

## EVALUATION RESOURCE

# GUIDANCE FOR USAID STAFF PARTICIPATION ON EXTERNAL EVALUATIONS

### I. 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 201.3.5.10) 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 201.3.5.14)

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: [Tips for Managing a USAID Performance Evaluation](#).

### II. 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 project 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

**USAID evaluations are classified by the composition of the evaluation team as either *internal* or *external*. (Automated Directives System [ADS] 201.3.5.14)**

#### **External evaluations:**

1. Are commissioned by USAID rather than by the implementing partner, and
2. Have a team leader who is an independent expert from outside the Agency and who has no fiduciary relationship with the implementing partner.

#### **Internal evaluations** are either:

1. Conducted or commissioned by an implementing partner —or consortium of implementing partner and evaluator— concerning their own project (an implementer internal evaluation), or
2. Commissioned by USAID in which the evaluation team leader is from inside the Agency (a USAID internal evaluation).

Only external evaluations count toward the three types of required evaluation. Optional evaluations may be internal.

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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. Many USAID staff bring strong subject matter expertise and familiarity with the technical implementation of USAID programming that can complement and enhance the technical expertise contracted by the 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 the evaluation findings utilized. At the end of the evaluation, the external consultant 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 evaluation participants 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 OUs and projects. Engaging staff from other missions or USAID/Washington fosters a natural cross-pollination of ideas and learning.

### III. What are the challenges for USAID staff participating on evaluations?

There are numerous challenges that USAID staff may need to overcome to participate effectively on a USAID evaluation.

First, USAID evaluations can be time consuming, requiring USAID staff to spend considerable time away from their regular daily activities. If a team member cannot maintain his or her commitments to the evaluation team, it could jeopardize the timeliness and quality of the evaluation report and make completion more difficult for external team members.

Second, if USAID staff members on evaluation teams have different or unclear expectations about their role(s) on the evaluation team, it can lead to conflict with the evaluation team leader and/or other members.

Third, as employees of USAID, staff members may bring their biases or preconceived ideas about the project being evaluated, jeopardizing the objectivity of the evaluation report. Even when a USAID staff member is able to be fully objective, his or her presence may still lead to a perceived lack of objectivity by the evaluation team. While having an external team leader is intended to mitigate such biases and perceptions, there is no guarantee that this arrangement will do so.

Finally, the participation of USAID staff members on evaluation teams has the potential for biasing responses from key informants (particularly implementing partners) when these

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informants are interviewed by USAID staff or even when a USAID observer is in the interview room.

### IV. 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. 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 a number of practices to consider when planning for and implementing 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:

- ***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 201.3.5.14), 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





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- ***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.