



Canadian International
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de
développement international

How to Perform Evaluations - □

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Evaluation Reports

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Canada 

HOW TO PERFORM EVALUATIONS

EVALUATION REPORTS

PERFORMANCE REVIEW BRANCH

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About this Series...

Evaluations are a key contributor to CIDA's performance measurement and reporting system.

These guides describe the Agency's expectations for delivery to help ensure effective, consistent work practices.

Bringing a Focus to...

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Building value through results

Evaluations are expected to contribute value to sustainable development. Understanding what works, what doesn't and what should be improved promotes informed decision-making about programming choices, approaches and practices. Good evaluation reports serve this process by accurately distilling and clearly articulating what is learned from evaluations.

The report itself comprises the most enduring expression of value. Recommendations put forward can enhance CIDA programming in the field. Beneficiaries can gain from their participation in developing results. New knowledge can be shared with the larger development cooperation community.

It is critical that CIDA management is properly and adequately informed about the performance of its programs. Yet preparing evaluation reports represents a formidable challenge. Evaluators are asked to fairly and objectively identify credible, reliable and useful results that are directly attributable to the investment being assessed.

This Guide was prepared to assist evaluators faced with the task of preparing evaluation reports. A focus is brought to:
1) identifying what CIDA expects from evaluation reports,
2) instilling a results-based approach to their preparation, and
3) enhancing the value-added of the final product.

This Guide serves as a companion piece
to CIDA's Evaluation Guide

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CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

ROLE OF THE EVALUATION REPORT

Maximizing the learning potential

Defining Success

The reporting of results should be aligned with and respond to the Agency's *Framework of Results and Key Success Factors* to maintain a focus on what constitutes achievement in the eyes of the Agency.

Informing CIDA Management

The *primary function* of evaluation reports is to inform CIDA management about the findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned developed through the assessment process. In fact, decisions to carry out evaluations are typically predicated on requirements for performance information expressed by Agency managers.

Advising Executing Agencies

Individuals involved in program/project delivery have an intrinsic need to know how the initiatives they are involved with are performing and what recommendations are being advanced.

Promoting Knowledge

Information sharing with local beneficiaries, recipient governments, NGOs and other donor agencies helps to build new knowledge about effective practices, and generate understanding and support for what the Agency is trying to accomplish. Participants in the evaluation process can reflect on development activities and become engaged in the strengthening of Agency programming.

Demonstrating Accountability and Transparency

Canadians expect federal institutions to be values-based and results-driven. To this end, evaluation reports set out levels of performance and measure the appropriateness of resource allocations in the use of public funds.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

Focusing on results

Understanding Expectations

The task before you is to prepare an evaluation report that describes your assessment of the performance of the subject program/project and brings forward key information that responds to a number of critical questions:

- ☑ What have you learned that provides answers to the evaluation questions raised in the workplan? What does the evidence indicate and support?
- ☑ What results were achieved by CIDA's investment relative to the expectations established during planning and design? What were the unintended results, if any?
- ☑ What recommendations would help to improve CIDA programming, both specific to this investment and more widely?
- ☑ What was learned from the evaluation that could benefit other development cooperation initiatives?

In developing responses to these questions, evaluators are expected to follow a progression in logic to arrive at useful and valid interpretations of the information collected. A credible evaluation methodology is one that uses multiple data sources and directly ties results to the investment being evaluated.

The attribution of results involves eliminating other explanations to determine causal inferences. Evaluators are to rely on assumption, logical argument and/or empirical analysis in reaching this goal.

Essential Reporting Elements

The following outline meets CIDA's expectations:

Executive Summary
Introduction
Program/Project Profile
Evaluation Profile
Evaluation Findings
Conclusion
Recommendations
Lessons Learned
Appendices

Questions & Answers

Before you start, a quick read of the following may prove useful.

Q: Who is responsible for what?

A: Typically, evaluators prepare evaluation reports to meet the requirements established by the terms of reference and the evaluation workplan. CIDA's assigned manager is expected to ensure a final product that: 1) meets contractual obligations and professional standards, 2) fairly and accurately assesses the performance of the subject program/project, and 3) provides useful and credible responses to the evaluation questions.

Q: What should the report look like?

A: The evaluation workplan sets out the outline for the evaluation report that has been agreed to by the evaluator and the Agency's manager. Before starting to write the report, however, the evaluator should consult with CIDA's manager to elaborate on the structure and contents of the report in order to gain a mutual understanding of the expectations for delivery. Agreement should also be reached on the time frame for completion.

Q: How long should the report be?

A: In general, the level of detail should be adequate to effectively inform about key audiences of what was learned from the evaluation and recommend substantive ways for improving CIDA programming. Longer texts may be required for investments of higher value and complexity. Keep in mind that clarity and succinctness can lead to higher readership as few of us have the time to read lengthy reports.

Q: How is what we learn from evaluations used?

A: Evaluators and CIDA alike favour seeing recommendations implemented and information broadly shared. Sometimes, however, this will not – nor should – happen. CIDA management brings a broader understanding of context, concerns, and limitations to the table that can influence decisions on information dissemination. The prerogative to determine the use of information should not be used to avoid taking difficult courses of action where warranted.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE REPORT WRITING

The following ideas may help you to visualize what you are getting into, and establish some basic values for keeping report preparation focused on what is to be accomplished.

- ☑ Think about how the evaluation results will be used from the outset of the evaluation. Recommendations and lessons learned will be of greater value if they are designed to facilitate implementation. Limit the number put forward based on significance and value.
- ☑ Write for all key audiences. Sensitivity to the differences in knowledge, expertise and information requirements of different audiences should be an important consideration in report preparation. Contents should be easily understood by readers with little or no technical knowledge. Translations may be necessitated to address the linguistic requirements of various audiences.
- ☑ Understanding and learning are enhanced when reports are written clearly and concisely, and main points are precisely articulated. Make every effort to minimize the risk of misinterpretations of what is being reported.
- ☑ Make reports visually appealing by using attractive layouts, graphics and colours. This often enhances the likelihood of people picking up and reading the report.
- ☑ Keep CIDA's *Framework of Results and Key Success Factors* as a handy reference throughout report preparation to maintain a consistent focus on factors that are valued by the Agency.
- ☑ Make sure that the recommendations are realistic given the context of development and doable within budgetary constraints.

WRITING THE REPORT SECTION-BY-SECTION

Below we elaborate on key elements of the evaluation report, setting out the Agency's expectations for content and level of detail.



1 Executive Summary

A concise synopsis of the report is to be prepared that provides an overview of all substantive elements of the evaluation, while emphasizing performance highlights, recommendations and lessons learned.

Our experience shows that the executive summary is more influential and has higher readership than the main body of the report. It is usually used to inform senior Agency management and CIDA's corporate memory system. Length is typically kept to six-to-ten pages.

Checklist

- Is the reader left with a clear and basic understanding of what **both** the investment and the evaluation are all about? Are purpose, scope and context adequately described? Are methodologies briefly explained?
- Does the performance assessment respond to the evaluation questions and address the issues?
- Do we learn how the investment is performing relative to the results expected during planning and design?
- Are the recommendations and lessons learned explained briefly yet concisely?

2 Introduction

Briefly identify the purpose of the report and the scope of the investment and evaluation. You may also wish to acknowledge those individuals who contributed to the evaluation. This section should be no longer than a page.

3 Program/Project Profile

Your profile should describe the context for development in the recipient country and key aspects of the investment itself to develop a well-rounded understanding of its role, expectations and current status.

Checklist

- Have you addressed the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions and the state of infrastructure/organization that characterize the context for development?
- How was CIDA's investment linked to poverty reduction, sustainable development, local needs, gender equality and other programming priorities? What results were expected to be achieved?
- Have you explained: 1) how the investment is organized, 2) milestones/achievements to date, 3) financial resourcing, 4) stakeholder participation, and 5) any obstacles impacting performance?

4 Evaluation Profile

This section should provide an overview of the evaluation, describe the methodology used and explain who was accountable for what on the evaluation team. Performance expectations should be drawn from the evaluation framework.

Checklist

- Are the reasons for carrying out this evaluation logical and clear?
- Is the logic that forged the evaluation design explained?
- Have you identified what was expected to be achieved by this evaluation?
- Are we informed about how stakeholders contributed to this evaluation?
- Does the write-up on methodology explain how the evaluation questions were addressed? What limitations were experienced?
- Are performance indicators, sources of information and the methods for information collection/analysis described?
- Is the evaluation team adequately profiled?

5 Evaluation Findings

Present your findings by responding to the evaluation questions. Findings constitute affirmations based on the information collected. The reader should be able to link results with the evidence gathered. References should be made to identifiable information sources.

This section is typically the longest of the report.

Checklist

- Do your findings collectively provide a thorough understanding of what was learned from this evaluation? Has significance been appropriately assigned in your presentation?
- Are you satisfied that your findings are valid? Are they supported by the evidence?

6 Conclusion

Your overall assessment of performance should indicate: 1) what results have been achieved, and 2) how they compare with the expectations set out during investment planning and design. CIDA's *Framework of Results and Key Success Factors* is to play an integral role in determining which results are highlighted (e.g. poverty reduction, contribution to sustainable development, cost-effectiveness, relevance to local needs/ country priorities).

Checklist

- Have you provided a thorough assessment that clearly and fairly articulates how the subject program/project is really performing?
- Does the conclusion tie the results achieved to the *Agency's Framework of Results and Key Success Factors*?
- Does your presentation of results facilitate informed decision-making?

7 Recommendations

Recommendations are individual statements derived from the evidence that prescribe who should do what in the future. They provide suggestions for introducing improvements and/or identify matters for follow-up.

Evaluators should explain the basis for making the recommendations, with linkages to the information collected in the evaluation. Both the interpretation of evidence and the basis for judgment should be addressed.

Recommendations should be prescriptive (i.e. "CIDA should...").

Checklist

- Are your recommendations: 1) supported by the evidence, 2) appropriate given what was learned, and 3) adequate in terms of coverage?
- Have the recommendations been written to facilitate implementation?

8 Lessons Learned

What is learned from an evaluation can have value for future development cooperation activities and/or managerial/administrative practices. In formulating lessons learned, evaluators should use their expertise and experience to see the potential offered by broader applications. Usually, no more than a half dozen lessons learned are crafted, with an onus being placed on usefulness and pragmatism.

Checklist

- Are the lessons learned: 1) supported by the evidence, 2) significant, and 3) an adequate expression of the entire learning experience?
- Have the lessons learned been written to facilitate implementation?

9 Appendices

Typically, appendices amplify, illustrate or elaborate, but are not essential to understanding what is being presented. Using appendices avoids interrupting the flow of the report and the focus of the reader.

Appendices may include terms of reference for the evaluation, lists of acronyms used and individuals consulted, bibliography, etc. If appendices are extensive/highly technical, they can be bound in separate volumes.

This series of guides are designed for internal application. They should, in no way, be viewed as defining or modifying CIDA Policy.

We welcome any suggestions to improve our work.

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