

PROGRAM CYCLE GUIDANCE

ADS 201 Additional Help

EVALUATION STATEMENT OF WORK (SOW) PEER REVIEW PROCESS

The Evaluation Statement of Work (Evaluation SOW) peer review is a required process to be completed after a SOW is drafted but before solicitation. This helps to ensure the quality of the Evaluation SOW.

Policy

Each operating unit's Program Office is required to organize peer reviews of evaluation statements of work as noted in the Evaluation Policy and Automated Directives System (ADS) [201.3.5.15](#). In doing so, they will work together with the technical office and may choose to work with individuals from regional and other Washington bureaus to assist in the peer review process. This guidance document provides further details on the peer review process, but each mission may have customized aspects of the peer review, as described in its Mission Order on Evaluation.

Why conduct a peer review?

There are numerous reasons to conduct a peer review beyond it being a requirement of USAID policy. These include:

- Ensuring that the required elements of an Evaluation SOW are included.
- Improving the overall quality of the Evaluation SOW before it is used to direct the work of the evaluation team. The peer review process can involve experts in evaluation and the technical subject area of the evaluation to improve the SOW quality.
- Increasing the independence and objectivity of the Evaluation SOW. By bringing in additional staff members from other parts of the mission or Agency, the Evaluation SOW can benefit from perspectives that are not as close to the activity, project, or program being evaluated, thereby promoting a more neutral and unbiased perspective.
- Ensuring buy-in from internal stakeholders regarding the key features of the evaluation (purpose, questions, methods, timing, etc.). Evaluations will only be a worthwhile endeavor if they can produce credible evidence that can be and is used. By bringing in the primary audiences who may use the evaluation results, the drafters can help ensure that the SOW meets these audiences' needs.

Before the peer review

Staff from technical teams will typically initiate and lead the writing of Evaluation SOWs in cooperation with the Program Office. The Program Office, Technical Office, and Contract Office should start talking as early as possible and expect to meet many times during the development of the SOW. The formal peer review should not be the first time the Program Office and Technical Office discuss the evaluation¹. Consider who needs to be involved in early stages and ensure that they are engaged. Consult the How-To Note on Evaluation Statements of Work for further details on drafting an Evaluation SOW.

The peer review

Once the Evaluation SOW is drafted and ready to be shared beyond those most directly involved in the drafting, the mission should organize the peer review. While there is no standard way of conducting a peer review, Mission staff should consult their own Mission Order on Evaluation for peer review practices specific to their mission. Here are some of the key issues to be decided when conducting a peer review:

When will the peer review take place?

When planning the peer review, missions should aim for conducting it after a full draft of the Evaluation SOW has been completed. The draft should clearly represent the intention of the drafting team, but there is still time to make substantial changes based on the comments of the peer review process. Peer reviews should not be given an incomplete or half-formed Evaluation SOW; if a particular individual's input is needed to complete an Evaluation SOW draft, then he or she should be individually consulted prior to the peer review. Nor should peer reviews receive a fully completed SOW where only cosmetic changes are to be considered.

When scheduling the peer review, the Program Office and technical team drafters should ensure that there will be sufficient time after the peer review to incorporate comments and revise the SOW prior to preparing the solicitation.

How many and which individuals will be involved in the peer review?

The mission's Evaluation point of contact (Evaluation POC) in the Program Office (or his or her designee) will lead a peer review of the SOW. The Evaluation POC or the designee should take lead responsibility for ensuring that the SOW meets the procedural standards and requirements of ADS 201 so that other peer reviewers can focus on substantive content.

¹ An SOW is also not the last time to discuss how the evaluation will be conducted. The SOW is not an evaluation design. Further refinement of SOW elements will occur after the evaluator is selected. Evaluation designs must be shared with relevant external stakeholders.

The peer review should include no fewer than two individuals in addition to the Evaluation POC (or the designee). Emphasis should be placed on finding at least one peer reviewer with evaluation methods expertise. Peer reviewers may include individuals from the Technical Office and Program Office as well as USAID/Washington regional and technical bureaus, the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning Office of Learning, Evaluation, and Research (PPL/LER), external subject matter and evaluation experts, and local partners. It is best practice, however, for no more than half of the peer reviewers to be from the Technical Office that oversees the activity or project being evaluated. USAID/Washington regional bureaus have a particular responsibility to participate in peer reviews when requested by missions. Mission staff should consult the Monitoring & Evaluation POC List for Washington Bureau contact information.

How much time will be provided for the peer review?

The Mission Order on Evaluation in each mission should specify the length of time peer reviewers will have to review the SOW. Good practice is to allow for 5 -10 business days for comments. Some USAID/Washington offices may have their own standards for how long they typically take to review an Evaluation SOW, so check with them if considering including USAID/Washington staff member in the peer review.

How will comments be received for the peer review?

There are a variety of ways of structuring the peer review process. Missions may choose to have a peer review meeting where individuals can discuss their comments on the draft SOW, request written comments on the draft SOW, or both. Many missions choose to ask the peer reviewers to fill out standard review sheets or checklists (see [Evaluation Toolkit: Evaluation SOW Checklist and Review Template](#)) while others prefer reviewers to send comments in an e-mail or in the document itself. The Evaluation POC should work with the evaluation drafters to determine what method would be most useful for receiving comments. Regardless of the method chosen, the Evaluation POC (or designee) should provide clear instructions to the peer reviewers regarding the means for providing comments on the draft SOW.

After the peer review

The staff who initiated the draft SOW will typically make any revisions to the Evaluation SOW based on the peer review process in cooperation with the Program Office before final clearance by the Program Office. The leader of the peer review should be sure to follow up with the peer reviewers and provide the final evaluation SOW to them so that they are able to view the results of their participation.

For more information

For more information on the peer review process or on what to look for in an Evaluation SOW, check out the following:

- [ADS 201 mab Evaluation Statement of Work Requirements](#). This mandatory reference to the ADS provides further guidance on writing a high-quality Evaluation Statement of Work.
- [Webinar: Good Practices for Peer Reviews of Evaluation SOWs](#). This webinar featured PPL, regional, and technical bureau representatives who have participated and led evaluation SOW peer reviews. They

discussed good practices in conducting peer reviews and how to get the most out of the process, resulting in a strong SOW with buy-in from key stakeholders.

- **How-to Note: Evaluation Statements of Work.** This Note addresses key issues for USAID staff who are developing a SOW for an externally contracted evaluation. It also serves as a guide for reviewing the quality of Evaluation SOWs for internal peer review processes.
- [Webinar: Developing Good Evaluation Questions.](#) This webinar discusses how to develop evaluation questions that will help ensure high-quality performance evaluations from external evaluators. Critical tips will be presented, along with a variety of negative and positive examples from real USAID Evaluation SOWs.