1998

IDRC Guidelines for Preparing Final Narrative Reports

Submission of Final Narrative Reports

Upon completing a project, recipients of IDRC project grants are expected to submit final narrative and financial reports as a condition for receiving final payment from IDRC.

Final narrative reports explain what was achieved with the money and time spent on a project, while at the same time, drawing lessons from the experience. These reports are becoming more important at a time of increased accountability to the Canadian taxpayer, and are a primary source of information and analysis for IDRC. The narrative report, or parts of it, may be used to publicize or disseminate the results of the project.

The scientific output of a project should not be seen as a substitute for the narrative report. The major scientific outputs of the project should be submitted separately and synthesized in the narrative report. Copies of research instruments, such as questionnaires, interview guides, and any other documentation judged useful to understand the project, may also be submitted.

Depending on the size and complexity of a project, this report may vary in length from two to three single-spaced pages, up to 15 or 20. Two printed copies of each document are required. If possible, the narrative report and accompanying documents should be submitted in electronic form as well.*

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* Text can be prepared in Corel WordPerfect, Microsoft Word, or a text file. The documents should preferably be sent by e-mail to avoid damage in shipment. If diskettes are sent, they should be labelled appropriately with the words "Final Report," the IDRC project number, the software program(s) used, the date, and the sender's name. Graphic files should be named using the three-letter extension that identifies the file format used (i.e., TIFF, GIF, JPEG, etc.).

The research leader should contact the IDRC Program Officer if there are difficulties submitting the report on time.

Using These Guidelines

Although fairly structured guidelines are provided below, we suggest to project leaders that they first consider and then focus on the main messages they would like to convey. IDRC's principal interest in the reports can be summarized under the following questions:

- Did the project meet its objectives?

- What were the most important research findings and outputs of the project? What will be done with them?

- What contribution to development did the project make?

- What activities were supported by the project?

- Were certain aspects of project design, management and implementation particularly important to the degree of success of the project?

- Did the project help build up the research capacity of your institution or of the individuals involved?

- What lessons can be derived to improve future performance?

In sum, the report should be an opportunity to synthesize and assess the main results of the project, while reflecting on the project's management, limitations, and achievements.

IDRC does not wish to impose an undue burden on project leaders in preparing these reports. The amount of effort can be reduced if project leaders are aware of the report's required content from the beginning, so that they can be thinking about it during the life of the project. As an ongoing exercise of self-assessment, this report can be a useful tool for keeping a project on track and for making any necessary adjustments.

Format

The report should include the following:

Title page and table of contents

The title page should include the name of the project, the IDRC project number, the name of the research institution and country where the project was carried out, the names of the research team, and the date of presentation to IDRC. A table of contents is optional, but is recommended for longer documents.

Synthesis

The report should begin with a half-page to one-page synthesis of the project that can be easily disseminated to a wide audience. It should contain the rationale for the project, the research problem that was addressed, the objectives, methodological approach, principal findings, results, and expected impact of the project. The abstract of the project written when the project was initially approved by IDRC and the objectives listed in the Memorandum

of Grant Conditions (MGC) should be useful inputs when preparing this part of the report.

Research problem

The reader should be reminded of the basic rationale of the project and the research problem or problems that were addressed. Often, the researchers' understanding of the problems will have evolved since the project was approved. The report should describe this evolution and the reasons behind it.

Research findings

The main research results should be described and interpreted by highlighting the project's contribution to knowledge from a scientific and policy perspective.

Fulfillment of objectives

The report should address each objective specified in the MGC, including the general objective, and assess the extent to which it was fulfilled. If any objectives were modified, added, or removed during the life of the project, this should be explained. The degree of fulfillment of any new objectives should also be assessed.

Project design and implementation

Briefly describe the activities supported under the project and the period of time covered by these activities. Describe and discuss the research methods and analytical techniques used and any problems that arose. Indicate and explain any changes

in orientation that may have occurred since the project was designed.

If relevant, please comment on specific aspects of project design, such as the following:

- any partnerships with Canadians or with other researchers, and the usefulness of these in achieving the project's objectives;

- the disciplinary orientation of the project;

- the involvement of research users or ultimate beneficiaries, or their representatives, in identifying the project idea, project design and implementation, review of results, and utilization; and

- features addressing gender issues.

Project outputs and dissemination

Provide a listing and self-assessment of project outputs. Identify any outputs that are planned, but which have yet to materialize. Please specify what dissemination efforts were made wherever relevant. Three general categories of outputs can be identified:

- information sharing and dissemination (reports, publications, conferences, websites, CD-ROMs...);

- knowledge creation (new knowledge embodied in forms other than publications or reports, e.g., new technologies, new methodologies, new curricula, new policies...); and

- training (short-term training, internships or fellowships, training seminars and workshops, thesis supervision...).

Capacity building

Indicate what capacity-building impact the project may have had on the following:

- institutional reinforcement and sustainability of the research organization (new equipment, training, improved administrative skills, lessons learned...);

- increased research or administrative skills of the researchers involved; and

- any particular contribution to capacity building of women or marginalized social groups.

Project management

Briefly assess and comment on the quality of project management through all stages of the project cycle with reference to the following:

- administration by the research organization;

- scientific management of the project; and

- technical and other support and administration by IDRC.

Impact

Describe and assess any development impact that the project may have had or might be expected to have. A useful distinction can be made here between the concepts of reach and impact. Reach refers to the reception and use of the knowledge produced. Impact refers to the influence of this new knowledge on decisions or on development more generally. Special attention should be paid to the expected impact on marginalized social groups.

Overall assessment

Briefly provide your own views on the value and importance of the project relative to the investment of time, effort, and funding involved.

Recommendations

Include any recommendations in this section that you would like to make to IDRC.