

Quality Evaluation Planning: A Structured Template

The following ‘template’ – or framework - addresses evaluation ‘Quality’ at an organisational/institutional level. It can therefore be useful to evaluation units, Managing Authorities and Ministries that wish to ‘quality assure’ their evaluation quality systems.

Most guidance on quality is at the level of individual evaluations or programmes. However if the ‘infrastructure’, resources and policies to support evaluation quality are not in place, it is difficult to ensure quality at an operational level.

This template takes the main categories of effective evaluation planning contained in Guidance prepared by the Commission for the 2014-2020 Programming period to support the preparation of evaluation plans.¹

The approach taken is to outline a ‘structured template’ that can be used to support evaluation planning and verify the adequacy of present arrangements . Using this framework can be a useful way to self-assess existing evaluation capacities and improvements in evaluation quality over time.

At a basic level it identifies the intended outcomes that need to be achieved – described as ‘standards’; and the ‘quality criteria’ that indicate what has to be done to achieve these ‘standards’. As a set of quality processes are also outlined these might be used to document what improvements are needed.

There are five main areas of focus in the Commissions Guidance:

- Management and Planning
- Responsibility & Coordination
- Skills and Expertise
- Use and Communication
- Design and Methods

Each of these focus areas is expanded below in terms of three main headings:

1. A *Topic* that simply labels what needs to be covered
2. A *Standard* that indicates what is expected to be demonstrated in relation to each topic
3. *Quality Criteria* by which one would assess whether the standard has been achieved

Discussing the framework among colleagues can be a

Discussing the framework with colleagues as part of capacity development initiatives can be a practical way to become familiar with how this ‘template’ might be used.

¹ This template uses these categories because they remain useful and relevant. It should be emphasised however that this has been prepared for Evaluation Helpdesk use as part of MA and Member State support activities and should not to be attributed to the Commission.

Focus area	Topic	Standard	Quality Criteria
Management and Planning	Evaluation function	An operating and effective evaluation function	Acquisition and deployment of specialist and administrative expertise so as to be able to plan, procure, coordinate and manage evaluations over the programming cycle
	Use of available evidence	Systematic use of available information to fully analyse need, resources, priorities and potential interventions.	Conduct of evidence reviews, synthesis of previous evaluations, existing research literature and consultation with experts including the academic community
	Time planning	A time-plan that indicates how evaluation will input into decision making and reporting	An outline 'chart' showing how evaluation deliverables will relate to: management reviews and decision points annual implementation and progress reporting reports at the end of the programming period.
	Quality management	A quality management plan is in place	Quality management will include: A standard 'model' for specifying ITTs A quality review process at each stage of the evaluation cycle from proposals through to reporting A peer review panel or similar to ensure that independent assessments and feedback can be provided
Responsibility & Coordination	Partnership Involvement	Involvement of partners and stakeholders in plan-making and delivery planning	Explicit involvement and consultation of partners in plan making Partner involvement in reviewing & summarising evaluation findings Commitment of partners to the plan
	MA Coordination	Clear responsibilities for design, coordination, delivery and monitoring of evaluations within an OP	Existence of a responsible coordination unit with stated powers and obligations at each stage of the evaluation cycle Specification of division of labour between coordination unit, MAs and MCs and other authorities, agencies or units
	Cross MA Coordination	Arrangements are in place to exchange information about cross-cutting aspects of evaluation and to facilitate mutual learning	Areas of interdependence have been identified (e.g. integrated evaluations that affect a particular target group).

			Procedures are in place to exchange information and responsibilities are clear
	Budget	An adequate and flexible budget for evaluation and related activities	A budget has been estimated that covers all evaluation activities Budget is clear about who pays for what and has been agreed by the relevant budget holders
Design and Methods	Evaluation design	Rationales and key evaluation questions for all evaluations are specified	Each planned evaluation (or evaluation cluster) is linked to programme objectives and priority axes Evaluation purposes are stated Types of evaluation questions are identified for each evaluation (or cluster of evaluations)
	Method selection	Appropriate approaches & methods are chosen	Broad evaluation approaches are identified for each evaluation matched to evaluation questions asked
	Results orientation	Expected results are described and indicators identified	A logic model or theory of change links the intervention logic of the main programmes to be evaluated to the results expected A set of indicators based on available data are identified that are matched to priority axes of EU strategy
	Impacts	Evaluation designs are capable of linking cause and effect	Evaluations that aim to demonstrate results and impact identify the limited number of objectives or outputs that are intended to be changed Evaluation approaches capable of linking cause and effect e.g. theory based, counterfactual etc are chosen and their rationale made clear
Data availability and data systems	Data availability	Data sources have been reviewed, gaps identified	A review of data sources has taken place Measures have been identified by which gaps will be filled and responsibilities for filling gaps are clear
	Data Requirements	Data requirements are identified and specified	Data needs are linked to the subjects of planned evaluations, methods to be used and the likely timescales of planned evaluations
	National data sets	Statistical systems appropriate to results indicators are available	Clear distinction is made between Monitoring data

			Existing national statistics and administrative data (e.g. unemployment and social security) Data to be collected by evaluators
Skills and Expertise	Evaluation independence	The independence of the evaluation function is assured by the Managing authority	Independence requires: Accountability lines that ensure separation from programme implementers Authority to commission and manage evaluations within agreed policies and operating procedures An obligation to support the independence of evaluators to report their findings and conclusions without interference
	Internal expertise	Post holders in the evaluation function understand evaluation	Those recruited or already in post have basic training in evaluation approaches and management Those recruited or already in post have had previous experience of OP evaluations
	Evaluation networks and markets	The evaluation function is linked sources of evaluation expertise and potential evaluation suppliers	A plan is in place to identify external expertise such as professional networks, university departments and specialist consultancy firms Information meetings and other awareness raising activities are planned
	Training and Development	There is capacity for evaluation training and development	Training and development needs for internal (Managing Authority) staff including staff of the evaluation function have been identified Need for specific orientation and specialist skills development for potential evaluation suppliers has been identified Sources of training and development expertise has been located
Use and Communication	Users of evaluation	Users of evaluation are identified	The uses of different users will be identified to include: Implementing agents Managing Authorities National authorities and The European commission
	Evaluation communication	Guidelines are envisaged regarding information sharing and dissemination	Guidelines will include: What information will be shared with which agencies

			Communication to the public Regular communication to the European commission
	Analysis and comparison at European level	Planning for the systematic comparison of results and findings at a European level	In order to accumulate results and lessons at a European level the plan will indicate how this will be supported by the structuring of outputs. Good practice would suggest that case studies should include: ITTs for each evaluation Outline of objectives and intended results Methodologies and data used Findings and conclusions Lessons learned both for evaluation and for future programmes and policies