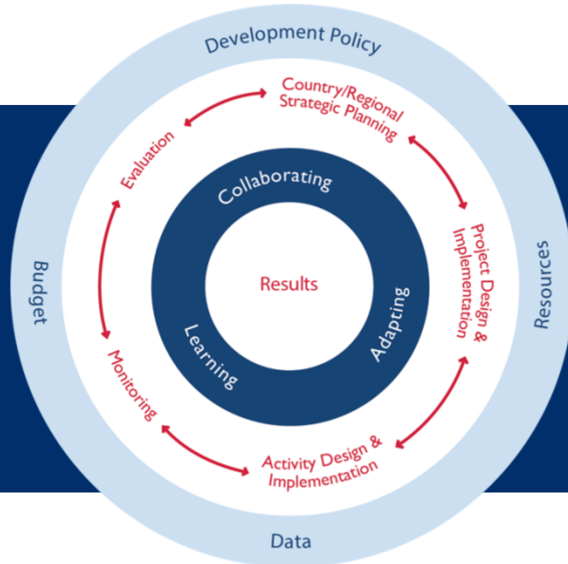

How-To Note: Preparing Evaluation Reports

This Note describes key steps and good practices to creating evaluation reports that are clear, credible, and useful.

Introduction

This Note supplements USAID's Automated Directives System (ADS) 201 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 strategies, projects, and activities. 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 strategies, projects, and activities. 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.

How-To Notes provide guidelines and practical advice to USAID staff and partners related to the Program Cycle. This note was produced by the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL).

Requirements

USAID's Evaluation Policy, ADS 201, ADS 201maa Criteria to Ensure the Quality of the Evaluation Report, and ADS 201mah Evaluation Report Requirements provide guidance on evaluation report quality, structure, content, and steps in the process of creating a report. Per ADS 201maa, the report should present a thoughtful, well-researched, and well-organized effort to objectively evaluate a USAID strategy, intermediate result, project, activity, or intervention within an activity. The report should address all evaluation questions. It should be based on the best methods of appropriate rigor. It should be independent, objective, and unbiased in measuring and reporting. It should adequately capture the situations and experiences of both males and females. Findings, conclusions, and recommendations (if any) should be specific, concise, and supported by strong quantitative and/or qualitative evidence.

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Steps In the Process

1. DEFINE REPORT REQUIREMENTS IN THE EVALUATION STATEMENT OF WORK AND FINAL WORK PLAN

All evaluation statements of work (SOW) **must** specify required elements for the final evaluation report. See ADS 201mab and the How-To Note: Evaluation Statement of Work for further guidance on Evaluation Statements of Work. 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

Per ADS 201.3.6.9. Program Offices **must** ensure that evaluation draft reports are assessed for quality by management and through an in-house peer technical review organized by the office that is managing the evaluation. Comments from the review should be provided to the evaluation team. USAID staff may consider relevant Regional and/or Technical Bureaus and other stakeholders in the review process as appropriate (see ADS 201sai, Managing the Peer Review of a Draft Evaluation Report). Tools such as the USAID Evaluation Report Checklist can be used.

3. STATEMENT OF DIFFERENCES

Draft reports **must** be shared with implementing partners of the projects or activities addressed in the evaluation and with related funders. Implementers, funders, and members of the evaluation team **must** be given the opportunity to write an individual Statement of Difference regarding any significant unresolved differences of opinion. Completed *Statements of Differences* must be attached as an annex to the report.

4. FINAL DRAFT

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.

5. SUBMIT TO DEC AND SHARE FINDINGS WIDELY

Per ADS 201.3.6.10, USAID Program Offices **must** ensure that evaluation final reports, including all annexes, are submitted within three months of completion to the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) 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 Difference*, if appropriate). Operating Units (OUs) **must** also submit data assets created or derived in the process of carrying out an evaluation to the Data Development Library (DDL) (see ADS 579 for more information).

In addition to submission to the DEC, OUs should distribute evaluation results widely, to both internal and external stakeholders. Missions and OUs should update and follow the Evaluation Dissemination Plan developed during the evaluation planning stage and consider dissemination channels in addition to posting the evaluation report and data, such as slide decks, videos, infographics, visualizations, podcasts, posting the report on the USAID Mission website, translating a summary into local language, and hosting presentations of the evaluation findings.

6. USE EVALUATION FINDINGS TO INFORM DECISIONS

The value of an evaluation is in its use. Evaluations should inform decision making and contribute to learning to help improve the quality of development programs. Per 201.3.6.10, Mission and Washington OUs **must** develop a Post-Evaluation Action Plan upon completion of an evaluation, with a designated point of contact who will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the action plan. While the Program Office in a Mission should ensure this happens, it is the responsibility of all USAID staff. Further guidance and templates for Post-Evaluation Action Plans are available in the Evaluation Toolkit.

Format and Content

GENERAL STYLE

When writing a report, the evaluation team should always remember the primary audience. The primary audience is usually specific to the evaluation, and may include project managers, activity CORs/AORs, policymakers, and direct stakeholders. Per ADS 201maa, Evaluation reports should use clear language per the USAID Style Guide. Keep the use of acronyms to a minimum.

USAID GRAPHIC STANDARDS

Per ADS 201.3.6.9 and ADS 201mah, the evaluation report **must** conform to USAID branding requirements and align with the USAID Graphic Standards Manual and Partner Co-Branding Guide. Evaluation reports may use the USAID Evaluation Report template. 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.

Per ADS 201mah, Evaluation reports **must** comply with section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (see ADS 302mak, USAID Implementation of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973).

REPORT SECTIONS AND CONTENT

At a minimum, all reports should include a Cover, Abstract, Title Page, Table of Contents, Executive Summary, Main Body Text, and Annexes. The Main Body Text of the report should include the evaluation purpose and questions, background, methods and limitations, and findings, conclusions, and recommendations (if requested). Reports may include additional content, split the sections up differently, or present the sections in a different order.

Cover

Per ADS 201mah, the evaluation cover **must** align with the USAID Graphic Standards Manual and Partner Co-Branding Guide. It **must** include enough information on the cover of the evaluation report so that a reader can immediately understand that it is an evaluation and what was evaluated. Per ADS201mah, all evaluation report covers should:

- Include the word "Evaluation" at the top of the title block and center the report title underneath that. The title should also include the word "evaluation."
- Include the following statement across the bottom of the cover page: "This publication was produced at the request of the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared independently by [list authors and organizations involved in the preparation of the report]." For an internal evaluation team, use the following statement: "This publication was produced at the request of [USAID/Mission or OU] and prepared by an internal evaluation team comprised of [list authors and affiliation]."
- Feature one high-quality photograph representative of the strategy, project, activity, or intervention being evaluated and include a brief caption on the inside front cover describing the image with photographer credit.
- State the month and year of report publication (e.g., when final and approved by USAID Operating Unit).
- State the individual authors of the report and identify the evaluation team leader.

Evaluation Title

Per ADS 201mah, the title of the report **must** identify the evaluation as either an impact or performance evaluation per the definitions in ADS 201.3.6.4. 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. Per ADS 540.3.2.8, the title **must** be in English when submitted to the Development Experience Clearinghouse. Good practice for titles includes:

- Composing a title that is informative, clear, and compelling (e.g., "Improving Community Health in Fredonia: Performance Evaluation of the USAID/Fredonia Community Health Project").
- Avoiding acronyms and partner names (e.g., "XYZ LTD Evaluation").

Abstract

Per ADS 201mah, the evaluation **must** include an abstract of not more than 500 words briefly describing the evaluation questions, intervention evaluated, methods, and key findings. The abstract should appear on its own page immediately after the evaluation report cover.

Title Page

The report title should be repeated on the title page. 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."

Table of Contents

This comes before any content referenced in the table of contents with the exception of the Abstract, which comes between the cover and the table of contents. Sufficient detail should be provided to guide the reader through the report, including page numbers.

Acronyms List

If acronyms are used, define all acronyms in the report by including an acronym list in the beginning of the report.

Executive Summary

Per ADS 201mah, the evaluation report **must** include an executive summary of two to five pages in length, that summarizes these key points:

- Evaluation purpose
- Evaluation questions
- Intervention being evaluated
- Evaluation methods
- Findings and conclusions
- Recommendations (if included)

The executive summary should stand alone as an abbreviated version of the report and should contain no new information.

Main Body Text

Most of the evaluation report consists of the main body text. As noted, this should include sections that describe the evaluation purpose and questions, background, methods and limitations, and findings, conclusions, and recommendations (if requested). However, the report may split these sections up differently or present these sections in a different order.

Evaluation Purpose and Questions

This section should describe the evaluation purpose and the evaluation questions in approximately one to two pages.

Per ADS 201mah, the evaluation report must state the commissioning Operating Unit as well as the purpose of, audience for, and anticipated use(s) of the evaluation. The evaluation purpose should clearly describe why the evaluation is being conducted now. The description of the audience for the evaluation may include both primary and secondary audiences including audiences both internal and external to USAID. The anticipated use(s) should describe any specific decisions that will be informed by the evaluation.

Per ADS 201mah, the evaluation report must state the evaluation questions. The evaluation questions are linked to the purpose, so should be listed along with the purpose. Per ADS 201mah, impact evaluations will include questions about measuring the magnitude of change in specific outcomes attributable to a specific USAID intervention. Per ADS 205, evaluation reports must identify all evaluation questions requiring sex-disaggregated data, the use of gender sensitive data collection methods, and analysis of sex-specific differential impacts.

Background

This section should summarize relevant background information in approximately one to three pages.

Per ADS 201mah, the evaluation report must describe:

- what is being evaluated (e.g., a strategy, intermediate result, project, activity, or intervention within an activity),
- the timeline showing dates of implementation,
- major events impacting implementation of the strategy, intermediate result, project, activity, or intervention being evaluated,
- award numbers,
- award dates,
- funding levels, and
- implementing partners.

Per ADS 201mah, the evaluation report **must** also provide brief background information on the strategy, intermediate result, project, activity, or intervention evaluated. This should include country and/or sector context; the specific problem or opportunity the intervention addresses; and, where available, the development hypothesis, theory of change, or simply how the intervention addresses the problem. It may also include other relevant background information, such as any changes that have occurred since the intervention started, a description of the beneficiary population, and the geographic area of the intervention. If a Country Development Cooperation Strategy results framework or logical model (for projects or activities) is available, these may be included here as well.

Methods and Limitations

This section should provide a detailed description within one to three pages of the evaluation methods, why they were chosen, and their strengths and limitations. If more space is needed, additional detailed information on the methods should be provided in an annex.

Per ADS 201mah, the evaluation report **must** identify existing and relevant strategy, project, or activity documents or performance information sources that were used, including monitoring data.

Per ADS 201mah, all evaluation reports **must** describe the evaluation method(s) for data collection and analysis including sampling strategy, number of days of fieldwork, and evaluation team composition.

Per ADS 201mah, the following are additional requirements for *impact evaluation* reports:

- An evaluation question response describing the extent to which implementation of the intervention evaluated followed the work plan. Any major challenges in implementation **must** be noted. If only part of an activity or project is being evaluated, the narrative description will focus on that part. This allows readers to better understand if the lack of, or limited, effect of an intervention was due to the design, or implementation, of the intervention.
- A detailed description of the method of deriving the comparison (i.e., control) group. If a quasi-experimental method was used, it is required that the report provide an explanation of how the comparison group was formed and the data sources used to identify the comparison group of respondents (e.g., government administrative data list or census or evaluator conducted household survey). If details have already been provided in a previous report, it is sufficient to provide a link to that report or provide the details in an annex.
- A statistical balance table showing how comparable the comparison group is to the treatment group on key observable variables. A balance table provides a demonstration of a "credible and rigorously defined counterfactual" as required by the USAID Evaluation Policy. If details have already been provided in a previous report, it is sufficient to provide a link to that report or provide the details in an annex.

Per ADS 201mah, the evaluation report **must** describe strengths and limitations of the evaluation methodology and other factors which affected the evaluation quality.

Based on this section, the reader should be able 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.

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 and Conclusions

Findings and conclusions should make up the majority of 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.

Per ADS 201mah, the evaluation report **must** include evaluation findings and conclusions.

Per ADS 201mah, the evaluation report **must** address all evaluation questions in the statement of work or document in the annex approval by USAID for not addressing an evaluation question.

The reader should be able to discern what evidence supports the conclusions. Whenever possible, data should be presented visually in easy-to-read charts, tables, graphs, and maps to demonstrate the evidence that supports conclusions. All graphics **must** have a title, be clearly labeled, and include a caption.

Per ADS 201mah, the following are additional requirements for *impact evaluation* reports:

- Statistical output tables showing the difference in the effect size between treatment and control groups with standard errors reported. If details have already been provided in a previous report, it is sufficient to provide a link to that report or provide the details in an annex.
- A statistical table showing the minimum detectable effect size of each outcome variable analyzed. This is the minimum amount of change in a variable that the study can determine was caused by the intervention. In the case that an impact evaluation finds no impact attributable to the intervention, information about the minimum detectable effect size allows the reader to determine whether this is likely due to a lack of actual impact of the intervention or weak statistical power of the study. If details have already been provided in a previous report, it is sufficient to provide a link to that report or provide the details in an annex.
- Per ADS 201.3.6.4, include a section on the mandatory cost analysis.

Recommendations

(if requested in the evaluation SOW)

Recommendations 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 recommendations.

Per ADS 201mah, if recommendations are included, the evaluation report **must** separate them from findings and conclusions.

Annexes

Per ADS 201mah, all evaluation reports **must** include the following as annexes:

- Timeline showing dates of data collection, baseline and subsequent data collection, if applicable.
- Evaluation statement of work. If the statement of work was revised over the course of the evaluation, the evaluation report should include the updated statement of work as an annex which describes major changes and reasons for those changes. The Contracting Officer's Representative of the evaluation **must** agree upon, in writing, all modifications to the statement of work, whether technical requirements, evaluation questions, evaluation team composition, methodology, or timeline.
- A description of evaluation methods and limitations (if not described in full in the main body of the evaluation report). If details have already been provided in a previous report, it is sufficient to provide a link to that report or provide the details in an annex.
- All data collection and analysis tools used, such as questionnaires, checklists, survey instruments, and discussion guides. Translation into English is at the discretion of the Mission.

- All sources of information—properly identified and listed. Include any existing and relevant strategy, project, or activity documents or performance information sources that were used, including monitoring data.
- Any statements of difference submitted per ADS 201.3.6.9 regarding significant unresolved differences of opinion by funders, implementers, and/or members of the evaluation team.
- Signed disclosures of conflicts of interest from evaluation team members.
- Summary information about evaluation team members, including qualifications, experience, and role on the team.

Additional annexes can be included at the discretion of the evaluation team and USAID, and in some cases implementing partners.

OTHER REPORT REQUIREMENTS

Per ADS 201mah, prior to public dissemination, evaluation reports **must** be adjusted to remove information, if any, that falls under one of the "principled exceptions to the presumption in favor of openness" as described in ADS 201mae, Limitations to Disclosure and Exemptions to Public Dissemination of USAID Evaluation Reports. Any adjustments **must** be disclosed or marked within the report.

COMPANION PRODUCTS

Per ADS 201.3.6.9, Operating Units may request other dissemination products as a means of sharing an evaluation's findings, such as a summary in the form of a PowerPoint or similar presentation. USAID staff should consider such products to include in the evaluation. Additional options 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.

USAID Evaluation Policy

ADS 201 Program Cycle Operational Policy

ADS 201maa Criteria to Ensure the Quality of the Evaluation Report

ADS 201mah USAID Evaluation Report Requirements

Evaluation Report Template

Sample Disclosure of Conflict of Interests Form

USAID Graphic Standards Manual