NEW ZEALAND
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE
Aid Programme

Evaluating an Activity

GUIDELINE

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Overview

This guideline supports the process *Evaluate an Activity*. It applies only when MFAT commissions an evaluation. It is intended for use by MFAT staff managing the New Zealand Aid Programme.

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Plan the evaluation

1. Establish the need, purpose and process for the evaluation

Establish that an evaluation is necessary

In order to establish that an evaluation is necessary, refer to the *Activity Evaluation Operational* Policy.

To decide whether to conduct a non-mandatory evaluation, refer to the *Evaluation Decision Matrix* in appendix A and the *Activity Evaluation Decision Checklist* in appendix B of the *Activity Evaluation Operational Policy*.

Discuss the evaluation with your Deputy Director or Development Counsellor who will make the final decision on whether an evaluation will be undertaken, and provide ongoing support.

Establish the purpose of the evaluation

Discuss and agree the purpose of the evaluation with stakeholders and partners (before initiating development of the terms of reference). The depth, nature and timing of evaluations depend on the type of Activity and the information required by stakeholders and decision-makers. Refer to the *Activity Evaluation Operational Policy* for further information on the purposes of evaluation.

Ask yourself and key stakeholders the following key questions:

- Why is this evaluation being undertaken, e.g. learning, improvement/decision making, and/or accountability?
- What will the results be used for?
- For whom is the evaluation being undertaken, i.e. to whom will the results be primarily reported?
- Why is the evaluation being undertaken at this time?

Establish who will manage the evaluation

Refer to the rules in the *Activity Evaluation Operational Policy* on 'managing an evaluation'. If the activity manager has a conflict of interest (for example the activity manager may have been highly involved in the design and/or implementation of the Activity) that is likely to jeopardise the evaluation then management of the evaluation should be transferred to another person at the discretion of the Deputy Director or Development Counsellor.

Establish the process of the evaluation

A decision is made at the outset of the evaluation about what organisation will lead and commission the evaluation and therefore whether the *Activity Evaluation Operation Policy* and *Activity Evaluation Guidelines* apply to the evaluation.

Commissioning an evaluation defined

An evaluation is considered to be commissioned by MFAT if both:

- MFAT is a formal party to the decision to evaluate and
- MFAT will manage the evaluation (including contracting, sign off of key documents and ensuring the delivery and quality of the evaluation).

Partner-led evaluations

Explore the opportunity for a partner-led evaluation in the first instance. If a partner commissions and leads an evaluation then expected quality standards for the evaluation should be clearly stated in contractual arrangements (refer to the *Activity Evaluation Operational Policy*). The New Zealand Aid Programme evaluation quality standards in appendix B of the *Activity Evaluation Operational Policy* could be used to guide the standards required. Whether other standards and processes in this guidance are used in the evaluation is negotiated with the partner organisation.

Joint evaluations

If a partner-led evaluation is not appropriate or feasible, consider a joint evaluation. A joint evaluation should particularly be undertaken if the Activity is co-funded or managed with another donor or partner, if other partner organisations are planning a similar evaluation at a similar time, or if the information from the evaluation will be of shared interest.

Where MFAT is working jointly with partner organisations, MFAT acts as a partner in the evaluation. This means:

- Sharing leadership and/or management responsibilities between MFAT and partner organisation
- Negotiating which principles, standards and processes in the Activity Evaluation Operational Policy and this Activity Evaluation Guideline, or partner documents, are used.
- Negotiating the level and nature of a 'joint' evaluation, roles and responsibilities

Consensus and decisions need to be made at the outset about the:

- Purpose, objectives, scope and approach of the evaluation (an initial scoping paper is useful for this)
- Communication methods, mechanisms for decision making (eg steering group), contracting, administration and cost sharing
- Implementation, feedback, reporting and follow-up
- How Terms of reference (TOR) will be developed

A joint evaluation could mean:

- Sharing all or some of data gathering, analytical work and findings
- Separate donor/partner evaluations, but linkages and interrelationships between evaluations.

Making decisions and achieving consensus around these issues can take considerable time. This needs to be factored into evaluation planning.

Participation in evaluation

It is important to encourage as much participation in the evaluation as possible. Refer to the *Participatory Evaluation Guideline* to decide how a participatory approach is applicable to your evaluation.

1a. For non-mandatory evaluations, approve the proposed evaluation

Where an evaluation is non-mandatory the decision to evaluate is approved by the Deputy Director/Development Counsellor.

Use the decision checklist in appendix B of the *Activity Evaluation Operational Policy* to approve the proposed evaluation. The checklist table is signed by the Deputy Director/Development Counsellor.

2. Plan the timing, roles and responsibilities of the evaluation

The activity manager plans the timing, roles and responsibilities of the evaluation before commencing any work. The time required for each evaluation will be different depending on the purpose, scope and complexity of the evaluation.

It is very important to initiate the evaluation early enough for it to be completed and the evaluation information available to meet the purpose of the evaluation. There needs to be a balance between allowing time for consultation and partnership, and ensuring a timely evaluation. In particular, allow <u>at least</u> one week for managing feedback on the evaluation plan (step 9) and two weeks for managing feedback on the draft report (step 12).

A timetable and process schedule for the evaluation can be prepared as in the example in appendix A of this guideline.

3. Establish governance and management arrangements and complete the Steering Group TOR

The difference between governance and management of an evaluation is that:

- Governance involves overseeing the evaluation and decision making (the function of the Steering Group)
- Management involves ensuring operational matters are addressed as they arise (the role of the activity manager).

Evaluations of low and medium risk Activities with a total value over $1 million, and high risk evaluations with a value over $500,000 require a steering group unless a Deputy Director or Development Counsellor approves otherwise. Refer to the *Activity Evaluation Operational Policy* for rules on when a steering group is necessary to govern the evaluation.

The activity manager discusses and agrees the governance and management arrangements for the evaluation with partner organisation(s), Deputy Director or Development Counsellor, and other relevant MFAT staff and stakeholders. This includes:

- Whether a steering group is needed, and if so who should be on it
- Management roles and responsibilities of MFAT staff in Wellington and at post

If there is no evaluation steering group then the Deputy Director or Development Counsellor fills this decision-making role.

For real-time disaster response evaluations, a steering group is not necessary.

Steering group membership

Keep the steering group small with a minimum of two, and maximum of five members. Members should represent key stakeholders as appropriate, e.g. New Zealand Government, partner government and partner implementing agencies, other governments and beneficiary representatives, with due consideration to the issue of independence.

In many instances, the partner government will have a significant stake in the results of the evaluation, and should be on the steering group.

In all cases of MFAT-commissioned evaluations, the MFAT representative on the steering group (normally the Deputy Director or Development Counsellor) is the chair (refer to the *Activity Evaluation Operational Policy*).

The activity manager is *not* a member of the steering group, in order that the governance and management roles are separated and the governance is seen to be objective. The activity manager will attend meetings unless the steering group chair requests that they do not.

Steering group formation and meetings

If a steering group is needed, then the activity manager drafts a brief (1-page) terms of reference for the steering group using the *Terms of Reference for Evaluation Steering Group* template.

4. Approve the steering group terms of reference

The terms of reference for the evaluation steering group are approved by the Deputy Director or the Development Counsellor for the team responsible for commissioning the evaluation.

Following approval, the activity manager:

- Sends a copy of the approved TOR to the steering group members for their information
- Coordinates and attends meetings, contributes information and ensures meetings are minuted.

Prepare TOR and establish the evaluation team

5. Manage the development of the terms of reference for the evaluation

The activity manager should manage the development of the terms of reference using the template *Terms of Reference for Evaluations*. The terms of reference clearly set out the requirements and expectations of an evaluation. They are referred to in any contract with external parties.

Decide with partners who will first draft the evaluation terms of reference. Ensure that the drafting and consultation processes result in a shared understanding and consensus of what is expected from the evaluation.

The evaluation objectives or evaluation questions must include appropriate analysis of **cross-cutting issues** in the Activity.

A question on value for money is normally asked in the TOR in order to assess the efficiency of an Activity. Value for money is an assessment of the outputs, outcomes, or changes brought about by the work (value) compared with the resources used (money). Refer to the *Value for Money Guideline* for more information.

Frame the question or request for value for money analysis in the TOR to reflect the fact that the evaluation can examine value for money in several ways. For example, it can:

- Compare the cost of the intervention with experience or norms in other activities (in the same country/region or internationally), where similar outcomes have been aimed for and/or achieved.
- Analyse the Activity's cost structures to identify efficiency issues, including whether savings could have been made (without disproportionately compromising outcomes) through different methods or management, procurement, prioritisation, design, etc.
- Make an assessment of whether better outcomes could have been achieved for the same cost.

There may also be other appropriate ways in which value for money can be assessed eg cost/benefit analysis.

6. Approve the terms of reference for the evaluation

The steering group chair or the Deputy Director or Development Counsellor (in cases where there is no steering group) reviews and approves the evaluation terms of reference.

7. Establish (select and contract) the evaluation team

Evaluations can be conducted by an individual or a multi-disciplinary evaluation team. This guideline refers to an evaluation undertaken by a team. However all the steps can be undertaken by an individual evaluator.

Independence and the evaluation team

Activity evaluations are usually undertaken by independent (contracted) evaluators to make the evaluation as independent as possible. (Refer to the New Zealand Aid Programme evaluation principles described in the *Activity Evaluation Operational Policy.)*

MFAT staff members or staff of partner organisations may compromise the level of independence of an evaluation if the staff member has been involved in the design or implementation of the Activity. In such cases, they should not be involved.

There may be circumstances where it may be beneficial for staff members of MFAT or partner organisations to be part of the evaluation team to maximise learning or to provide important knowledge or context or for professional development.

The questions below will help you to decide if the evaluation needs to be undertaken by independent evaluators. If the answer to any of these questions is YES, then it is recommended that MFAT or partner staff are *not* included in the evaluation team.

- Do the evaluation questions require information from participants that could be compromised if an MFAT or partner staff member were to be present at participant interviews/focus groups, or known to be involved in analysing information?
- Does the evaluation ask for information that could be biased (either positively or negatively) if an MFAT/partner staff member is on the evaluation team?
- Where the purpose of the evaluation is 'accountability' (requiring the assessment of the Activity's performance), could this be compromised by a non-independent evaluator?
- Do the evaluation conclusions/recommendations need to be perceived to have been reached by an independent unbiased evaluator with no conflicts of interest?

Select the team

Using the list of key attributes identified in the terms of reference and taking into consideration the need for independence, decide the best mix of internal MFAT, contracted external team members and/or team members from partner organisations. An experienced evaluator should always be included in the team.

Also carefully consider the need for local team members and what role they will have in team, and what role international team members will have. This will vary from country to country and depending on the nature of the evaluation.

The team may be led by either an internal or an external team member.

The team should reflect gender and ethnic concerns of the Activity.

Steering group acts as the selection panel

In cases where a steering group is established, the steering group members should act as the selection panel for evaluation team members. However, once evaluators are selected, the steering group has no role in managing contractors. This is the responsibility of the activity manager.

Contract the external evaluators

Follow the appropriate contracting processes to contract external evaluators to be team members/team leader. See the *Contracting Policy and Guidelines*.

8. Brief the evaluator or evaluation team

Arrange for a briefing for the evaluator or evaluation team so that they understand the country and Activity context. The briefing may include meetings with the key steering group members and Deputy Director or Development Counsellor if appropriate.

Prior to the briefing, provide copies of all necessary documents for the evaluation to the evaluation team. Provide a list of key contacts. Ensure that team members receive copies of and understand New Zealand Aid Programme policies on crosscutting issues, and other policies relevant to the evaluation.

When briefing the evaluation team, the activity manager should:

- Discuss the terms of reference and evaluation process with the team, including identification and resolution of any issues.
- Explain which objectives (if any) have greater emphasis or priority.
- Explain the expectations for an evaluation plan; provide the *Evaluation Plan template* (for evaluators to use as a guide to format and headings) and examples if necessary.

- Explain that if any variance to the evaluation plan is required during implementation of the evaluation then evaluators must inform and discuss changes with the activity manager who will in turn inform the steering group if the changes are significant.
- Explain the quality standards required of the evaluation. Refer to appendix C of the *Activity Evaluation Operational Policy* for a summary of the standards.
- Explain the review process for the evaluation plan and report and what aspects reviewers will address (respecting the independence of the evaluation team).
- Describe evaluation management and governance arrangements.
- Present and discuss the results framework (which is normally developed at the design stage) for the Activity and discuss any changes to the framework that have occurred. If there is no results framework for the Activity (or it is not adequate for the evaluation) then explain that a framework will need to be developed for the evaluation (drafted in the evaluation plan). Refer the *Evaluation Plan template*.
- Discuss monitoring information and reports, and the extent to which the results framework has been used to guide Activity monitoring and reporting.
- Discuss in-country arrangements if appropriate and provide details of key contacts.
- Answer any questions the team may have about the evaluation.

Prepare the evaluation plan

9. Develop the evaluation plan

The evaluation team prepares an evaluation plan which:

- Explains how the evaluation purpose and objectives will be fulfilled by the evaluation
- Addresses the evaluation principles and approach specified in the TOR
- Explains the detailed methodology (design) of the evaluation
- Describes the stakeholders who will be part of the evaluation
- Describes how ethical standards will be upheld
- Identifies any potential constraints and how they will be managed.

The evaluation team should use the *Evaluation Plan template* but note that not all headings in the template are needed for every evaluation and those not used can be deleted.

9a. Manage review of the evaluation plan

The draft evaluation plan is reviewed by the steering group. The activity manager forwards copies of the *Feedback on Activity Evaluation Plan or Report template* to reviewers after having edited it to ensure it is appropriate for the reviewers to complete. When copies of the completed template have been received back from the reviewers, and decisions have been made on changes required by the steering group, the activity manager summarises the feedback in a separate copy of the *Feedback on Activity Evaluation Plan or Report template* and forwards to the evaluation team.

Revisions may be required if the plan is unclear, or some aspects are not described in sufficient detail to give the steering group confidence that the objectives set out in the evaluation terms of reference will be achieved and the evaluation purpose fulfilled.

10. Approve the evaluation plan

The steering group chair or the Deputy Director or Development Counsellor (in cases where there is no steering group) approves the evaluation plan. The evaluation plan **must** be approved prior to the start of any substantial work (including field work). In some cases field work may be needed to test/confirm a results framework. It may therefore only be the draft results framework that is signed off in the evaluation plan.

Once the evaluation plan is approved, the evaluation plan stands as a formal agreement of the work that will be conducted in the evaluation and supersedes the TOR where there are differences.

If the evaluation plan results in a material change to the contract, a variation to the contract with external evaluators is required. Normal contract variations policy and processes apply. See *Contract Variations* in the Contracting Policy section of the *Contracting Policy and Guidelines*.

Undertake and report the evaluation

11. Undertake the evaluation and draft a report

The evaluation is undertaken as described in the evaluation plan. If any significant variance to the evaluation plan is required during the evaluation, evaluators must inform the activity manager, and wait for approval of the variance from the activity manager before proceeding.

The *Evaluation Report template* should be used to guide the format and content of the draft report. The evaluator/evaluation team is responsible for checking that all findings in the evaluation (including participants' responses) are accurately recorded in the report.

Any classified or private information that could prevent the public release of the report should be excluded from the report and provided in a completely separate document.

12. Manage review of the evaluation report

The activity manager arranges for the final draft report to be reviewed to ensure that the report:

- Fulfils the purpose and meets the terms of reference of the evaluation (including adequately addressing crosscutting issues and value for money)
- Is accurate and complete
- Meets the DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation, and New Zealand Aid Programme's quality standards for evaluation reports (for a checklist of quality standards see Appendix C of the *Activity Evaluation Operational Policy*)

Steps (adjust as appropriate for the evaluation)

1. The activity manager, in consultation with the steering group, decides who should review the draft report. Steering group members and the activity manager normally review the draft, and Post and partners may also be invited to do so.
2. The activity manager ensures the report is of an acceptable standard for review, including being largely free of typographical errors. If it is not, then further drafting is required by the evaluator or evaluation team.
3. The activity manager briefs the Head of Mission (HOM) on the draft report and provides an opportunity for the HOM to review the draft report.
4. The activity manager distributes the draft report to the reviewers, advises them what aspects to review, and sets a deadline for comments. The activity manager explains to reviewers that the final decision about what is changed in the report lies with evaluator(s) in order to preserve independence and impartiality.
5. Together with the draft report the activity manager forwards copies of the *Feedback on Activity Evaluation Plan or Report template* to reviewers after having edited it to ensure it is appropriate for the reviewers to complete.
6. Allow sufficient time for reviewers to review the draft report and feedback their comments.
7. The reviewers review the report and email copies of the completed *Feedback on Activity Evaluation Plan or Report template* back to the activity manager.
8. The steering group discusses the report's strengths and weaknesses and decides and prioritises the necessary changes required.

9. The activity manager provides consolidated evaluation report review feedback to the evaluator or evaluation team, listing the report's strengths and weaknesses, and summarising and prioritising any changes in a separate, appropriately edited copy of the *Feedback on Activity Evaluation Plan or Report template* which is forwarded to the evaluation team.

13. Finalise the report

- The evaluator or evaluation team addresses each aspect of the report review feedback and makes any revisions to the report.
- Separately, in the *Feedback on Activity Evaluation Plan or Report template* the evaluator or evaluation team comments on how they have responded to the report review feedback, i.e. listing any aspects of the report review feedback that have not been addressed (and why), and how and where (i.e. page /paragraph numbers) changes have been made to the report.
- The evaluator/evaluation team makes the final decision on what information should be changed in the report in order to maintain their independence.
- The activity manager checks that revisions have been completed satisfactorily, or explanation is provided for not making changes, and that the report is ready for approval.
- The activity manager does a final check that no private or classified information that could prevent the public release of the document is included in the report. Participants' names should not appear in the report or in the appendices, unless permission has been given to do so and this is stated in the report.

14. Approve the final report and debrief

The activity manager sends the final report to the steering group for approval and to others (e.g. partners) if this has been requested. If there is no evaluation steering group then the Deputy Director or Development Counsellor is the approver.

Any unresolved disputes between the evaluation team and the steering group or the programme team and the evaluation team are escalated to the Director for resolution.

The activity manager debriefs with the evaluator or evaluation team to share experiences and lessons regarding the process of the evaluation. Ensure any lessons learned or recommendations from this debrief are included in the MFAT management response in Step 15. Follow up the evaluation

Follow up the evaluation

15. Complete the MFAT Management Response to Evaluation

The activity manager uses the *MFAT Management Response to Evaluation* template to describe how MFAT will respond to the findings, conclusions, learning and recommendations, actions planned, who is responsible for actions and when they will take place, and how the evaluation will be disseminated.

A checklist for public release of the report is attached to the *MFAT Management Response to Evaluation* template and should be completed and signed by the activity manager.

16. Review and approve the MFAT Management Response to Evaluation

The *MFAT Management Response to Evaluation* is reviewed by the Deputy Director or Development Counsellor.

The public release of the evaluation is approved by the Deputy Director or Development Counsellor who signs the completed release checklist attached to the *MFAT Management Response to Evaluation*.

The *MFAT Management Response to Evaluation* is approved by the Director of the team that has commissioned the evaluation within 2 months of the report being finalised (Step 16a). The Director uses the *MFAT Management Response to Evaluation* in preparing a six monthly report on the division's evaluations (Step 19*)*

Following up that recommendations and actions in the MFAT Management response are implemented as agreed is the responsibility of MFAT management within the appropriate division.

17. Share the evaluation within the division

The evaluation is shared for learning and awareness within the activity manager's division in the manner deemed appropriate by the Director. The evaluation is then shared with other IDG divisions and stakeholders as described in the dissemination plan in the *MFAT Management Response to Evaluation*.

18. Disseminate and publish the evaluation report

Dissemination of evaluations involves actions to inform Ministry staff (outside the activity manager's division), partner organisations and other stakeholders about the information that has been produced by the evaluation.

The activity manager ensures that the dissemination plan, as approved in the *MFAT Management Response to Evaluation*, is implemented.

Website publishing

The Deputy Director or Development Counsellor of the team that commissioned the evaluation gives advance notice to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of any reports that have political implications or sensitive information.

After the *MFAT Management Response to Evaluation* (including public release) is approved, and the evaluation has been shared with the division, the activity manager arranges for the report to be published on the New Zealand Aid Programme website.

The activity manager forwards a pdf version of the report to the Development Support Officer, Development Strategy and Evaluation Division, for publishing on the website.

MFAT Library

The activity manager also ensures that the Development Support Officer, Development Strategy and Evaluation Division arranges for the evaluation to be placed in the MFAT library collection.

19. Submit the Six Monthly Divisional Report on Evaluations

The *Divisional Six Monthly Report on Evaluations* is due at the end of March and at the end of September. The Director prepares the report using the template *Divisional Six Monthly Report on Evaluations.* The Director then sends it to the Development Support Officer of the Development Strategy and Evaluation Division for submission to the Evaluation and Research Steering Group.

Appendix A: Sample Evaluation Timetable and Process Schedule

This table shows a sample evaluation timetable and process schedule

Task/milestone	Timing	Stakeholders/MFAT staff involved	Responsible
Purpose and nature of evaluation established	By mid June	Partners DD/DC Activity manager	Activity manager
Steering group in place with TOR	By end June	DD/DC Steering group members Activity manager	Activity manager, DD approves Steering Group TOR
Evaluation TOR complete and approved	By end July	Partners Steering group DD/DC	Activity manager (to finalise TOR) Steering group chair approves
Evaluation team selected and contracted	By mid August	Steering group Activity manager	Activity manager
Contract start date	20 August	-	-
Briefing meeting	20 August	Activity manager Others as appropriate	Activity manager
Draft Evaluation Plan submitted to MFAT	27 August	Evaluation team	Evaluation team leader
Collated feedback to evaluation team on Evaluation Plan	4 September	Steering group Activity manager	Activity manager
Evaluation Plan finalised	8 September	Evaluation team	Evaluation team leader. Chair of steering group approves
Arrange for in-country visit	8 – 13 September	Activity manager IDG staff at post Partners Others	Activity manager, evaluation team and IDG staff at Post
In-country field work and feedback presentation	16 - 30 September	Evaluation team Post staff Steering group members in-country Evaluation participants	Evaluation team leader, staff at post
Draft report submitted to MFAT	10 October	Evaluation team	Evaluation team leader
Collated feedback to evaluation team on draft report	24 October	Steering group members Activity manager	Activity manager

Task/milestone	Timing	Stakeholders/MFAT staff involved	Responsible
Final report to MFAT	28 October	Evaluation team	Evaluation team leader
Final report approved by steering group	3 November	Steering group Activity manager	Steering group chair
Debrief	10 November	Activity manager Evaluation team Steering group members	Activity manager
Contract end date	15 November	-	-
Complete, review and approve the MFAT Management Response to the evaluation	Mid December	Activity manager DD/DC Director	Activity manager: Complete DD/DC: Review and sign release checklist Director: Approve
Share evaluation in Division	January	All staff in the division	Activity manager, DD/DC
Disseminate and arrange to publish the report	January/Early February		Activity manager