for the SOW to link the suggested methods to the specific questions that each data collection method will be used to answer. For instance, if a beneficiary survey and focus group are two of the methods suggested in this section, it should be clear which questions will be answered using either, both, or neither of these methods. Even the most basic methodological suggestions can communicate to evaluators what USAID is expecting regarding the type and strength of evidence for answering each evaluation question. The suggested evaluation methods should be consistent with the type of evaluation question asked and will ideally include more rigorous methods than simple key informant interviews.

In addition to the data collection methodology, a well-written SOW communicates any expectations regarding how evaluation data will be analyzed.

If the evaluation questions ask the evaluators to make judgments from the evidence to be gathered about the evaluated activity, project, or program's overall "effectiveness," "relevance," "efficiency," etc., then this section should suggest criteria for making such judgments or request appropriate criteria from the evaluators. The analysis methods section should also note where analysis of gender, age, or other relevant aspects of beneficiaries are needed.

SPECIFY DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINE

The SOW must specify the products, the time frame, and the content of each deliverable that evaluators are required to complete in the evaluation contract. At minimum, required deliverables should include an evaluation design, draft evaluation report, final evaluation report, and evaluation data.

As noted in the Evaluation Policy, the written design should include identification of key questions, methods, main features of data collection instruments, and data analysis plans. This design will be shared with country-level stakeholders as well as with implementing partners before being finalized. Requiring a draft evaluation report will enable the mission to provide feedback following the peer review process, prior to the submission of the final report. The SOW should define specific expectations for the final evaluation report. For information regarding what should be included in a final evaluation report see the How-To Note "Preparing Evaluation Reports."

The SOW should request all evaluation data to be provided at the end of the evaluation. Moreover, all quantitative data collected by the evaluation team should be provided in an electronic file in an easy to read format; organized and fully documented for use by those not familiar with the project or evaluation.

Any number of additional deliverables may also be requested. These may include: an evaluation work plan, an in-brief with USAID or other stakeholders, an initial document review, progress reports,

photographs of activity sites, an out-brief with USAID or other stakeholders, etc.

A good SOW also specifies the timeline for submission of deliverables, languages of the final report and/or executive summary, maximum or expected number of pages, how the report should be submitted (electronic and/or hard copy), and the number of hard copies requested.

Formatting and branding requirements should also be specified (see How-To Note on Evaluation Reports).

Finally, the SOW should note that the evaluation reports will be reviewed against the Evaluation Policy's "Criteria to Ensure the Quality of the Evaluation Report" as described in Appendix I of the USAID Evaluation Policy.

CLARIFY THE COMPOSITION OF THE EVALUATION TEAM

A good evaluation SOW describes the intended size of an evaluation team, the roles and responsibilities of team members, and the specific qualifications that the team members possess. These skills may include evaluation or methodological expertise, regional or country experience, language skills, management skills, experience working with USAID, technical subject matter expertise, etc. As noted in the Evaluation Policy, teams should include "appropriate methodological subject matter expertise to conduct an excellent evaluation." Team leaders should be "an outside expert with appropriate skills and experience." At least one team member should be an evaluation specialist and all team members should be familiar with the USAID Evaluation Policy.

USAID encourages evaluation specialists from partner countries to lead or participate in evaluation teams. Where appropriate, USAID staff and/or implementing partners may also participate in the evaluation team and the SOW should describe the intended roles of any participating staff. This section should also note that all team members will be required to provide a signed

statement attesting that they have no conflict of interest, or describing an existing conflict of interest.

ADDRESS SCHEDULING, LOGISTICS, AND OTHER SUPPORT

An SOW provides information to potential evaluators on any scheduling constraints that could affect the evaluation. It states the expected period of performance, identifying any specific dates that need to be incorporated in the evaluation plan. Good scheduling and effective local support contributes greatly to the efficiency of the evaluation team. For evaluations involving complex designs and/or 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. 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.

An SOW also outlines the specific kinds of support USAID will provide, along with any additional logistical roles or responsibilities that it expects the team to fulfill. If the SOW requires the team to make site visits to distant or difficult locations, such planning must be incorporated into the SOW.

Budget considerations have to be part of the decision making process for developing the SOW from the beginning. The proposed evaluation questions, methods, timeframe, and expertise required must be balanced against each other and the budget limitations. The calculation of the independent government estimate of the evaluation budget is beyond the scope of this How-To Note. A key aspect of the estimated budget, though, is the level of effort required by the evaluators. A good SOW should include illustrative information about the level of effort expected, preferably in the form of a matrix that displays team member days allotted by evaluation task on a notional basis.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources provide more information. 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) take precedence over that in other resources.

- USAID ADS Chapter 203: Assessing and Learning : <http://transition.usaid.gov/policy/ads/200/203.pdf>
- USAID Evaluation Policy, January 2011. (http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACQ800.pdf).
- Evaluation Statements of Work: Good Practice Examples, August 2011: (<http://transition.usaid.gov/policy/evalweb/documents/EvaluationSOW-GoodPracticeExamples.pdf>).
- How-to Note: Preparing Evaluation Reports, July 2012: <http://transition.usaid.gov/evaluation/HowtoNote-PreparingEvaluationReports.pdf>