



GUIDANCE FOR USAID STAFF PARTICIPATION ON EXTERNAL EVALUATIONS

Introduction

ADS 201 places considerable emphasis on external evaluation. It states that “Evaluations 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.” (ADS 201.3.6.2) However, the ADS also allows USAID participation on external evaluations. It states that “In cases where a Mission’s or Washington OU’s management determines that appropriate expertise exists within the Agency, and that engaging USAID staff in an evaluation will facilitate institutional learning, an external evaluation team may include USAID staff under the direction of the external team leader.” (ADS 201.3.6.6)

This guidance concerns the participation and conduct of USAID staff as team members on *external evaluations*. For the purpose of this guidance, participation refers to actively contributing, in whole or in part, to the evaluation report under the direction of the external evaluation team leader.

For more information regarding participation of USAID staff members on *internal* evaluations for non-required evaluations see the [Evaluation Toolkit resource: Choosing between Internal or External Evaluation](#).

For more information regarding monitoring, observing, or providing technical direction to external evaluation teams as an Evaluation COR, see the Evaluation Toolkit resource: [Lessons Learned Managing a USAID Performance Evaluations](#).

I. What are the benefits to USAID staff participating on external evaluation teams?

USAID participation on an external evaluation has the potential to benefit USAID in many ways.

First, participation of USAID staff on evaluations can provide a learning opportunity to the USAID staff member. Participating on an evaluation can help the participant learn more in depth about evaluation practices and procedures, promote a more data-driven approach to activity management and decision-making, and raise awareness of the practical opportunities and constraints faced by external evaluators. In addition to learning about evaluation, participation can help the USAID staff member gain more insight into activity implementation in the field in general, along with specific information about the particular activity that is being evaluated.

Second, participation of USAID staff on evaluations can help enhance the technical quality of the evaluation through leveraging in-house skills USAID staff bring strong subject matter expertise and familiarity with the technical implementation of USAID programming that can complement and enhance the technical expertise of an external evaluation team.

Third, USAID staff can bring their insider knowledge of USAID to an external evaluation team that may not be familiar with the procedures, norms, culture, and operating context in the Agency or a particular Mission. USAID participation on evaluation teams can help, for instance, in making sure evaluation recommendations are relevant and actionable in the USAID context.

Fourth, USAID participation on evaluations can help ensure the learning from the evaluation is institutionalized and contribute to the utilization of evaluation findings. At the end of the evaluation, the external evaluator will move on to the next job, but the USAID staff member who participated in the evaluation can remain available after the formal evaluation period ends, which can be useful for follow-on design work, strategy development, etc. USAID staff who participate in an evaluation are more likely to internalize findings and incorporate the learning from the evaluation into operating unit (OU) and Agency decision-making.

Finally, USAID participation on evaluation encourages sharing of lessons learned among different USAID operating units (OUs), projects, and activities. Engaging staff from other Missions or USAID/Washington fosters a natural cross-pollination of ideas and learning.

2. What recommendations does the Office of Learning, Evaluation, and Research have for USAID participation on external evaluations?

Despite the potential drawbacks, the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning Office of Learning, Evaluation, and Research (PPL/LER) generally considers that the overall benefit to USAID participation on evaluations outweighs the costs.

PPL/LER supports the participation of USAID staff members on externally led evaluations and encourages USAID OUs to seek out ways to increase such participation. However, this support does not suggest that the inclusion of USAID staff on evaluations is appropriate in all circumstances (see Section 2.B for considerations). PPL/LER encourages OUs to thoroughly assess the appropriateness of individual USAID staff members to participate in evaluations in each instance it is considered.

To help ensure that USAID participation will benefit the evaluation process, PPL/LER suggests several practices to consider when deciding on participation, planning for, and then conducting an external evaluation that includes USAID staff.

A. PARTICIPATION ON EVALUATION TEAMS

USAID policy does not specify who may or may not participate on an external evaluation as a team member. However, when considering who should participate in an externally led evaluation, PPL/LER recommends that:

Agreement Officer's Representatives/Contracting Officer's Representatives (AORs/CORs) of implementing mechanisms being evaluated should not participate as evaluation team members. AORs/CORs of implementing mechanisms being evaluated should have a role in the evaluation process, from leading or participating in the drafting of the statement of work (SOW) to reviewing and utilizing the evaluation report. However, their close relationship and responsibilities to the activity being evaluated is likely to harm the perception of objectivity of the evaluation team that is key to an external evaluation if they were to participate as evaluation team members.

CORs of the evaluation contract/task order should not participate as team members. CORs of the evaluation contract/task order also have a role in the evaluation process, from leading or participating in the drafting of the statement of work (SOW), supporting and providing technical

direction to the evaluation team, monitoring the evaluation team's progress and deliverables, to reviewing and utilizing the evaluation report. However, CORs have obligations to the Contracting Officer and to the external evaluation team leader that conflict with a role of serving under the evaluation team leader on an evaluation.

For other USAID staff members, the Program Office should consider the appropriateness of participation on an evaluation team and serve as the office that approves or does not approve participation. As the office that is expected to manage external evaluations in most instances (ADS 201.3.6.6) the Program Office should consider the appropriateness of individual USAID staff members' participation on evaluation teams with the above-noted benefits and challenges in mind. USAID staff members from the same Technical Office as the activity or project being evaluated should not automatically be eliminated from participation, but their involvement with the activity/intervention, if any, should be examined. For instance, if the evaluation examines how an implementer has adhered to or deviated from the activity design, a USAID staff member (from the same OU or another OU) who participated in that design may be a welcome addition. However, if the evaluation is also expected to examine whether the activity design was appropriate or relevant given country conditions, then a USAID staff member who participated in the design of the activity is unlikely to be an objective team member. For evaluations that particularly focus on ensuring USAID accountability to external audiences, no USAID participation may be the most prudent course, while more exploratory evaluations focused on internal adaptation and learning may be particularly appropriate for USAID participation.

USAID participants on evaluation teams should have familiarity with USAID evaluation policies and practices. PPL/LER recommends that USAID staff members take a USAID-sponsored evaluation training prior to participating on a USAID evaluation. Also, staff should have read and be familiar with ADS 201 as well as relevant PPL-issued evaluation guidance.

Participation should not be limited solely to senior monitoring & evaluation specialists or senior technical experts. There are many reasons for USAID participation on an external evaluation, as well as benefits. It should not be limited to those who are senior experts in evaluation or the technical subject matter of the project or activity being evaluated. While such team members are likely to provide strong contributions to the evaluation, individuals new to evaluation, and/or from a different technical sector, can learn from and also contribute to an evaluation team.

B. PLANNING FOR USAID PARTICIPATION ON EVALUATION TEAMS

Prudent planning can help ensure that USAID staff participation will benefit the evaluation. PPL recommends the following:

OUs should decide as early as possible in the evaluation planning process whether a USAID staff member will participate in the evaluation. Preferably, such decisions will occur prior to or during the drafting of the SOW, as this will help in preparing the SOW—particularly the section on the team composition and the Independent Government Cost Estimate. In addition to knowing whether or not a USAID staff member or members will participate, it will help to identify:

- a. The specific individual(s) who will participate;
- b. The reason for participation (Is it primarily for the individual's learning or for the technical expertise that they can contribute?);
- c. What expectations they have for contributing to the evaluation (Will they expect to just observe, work on the evaluation design, participate in data collection, etc.?);

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- d. What skills they bring to the evaluation (for instance, country/regional knowledge, language skills, technical subject expertise, evaluation expertise, familiarity with USAID processes, etc.);
- e. How much time they have to commit to the evaluation; and
- f. What current or past relationships the USAID staff member has with the evaluation team or the activity being evaluated, particularly since USAID staff do not fill out the disclosure of conflict of interest form that external team members complete.

OUs should inform prospective evaluation contractors in the evaluation solicitation that USAID expects to include USAID staff on the evaluation. Potential evaluation contractors should be provided with information on the number of participants and other relevant information, including expected roles, skills and experience, and time commitment. If decisions are not made prior to solicitation of the evaluation regarding USAID participation, the evaluation contractor should be informed as early as possible following award and prior to developing a workplan and final design. Following the award, the evaluation team should be given the curriculum vitae (CVs) and other additional information about the specific individuals participating on the evaluation team.

The evaluation team leader, the USAID team member(s), and the evaluation COR should meet as soon as possible following award to discuss team roles. In addition to providing any further information about USAID staff member(s) to the evaluation team leader, the USAID team member(s), the external team leader, and the COR should meet as soon as possible (in many cases, this may be a virtual meeting) to discuss:

- a. Expected roles of the evaluation team members;
- b. The time commitment of the USAID staff member(s);
- c. Limitations on the participation of USAID staff members in certain aspects of the data collection—such as interviews with particular key stakeholders where USAID presence may bias interview responses;
- d. Coordination of logistics, for instance, if USAID staff will need to travel in separate vehicles to data collection sites; and
- e. Coordination on communication within the team and between USAID and the evaluation team.

This meeting should also serve as a time for USAID to reiterate that the external evaluation team leader is recognized by USAID as the leader of the evaluation team and that USAID staff on the evaluation will serve as team *members*, not secondary team leaders. If necessary, the meeting may lead to the development of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Mission and leadership of other OUs if USAID evaluation team members are participating from OUs that are not managing the evaluation.

C. CONDUCTING THE EVALUATION WITH USAID STAFF PARTICIPATION

In the conduct of an external evaluation with USAID participation, PPL recommends:

USAID evaluation team members participating on evaluations to learn the evaluation process should have the opportunity to participate in all aspects of the evaluation, from supporting design to writing the final report. External evaluations may benefit from USAID participation in limited, targeted roles on an evaluation (for instance, to provide technical expertise during the design phase or to assist in the data collection phase of an evaluation). However, full integration is likely to be the most beneficial. This is particularly true for USAID team members who

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participate on evaluations in order to better understand the evaluation process. Moreover, USAID team members should not be excluded arbitrarily from participating in particular phases, such as writing the report, if they have committed the time to participate.

USAID evaluation team members should not participate on an evaluation “part-time.”

Regardless of how expansive or limited the role is of USAID team members, it is recommended that during the time period they have committed to be members of the evaluation team, the USAID team members serve as full-time members of the evaluation team, particularly if they are involved in data collection for the evaluation. It can be disruptive to the evaluation if team members are pulled away or unavailable at certain times. Supervisors should be made aware of and approve the expected level of effort required to fully commit to the evaluation role the USAID team member has agreed to.

Team members should remain flexible and defer to evaluation team leaders on the conduct of the evaluation. Even the most thoroughly planned evaluations require adaptation in the field. Similarly, agreed-upon roles and responsibilities of USAID staff on the evaluation and the evaluation team leader may need to be adapted during implementation of the evaluation. In general, USAID team members should defer to the evaluation team leaders on matters related to the conduct of the evaluation and reporting of evaluation results (within ethical boundaries). If USAID evaluation team members disagree with evaluation findings, they have the opportunity, under USAID policy, to prepare a statement of differences.

Communication between the evaluation team and the OU commissioning the evaluation should be conducted through the evaluation team leader and the USAID evaluation COR.

USAID participation on an evaluation team should not be seen as an additional means for monitoring the external evaluation team. Back-channel communications between USAID evaluation team members and USAID staff in the OU commissioning the evaluation should be discouraged.