EVALUATION RESOURCE

LESSONS LEARNED MANAGING EXTERNAL PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

This document provides lessons learned on managing an external USAID performance evaluation as a Contracting Officer's Representative (COR). While the responsibilities of managing an evaluation contract are similar to those of an activity contract, there are particular needs for an evaluation. It is not intended to replace, but instead complements USAID policy and guidance for CORs. Also, each mission's Mission Order for Evaluation may outline responsibilities that differ from those included in this document.

Planning to Manage an Evaluation

Overall, strong internal USAID relationships are needed from the early planning stages of an evaluation among:

- The Agreement or Contracting Officers' Representative (AOR/COR) of the activity or activities being evaluated (henceforth, the *Activity AOR/COR*);
- The *Project Manager* or Technical Office staff who oversees the project or activities being evaluated;
- The individual from the Program Office (PO) designated as the COR for the contracted evaluation (henceforth, the *Evaluation COR*); and
- *Contracting Officer (CO)* for the evaluation.

Prior to the award of the evaluation contract, all parties should discuss and agree on the delegation of roles and responsibilities for managing and supporting the evaluation, particularly between the *Evaluation COR*, the *Project Manager* (as applicable) and *Activity AOR(s)/COR(s)*. In doing so, all parties should consult their Mission Order for Evaluation. As noted in the Evaluation Policy, evaluations are expected to be managed out of the Operating Unit's Program Office to help ensure that evaluations are not subject to the perception or reality of biased measurement or reporting due to conflict of interest. This underlying principle should help guide discussions regarding roles and responsibilities. Ultimately, the *Evaluation COR* remains accountable for the responsibilities delegated to him or her by the *CO*.

In addition to managing these internal relationships, the *Evaluation COR* also needs to ensure that external stakeholders are aware and engaged in the evaluation process. In particular, the *Evaluation COR* should work with the *Activity AOR/COR(s)* to ensure that the implementing partner of the project or activity(ies) to be evaluated are informed and prepared for successful coordination with the evaluation team. The *Evaluation COR* should facilitate and/or prepare the development of an [evaluation dissemination plan](#).

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Managing the Evaluation Contract after Award

Once the contract is awarded, the *Evaluation COR* needs to continue collaboration with the USAID staff and stakeholders mentioned above. In addition, the *Evaluation COR* needs to build a strong relationship and ensure ongoing communication with the external evaluation management team (which may be the evaluation team itself or a management team from the contractor).

The general responsibilities (as outlined in the COR designation letter) include:
- following the schedule and requirements in the statement of work (SOW) and contract;
- ensuring proper procedures are followed with the *CO* if any extensions or modifications are needed;
- ensuring deliverables, particularly the evaluation report, are received on time and confirming receipt; and
- approving of all deliverables (once they meet contractual requirements).

Table 1 summarizes the responsibilities actions that are particular to the management of an evaluation (in line with the deliverables requirements included in most Evaluation SOWs).

Table 1: Responsibilities by Evaluation Phase

Evaluation Phase	Management Responsibilities	Collaboration Responsibilities
Evaluation Work Plan and Preparations	Write letters of introduction and/or visa letters for evaluation team as needed	
	Ensure that the evaluation team has all necessary Agency guidelines and templates (e.g., how-to notes; template for report) as well as the activity or project documents and performance monitoring data (e.g., quarterly reports, previous evaluations, statement of work, etc.)	Review with the COR for the implementing partner the list of background documents (especially any documents completed since the SOW was originally developed)
	Review the initial work plan to identify that it meets the requirements and expectations of the SOW in terms of a realistic schedule and scope	Review the work plan with the COR for the implementing partner to ensure access during the times requested
Evaluation Design	Review the initial design for the evaluation to identify that it meets the requirements and expectations of the SOW in terms of a realistic approach to answering the evaluation questions	Share the evaluation design with relevant stakeholders inside and outside of USAID
Data Collection	Respond to requests from the evaluation team	Ensure that coordination between evaluators and implementers is

Evaluation Phase	Management Responsibilities	Collaboration Responsibilities
	Schedule any midpoint and endpoint briefings well ahead of time	smooth and trouble-shoot any complications that arise within the evaluation time period
Report Preparation	Send out drafts of deliverables to appropriate people with a set turn-around period for comments	Notify implementing partners on timeline and procedures for submitting a statement of differences once draft report is near completion
	Compile and prioritize comments on drafts and sending them back out to the evaluation team in a coherent manner	Notify USAID stakeholder on the procedures for submitting a statement of differences
	Ensure dissemination of the final report according to the plan	

As noted in Table 1, there are several points for collaboration and coordination. The evaluation SOW should have information that addresses responsibilities between USAID and the evaluation team/contractor for contacting external stakeholders, setting up interviews and meetings, and arranging travel while in the field. The *Evaluation COR* is best placed to ensure that the details related to data collection are effectively coordinated. Some of these actions may include providing contact information for interviewees, stakeholders, and implementing partners; and scheduling visits to multiple sites. Each of these tasks should be agreed upon beforehand between the *Evaluation COR* and the appropriate *Activity AOR/COR*, as the *Activity AOR/COR* usually has the knowledge to provide this information and assistance more easily or already has contacts to assist.

Special Considerations for Managing Evaluations

Activity AOR(s)/COR(s) should not participate in the evaluation. Rather, *Activity AOR/CORs* are important stakeholders in the evaluation and a valuable resource for the *Evaluation COR* in facilitating data collection by the evaluation team, reviewing deliverables, and utilizing the outcomes of the evaluation.

Similarly, the responsibilities of the *Evaluation COR* do not include participating in the evaluation as a member of the evaluation team. The *Evaluation COR* may participate as an observer of the evaluation in the field, as necessary to fulfil his/her role in the technical monitoring of the evaluation or to facilitate administration of the evaluation. In some cases, the *Evaluation COR* may need to be present in evaluation interviews as a representative of USAID, for instance, in certain instances when an evaluation team meets with government officials. However, curiosity, wanting to get out into the field, or a general interest in evaluation are not valid reasons for the *Evaluation COR* to observe or participate in data collection efforts. If the *Evaluation COR* finds continuous legitimate reasons to observe the evaluation, then there may be a problem with the evaluation team or methods, which would signal a larger problem with the evaluation. If the *Evaluation COR* believes that USAID staff should be more involved in some way, other qualified USAID staff may participate in the evaluation as a member of the evaluation team, but should plan to do so prior to the start of the evaluation.

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> **Guiding Principles for Successful Evaluation Management**
> - Always be open to the evaluation team and/or contractor by email or phone call; the *Evaluation COR* should go out of his/her way to be facilitator and mediator.
> - Always be open to the *Activity AOR(s)/COR(s)* and the Technical Office staff if there are questions or concerns.
> - Never promise or agree to any changes that are not within the boundaries of the SOW or if you are not sure. Do not give vague answers to the team/contractor such as, "I think it's okay," "I'm guessing it's fine," or "That sounds right." Find out first!
> - At the end of the contract period (and during), remember to acknowledge and thank everyone involved for his or her hard work.

Lessons Learned from USAID CORs of Evaluations

1. It is essential that the *Evaluation COR* have an early conference call with the Contractor's management team that includes most of the evaluation team members to outline standards that must be met throughout the evaluation. It is reasonable to state to the evaluation team that the Mission will not accept anything that is not in line with the Evaluation Policy, ADS 201, and generally accepted evaluation principles and standards.

2. The evaluation team should conduct the document review and submit a work plan and detailed evaluation design (including data collection tools) before arriving in-country. This will help ensure that the team has "done their homework" before in-country arrival, leading to more productive in-country planning meetings with USAID. But, be open to the need for the evaluation design to be updated once the team arrives to the field if there is limited written documentation.

3. Do not assume that the evaluation team knows everything about the local context, especially if team members are arriving from different countries. This is especially true for politically sensitive activities/projects. A local consultant team member will help with understanding the situation, but the *Evaluation COR* should still make sure that the evaluation team is aware of any sensitivities or extenuating circumstances that may affect the evaluation. Plan sufficient time once the team is in the field to meet and review the work plan and design.

4. Do not assume that the evaluation team is fully familiar with the nuances of USAID policies, processes, practices, and norms - even after providing them with guidance. The *Evaluation COR* should be clear that s/he is a resource on these issues so that any confusion can be addressed during data collection and analysis rather than in comments to the draft report.

5. Once the evaluation design is complete, the *Evaluation COR* or the evaluation team should prepare a one-page summary of the evaluation, including purpose, evaluation questions, and design of the evaluation that can be shared with internal and external stakeholders and key informants.

6. If the evaluation involves numerous interviews with USAID staff, implementing partners and government officials, the *Evaluation COR* should expect to commit considerable amount of time to facilitate the arrangement of these interviews.

7. The *Evaluation COR* should very carefully think through the implications for an evaluation on the implementing partner who is being evaluated. S/he should try to limit the burden on the implementing partner and not keep going back with requests for more interviews and more requests for data.

8. The *Evaluation COR* should strike a balance between being involved versus being too involved. The *Evaluation COR* should not overburden the evaluation team. Early and detailed planning (with USAID involvement) can obviate a lot of the potential missteps that can occur. This allows the *Evaluation COR* to focus on following the work plan schedule for check-in times and deliverables. If the *Evaluation COR* or other USAID staff plan observational trips, these should be separate from the evaluation team's travel, and no logistical requests should be made to the contractor/evaluation team.

9. During the evaluation, if the *Evaluation COR* is not satisfied with an evaluation team member's work, s/he may ask the contractor to propose a new team member(s). Remember that this process will add an additional amount of time for approval, contract signing, travel, etc., so weigh the costs and benefits of changing personnel. Discuss with the *AO/CO* before acting.

10. Plan early and block off considerable time for the evaluation report peer review early so that feedback can be provided in a timely manner to the evaluation team. Consolidate all feedback in a single, coherent document so that the evaluation team does not get mixed messages on how to adjust the evaluation report.

11. Consider inviting stakeholders and implementing partners to the evaluation out-brief. Out-briefs scheduled at the end of the fieldwork but before the international team leaves the country allow for some initial feedback pre-report, which is often well-received both by the Mission and the evaluation team. Be sure to remind attendees that the out-brief will not include data analysis or recommendations, but field observations and preliminary findings.