

Evaluation Planning in Program Initiatives

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The purpose of this guideline is to outline the evaluation planning requirements for prospectus preparation. This guideline will review the role of evaluation in the Centre, the required elements of an evaluation plan for inclusion in the prospectus and the process for evaluation plan modifications through the Program Initiative (PI) annual workplan. This guideline replaces the 1997 manual "Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Programme Performance".

All of the evaluation guidelines and highlights referenced are available on the Evaluation Unit's website at: http://web.idrc.ca/en/ev-32492-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

PIs and Evaluation

The 2000-2005 Corporate Strategy and Program Framework states, "IDRC recognizes that evaluation makes an essential contribution to learning and decision-making about research" (Section 48). The evaluation function is decentralized according to the use of the evaluation with the Board of Governors, senior management, program staff, project partners and the Evaluation Unit each having specific roles and responsibilities.

Evaluation within PIs at IDRC is primarily use- and learning-oriented and is an important element of the knowledge system within the Centre. It is intended to improve the PI's performance during the implementation of its prospectus. This approach merges evaluation with organizational learning, program, and project work. Formal PI accountability for the results achieved using public resources comes through reporting by the Director of Program Area (DPA) and an external review conducted once at the end of each PI's cycle. Accountability-oriented evaluation draws on information from learning-oriented evaluations but accountability is not the primary purpose of the PI evaluations. These different purposes are kept separate so as not to compromise or confuse their intended uses. This balance is an important feature of the system.

Evaluation Planning in PIs: Overview

Each PI team develops and includes in its prospectus an evaluation plan, setting out in broad terms what evaluation the PI plans to undertake during the prospectus period. (see Table 1) This is updated each year in the PI's annual workplan, where the PI will set out evaluations to be undertaken in the coming year.

In the prospectus evaluation plan, the PI team identifies the topics, activities, result-areas, or information and knowledge gaps around which they want to prioritise their evaluation resources (time and money). The evaluations can be at the project, program, organizational, thematic or regional level. The primary intended users of the evaluations included in the plan are usually the PI team itself or its close partners (e.g., collaborating donors, recipients, partner institutions).

In reviewing and approving the prospectus, management will take into account their information needs and will alert PIs if additional information will be needed so that the PI can insert it in its evaluation plan.

The evaluation plan provides a short description of the main elements of each evaluation to be initiated by the program. It outlines the evaluation issue to be addressed, the way findings will be used, which team member(s) will be responsible for managing the study, and the approximate timing and cost. The information in the evaluation plan signals intentions to other parts of IDRC and guides the evaluation design. If the program has decided to use an external evaluator, the plan can be used to help set the terms of reference for a contract. For more detailed support in the *preparation of Terms of Reference*, see *Evaluation Guideline #5*. The Evaluation Unit will work with any PI that requests assistance to support the development of its evaluation plan. Each evaluation will require a more detailed plan at implementation. One process for developing an evaluation study plan is provided in *Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs* (Earl, Carden, Smutylo, IDRC, 2001: 115-124).

Upon submission of the prospectus to PPB management, the Evaluation Unit will review it and provide feedback on its strengths and weaknesses and make suggestions for improvement.

The PI Evaluation Plan

The format for the PI evaluation plan is presented below. Following the table, definitions are provided for each section of the plan to assist in its completion. This table is available separately as a MS-Word file from the Evaluation Unit's intranet site for inclusion in a prospectus document. It can be found at http://web.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/10807486741PI_Evaluation_Plan.doc

Table 1: PI Evaluation Plan

Evaluation Issue	Intended Users & Uses	Audience	Responsible Officer	Timing	Cost

1. Evaluation Issue

This section identifies the main focus or questions of the evaluation. For example, the evaluation may be carried out to assess the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming strategies in order to feed into the planning of a new capacity building project. A full description of the issue is not required but there should be sufficient detail to allow an external reader to understand the overall nature of the evaluation concerns of the PI. In selecting evaluation issues, the PI should consider other evaluation and knowledge activities that partners are being asked to participate in (within and external to the PI) so as to not to overtax them.

For some general issues to consider in designing an evaluation, see **Evaluation Highlight #1: Addressing the question of attribution in evaluation.**

2. Intended Users and Uses

Use is an important factor in all evaluation, but is critical in learning-oriented evaluation. The primary intended users are those particular individuals or groups who are affected by the outcome of the evaluation, are in a position to make decisions about the evaluation, and intend to use the evaluation process or findings to inform their decisions or actions. The primary intended users should be designated at the outset of an evaluation, and the evaluator should maintain frequent interaction and involvement of the users to be sure that the evaluation specifically addresses their values and needs. This section should indicate who needs the information and for what purpose – e.g., PO to modify a project or program area in some specific way, PI team to assess niche in order to make a decision, etc. Users are generally a fairly small group, smaller than the full set of people who will be interested in reading the study.

At IDRC, if you cannot identify and articulate the primary intended users and uses of the evaluation you should not conduct the evaluation. Unused evaluation is a waste of precious human and financial resources.

See **Evaluation Guideline #6: *Identifying the Intended Uses of an Evaluation*** and **Guideline #7: *Identifying the Intended Users of an Evaluation***

3. Audience

The audience is the range of groups and individuals who will be interested in the findings of the evaluation, both within IDRC and outside. In order to reach different audiences, the evaluation findings may have to be packaged and disseminated in a variety of ways.

See **Evaluation Guideline #7: *Identifying the Intended Users of an Evaluation***

4. Responsible Officer

The team leader is accountable for the operationalization of the PI's evaluation plan and may designate a program officer to be responsible for a particular evaluation activity. The responsible officer is the person on the team responsible for ensuring that the evaluation gets designed and implemented in a timely manner. Once the evaluation is included in the prospectus, the responsible officer follows up according to the proposed timeline in order to develop terms of reference, identify consultants, oversee implementation of the study (or implement if it as a self-assessment), disseminate the results and promote its use. S/he should consult with the Evaluation Unit for technical input and to avoid duplication of efforts.

For information on evaluation design and implementation, see **Evaluation Guideline #3: *Formatting evaluation reports at IDRC***; **Guideline #4: *Quality assessment of IDRC evaluation reports***; **Guideline #5: *Writing Terms of Reference***; **Guideline #8: *Selecting and Managing an Evaluation Consultant or Evaluation team***.

5. Timing

This section indicates what year the evaluation is expected to start and end. The timing of the evaluation should be directly related to its intended use. This signals the need to include the evaluation in the PI work plan for that year.

See **Evaluation Guideline #6: *Identifying the Intended Uses of an Evaluation*** and **Guideline #7: *Identifying the Intended Users of an Evaluation***

6. Cost

This section indicates the approximate cost of the evaluation. It represents the anticipated level of effort required to conduct the evaluation and facilitate its use.

See **Evaluation Guideline #5: *Writing Terms of Reference***.

Changing an Evaluation Plan during Implementation of the Prospectus

In order to remain relevant and use-oriented, the evaluation plan may change over the life of the PI. In its annual work planning process, each PI should review its evaluation plan to determine what evaluations are intended for that fiscal year, what will be accomplished and whether or not any issues have arisen which have an impact on the planned activities. The work plan should note both studies planned for the year as well as any changes to the evaluation activities as identified in the prospectus (i.e., studies delayed, modified, or cancelled). The evaluation plan for the year is approved in the PPB work planning process.

Each PI should provide the Evaluation Unit a copy of its work plan for inclusion in the corporate evaluation plan presented annually to the Board of Governors. Each PI's evaluation plan is listed on the Evaluation Unit's intranet site under "Internal Documents", at: http://intranet.idrc.ca/en/ev-50993-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html.

PIs can call on the Evaluation Unit for support in reviewing and revising its evaluation plan at any stage.

The Evaluation Unit provides technical input, facilitates planning and implementation processes, and provides print and electronic resources to support the ongoing evaluation work of PIs.