The “Hybrid Team” Approach to Foreign Assistance Evaluation: Benefits and challenges of externally-led, internally-staffed evaluations at USAID

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External Evaluation

Internal Evaluation
External Evaluation

Internal Evaluation
Perceived objectivity
Credibility for accountability purposes
Ability to collect unbiased information
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An evaluation including both external evaluators and internal staff
USAID Evaluation Policy
(Adopted in January 2011)
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Changes in the guiding principles for USAID evaluations and evaluation procedures
USAID
Evaluation Policy:
Emphasis on
External Evaluation
USAID Evaluation Policy: Emphasis on External Evaluation

“Evaluations of USAID Projects will be undertaken so that they are not subject to the perception or reality of biased measurement or reporting due to conflict of interest or other factors. In most cases, the evaluations will be external...”
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Evaluation Policy:
Exceptions for Internal Participation
“In cases where a USAID operating unit management determines that appropriate expertise exists within the Agency, and that engaging USAID staff in an evaluation will facilitate institutional learning, an evaluation team may be predominately composed of USAID staff. However, an outside expert with appropriate skills and experience will be recruited to lead the team, mitigating the potential for conflict of interest.”
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2. How do the internal and external participants view the objectivity of the evaluation team?

3. What other benefits and challenges to conducting hybrid team evaluations?
Methodology
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1. Searched for and Identified 24 hybrid team evaluations
   (completed between January 2012 and June 2014)
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2. Conducted 24 interviews with USAID participants from 21 of the 24 hybrid team evaluations

3. Conducted 21 interviews with external team leaders from 20 of the 24 hybrid team evaluations
Characteristics of Hybrid Team Evaluations
24 USAID Hybrid Team Evaluations identified since January 2012
USAID Hybrid Team Evaluations
(Jan 2012 – June 2014)

Average number of USAID staff members on hybrid team evaluations
USAID Hybrid Team Evaluations
(Jan 2012 – June 2014)

Average number of USAID staff members on hybrid team evaluations

2.2
USAID Hybrid Team Evaluations
(Jan 2012 – June 2014)

Average number of external evaluators on hybrid team evaluations
Average number of *external evaluators* on hybrid team evaluations

2.7
52 USAID Staff on 24 Hybrid Team Evaluations

- Washington: 26
- Field: 26
24 USAID Interviews from 21 Hybrid Team Evaluations

- Washington: 14 interviews
- Field: 10 interviews
9 of 24 were evaluating their own unit’s project.
21 External evaluation team leaders from 20 Hybrid Team Evaluations

- Previous USAID Evaluation Team Leader: 10
- Previous USAID Evaluation Team Member: 4
- Previous Non-USAID Evaluation Experience: 2
- No Previous Evaluation Experience: 5
Learning Motivations and Outcomes
Two Broad Types of USAID Evaluation Team Members

Learners (14 of 24)
Two Broad Types of USAID Evaluation Team Members

Learners (14 of 24)

• Mostly from *country and regional missions*, but some from Washington.
• More likely to mention *professional development* as motivation to participate.
• More emphasis on *learning about evaluation* and project implementation in general than particular project.
• All stated they learned something about evaluation, many enthusiastically.
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Tech Specialist (10 of 24)

• All from Washington technical offices
• More likely to have evaluated before
• Most were asked to participate on evaluation by missions or offices
• Project is in their field and they were more interested in the project being evaluated
• Somewhat less likely to say (or say with enthusiasm) that they learned evaluation techniques or evaluation processes
Two Broad Types of USAID Evaluation Team Members

Learners (14 of 24)

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-- USAID Learner

“I have a pretty good understanding [of evaluation]. It’s always interesting to see how other people approach evaluation.”

-- USAID Tech Specialist
The vast majority of external evaluation team leads perceive that USAID team members learned about evaluation and USAID projects through this experience.
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"Of course [learning was] huge. They never had a chance to be on an evaluation before -- they had some trainings, but it all fit together -- it piqued their interest and they kept saying ‘next time I write an [evaluation] SOW I'm going to put this in there...”

-- External Evaluator
Objectivity of USAID Participants
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-- USAID Participant

I had no relationship to the project. I think we can be honest that not everything we do is great and some projects don't work out. [USAID participation] is not always a conflict of interest, but [project managers] on evaluations can lead to a conflict of interest.

-- USAID Participant
Approximately two-thirds of external evaluators interviewed said USAID team members were no more or less biased than external team members...
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...While about one third of external evaluators interviewed said they could be more biased, but considered the bias slight or hypothetical.
Benefits of Hybrid Team Evaluations
The vast majority of both USAID participants and external evaluators stated that USAID staff on team brings an understanding of USAID processes, procedures, capabilities, and/or constraints.
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-- USAID Participant

“Knowledge of USAID's internal procedures, grant structure, staffing of local delegations, history and evolution of the program -- all of this was invaluable to us....
-- External Evaluator
USAID participants noted that an external consultant brings evaluation skills, a fresh perspective, credibility, and dedication to the task.
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“We would not have been able to do this without a full time external team leader who is paid to produce a report for USAID”

-- USAID Participant
Challenges of Hybrid Team Evaluations
Time Commitment of USAID Staff
“If they are adding USAID bodies to the evaluation...[but] they aren't really available because of other USAID responsibilities, then it's inevitable the team will feel the person flaked.”

-- External Evaluator
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-- External Evaluator

“I think that its hard to predict how much time USAID staff can realistically spend on this. We kind of let the contractor hang out there once we got back to our jobs. USAID staff have another life.”

-- USAID Participant
Expectations and Clarity of Roles
There needs to be perfect clarity at the beginning about the role of team members and what their role will be.

-- External Evaluator
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If we are expected to write the report, we need to know this before we go back to our regular jobs.

-- USAID Participant
Potential for biased responses due to USAID presence
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“There’s a potential conflict if [you’re] going to interview the implementing partners, maybe they would hold back certain things, especially criticism of USAID and especially if they know the [USAID] person and work with them. You don't want to bite the hand that feeds you.”

-- External Evaluator
Should USAID continue hybrid team evaluations?

USAID team member respondents who preferred that USAID continue to conduct hybrid team evaluations:
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External evaluation team leaders who preferred that USAID continue to conduct hybrid team evaluations:
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Issues for Discussion
1. Should restrictions/recommendations be made on who should be allowed on an evaluation team from USAID?
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2. Should restrictions be set on USAID participation in certain aspects of the evaluation (where internal presence likely to bias responses) or certain roles (writing the report)?
**Issues for Discussion**

1. Should restrictions/recommendations be made on who should be allowed on an evaluation team from USAID?

2. Should restrictions be set on USAID participation in certain aspects of the evaluation (where internal presence likely to bias responses) or certain roles (writing the report)?

3. Should there be some standard practices for preparing for USAID staff to participate in a Hybrid evaluation?
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2. Should restrictions be set on USAID participation in certain aspects of the evaluation (where internal presence likely to bias responses) or certain roles (writing the report)?

3. Should there be some standard practices for preparing for USAID staff to participate in a Hybrid evaluation?

4. What guidance should we give to external evaluators on how to work with USAID staff on Hybrid evaluations?
Thank You

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