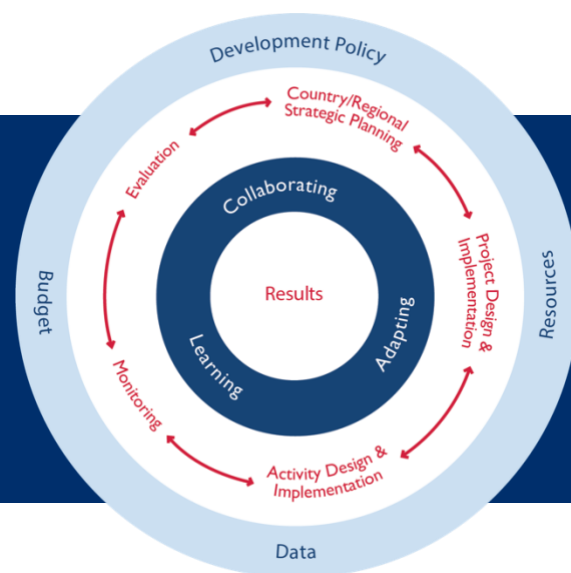


PROGRAM CYCLE

How-To Note: Evaluation Statements of Work



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.

Introduction

This How-To Note addresses key issues for USAID staff who are developing a Statement of Work (SOW) 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 SOWs during the required internal peer review processes. While the information in this Note is applicable to both performance and impact evaluations, USAID staff may wish to seek out additional guidance for developing SOWs for complex impact or multi-stage evaluations.

Background

An Evaluation SOW contains the information that those who conduct the evaluation need to know:

- whether the evaluation is an impact or performance evaluation;
- purpose of the evaluation and how it will be used;
- the audience of the evaluation
- background and history of the projects or activities 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 that 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 USAID ADS 201 requires collaboration between the Mission Program Office and technical offices. 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 ultimate managers of most evaluations) finalize the SOW.

Program offices take the lead in ensuring that final SOWs for external evaluations comply with [ADS 201 mab USAID Evaluation Statement of Work Requirements](#) 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 U.S. government agencies, partner country organizations, and beneficiaries. Involvement by stakeholders can both improve the evaluation questions and increase acceptance of the evaluation purpose and process, leading to increased utilization of the evaluation findings, conclusions, and (if applicable) recommendations.

SOW Elements at a Glance

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

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 are as follows (For complex evaluations, the Mission may undertake an assessment of evaluability as an initial step to increase the likelihood that an evaluation will provide timely and credible information.):

1. Reviewing and preparing background material about the project/activity 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 cost 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;

If the evaluation is to be commissioned through a competitive process:

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 may focus on strategies, projects or activities 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 or an activity. An SOW introduces the strategies, projects, activities, or interventions that USAID wishes to evaluate, stating the title(s), award numbers, start and end dates, funding levels, implementing partners, and sectors or topics.

I. PROVIDE BACKGROUND AND PERFORMANCE INFORMATION SOURCES

This section of the SOW should give a description of the context, strategy, history, and current status of the projects or activities, and other information to help the evaluation team understand background and performance. State in detail the specific problem or opportunity the intervention was designed to address. Where available, the SOW should state the development hypothesis(es) and clearly describe the theory of change that underlies the intervention's design. When available, also include the results framework and project design logic model. If the evaluated intervention 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 strategy, project, or activity 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 build on what is already available.

2. STATE THE PURPOSE, AUDIENCE AND HOW THE EVALUATION WILL BE USED

The 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 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 activity's life cycle. For instance, an evaluation whose main purpose is to inform a follow-on activity should ensure that the evaluation will be conducted after the activity has generated enough evidence to inform the follow-on, but prior to the main design decisions for the follow-on activity.

3. 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 one 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 activity need be, or should be, the focus of the evaluation.

While limiting the number of evaluation questions 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 "objectives", "results", "success", "sustainable" "relevant" and "effective," should be clearly defined in this section or in the methodology section of the SOW. For example, avoid questions such as, "To what extent did the activity achieve its objectives?" 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.

An SOW for an impact evaluation must include an evaluation question regarding the fidelity to which implementation followed the work plan and note any major challenges, per [ADS 201 mah](#). All impact evaluations must include a cost analysis of the intervention or interventions being studied; therefore, it may be helpful to include a specific cost analysis question related to the purpose of the evaluation.

In addition to specifying which questions the team should address, a well-written SOW for both impact and performance evaluations 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 sex-disaggregated data are expected and questions for which an examination of differential impacts on males and females of the project or activity are expected.

4. 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 ADS 201.3.6.7, the methodology should “generate the highest quality and most credible evidence that corresponds to the questions being asked, taking into consideration time, budget, and other practical considerations. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods applied in a systematic and structured way yields valuable findings and is often optimal regardless of evaluation design.” 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 must state whether the evaluation will be a performance evaluation or an impact evaluation as defined in ADS 201.3.6.4. The SOW *must* “describe the evaluation method(s) for data collection and analysis, including sampling strategy, or provide parameters within which bidders may propose evaluation methods”, as stated in [ADS 201 mab](#). 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 when planning with the evaluation team.

Additionally, impact evaluations must use evaluation methods and approaches that credibly define a counterfactual either through experimental design or quasi-experimental design. In the absence of an experimental design, a comparison group may be generated through statistical procedures. Supporting evidence is required through the inclusion of a statistical balance table and statistical output tables reporting differences between the control and treatment groups ([ADS 201 mab](#)). In addition, all impact evaluations must include a cost analysis of the intervention or interventions being studied.

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 project or activity, 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. Finally, the SOW must require bidders to discuss proposed method strengths and limitations and discuss mitigation measures.

5. 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 must include an evaluation design, draft evaluation report, final evaluation report, and evaluation data.

Evaluation Design: As noted in ADS 201mab, the written design must 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. As noted in the ADS, while the SOW proposes evaluation questions and methods, these may be altered during the design process. The SOW may include a suggested approach for the consultation process with USAID to make such changes.

Reports: 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 including all required elements described in [ADS 201mah USAID Evaluation Report Requirements](#).

Datasets: The SOW must 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. As noted in ADS 201mab, this includes “datasets—and supporting documentation such as code books, data dictionaries, scope, and methodology used to collect and analyze the data—to be submitted to the USAID Development Data Library.”

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.

For an impact evaluation, if it is anticipated that the evaluation will influence \$100 million or more of award spending then the drafters should consider whether to add in this section requirements for reporting and dissemination as contained in ADS 578.

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 (electronically and/or hard copy), and the number of hard copies requested. The SOW must specify the timeline for deliverables, including but not limited to the submission of the design in writing, draft report for review, final report and submission of all data in electronic format. Formatting and branding requirements should also be specified (see [How-To Note on Preparing Evaluation Reports](#)).

Finally, the SOW must include USAID’s Evaluation Report quality criteria as described in [ADS 201maa, Criteria to Ensure the Quality of the Evaluation Report](#).

6. 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, technical subject matter expertise, etc.

As noted in ADS 201.3.6.8, “evaluations must be conducted by individuals with appropriate training and experience, including but not limited to, evaluation specialists and technical or subject-matter experts, including local experts.” To be considered an external evaluation, the evaluation team must be led by an expert external to USAID who has no fiduciary relationship with the implementing partner. All team members should be familiar with the USAID ADS 201 operational policy on evaluation and the [USAID Evaluation Toolkit](#).

The SOW should include the requirement that evaluation team members provide a written disclosure of conflicts of interest (COI). For evaluations commissioned through a competitive procurement process, the COI disclosures are required for key personnel to be submitted with the proposal.

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.

7. 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 contribute 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, train 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. Similarly, if there are security requirements that will affect the conduct of the evaluation, these should be noted in the SOW.

8. BUDGET

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. For further information, please see the [Guidance Note on Developing an Independent Government Cost Estimate \(IGCE\) for a Performance Evaluation](#). A key aspect of the estimated budget 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. Requirements and good practices are regularly updated. For the most up-to-date requirements, the USAID ADS (Automated Directives System) takes precedence over all other resources and USAID or third-party websites.

1. USAID ADS Chapter 201: Program Cycle Operational Guidance
2. USAID ADS Chapter 201maa, Criteria to Ensure the Quality of the Evaluation Report
3. USAID ADS Chapter 201mab, USAID Evaluation Statement of Work Requirements
4. USAID ADS Chapter 201mah, USAID Evaluation Report Requirements
5. Evaluation Toolkit (available on USAID Learning Lab)
6. [How-to Note: Preparing Evaluation Reports](#)