ADS 201 Additional Help

WHOLE-OF-PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

This Additional Help document is a supplemental resource to the whole-of-project evaluation (WOPE) requirement stated in ADS 201.3.5.13. It is intended to help USAID Mission staff understand how a whole-of-project performance evaluation differs from an activity-level performance evaluation, and how it can respond to learning needs. Missions are encouraged to read this document along with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on Program Net before selecting a project or planning for a whole-of-project performance evaluation.

This document provides information on:

- The whole-of-project performance evaluation requirement
- The whole-of-project performance evaluation definition
- Selecting a project to evaluate
- Planning and designing a whole-of-project performance evaluation

The Whole-of-Project Evaluation Requirement

ADS 201.3.5.13 requires evaluations in three instances. This Additional Help note focuses on the third evaluation requirement.

Requirement 3: Each Mission must conduct at least one "whole-of-project" performance evaluation within their CDCS timeframe.[1]

Please note that a WOPE may also count as one of the evaluations required under Requirement 1, "Each Mission and Washington OU that manages program funds and designs and implements projects must conduct at least one evaluation per project."

All other evaluation requirements, standards, and guidance for USAID apply to WOPE, including the ADS definition for performance evaluations and supplemental guidance for evaluation planning, reports, and utilization (see the ADS and the Evaluation Toolkit for more information).

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[1] The new ADS requirement that Missions conduct at least one 'whole-of-project performance evaluation' under its CDCS to assess the successes and shortcomings of an entire project only applies to CDCSs approved in January 2015 or later. "whole-of-project" performance evaluations may be conducted on new projects or ongoing projects that were approved prior to the issuance of the new policy. Any whole-of-project performance evaluations that were completed before the issuance of the new policy fulfill this requirement.

The Whole-of-Project Evaluation Definition

The ADS states that "whole-of-project performance evaluations examine an entire project, including all its constituent activities and progress toward the achievement of the Project Purpose."[2]

By definition, a whole-of-project performance evaluation *must*:
- Examine an entire project, including all its constituent activities, and
- Examine progress toward achievement of the Project Purpose.

Missions may find it helpful to review the definitions for Project Purpose, project, and activity provided in the ADS Chapter 201 (emphasis added in italics).

> The Project Purpose is the highest-level result to be achieved by a project. It must support the Mission's CDCS Results Framework, typically at the Intermediate Result (IR) level, and *be defined at a level of ambition that is manageable and judged to be attainable given the Mission's resources, staff, and influence.*
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> A project is *a set of complementary activities*, over an established timeline and budget, *intended to achieve a discrete development result, often aligned with an Intermediate Result (IR) in the CDCS Results Framework*. Taken together, a Mission's suite of project designs provides the operational plans for achieving the objectives in its CDCS or other applicable strategic plan.
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> An activity carries out an intervention, or set of interventions, typically through a contract, grant, or agreement with another U.S. Government agency or with the partner country government. An activity also may be an intervention undertaken directly by Mission staff that contributes to a project, such as a policy dialogue. *In most cases, multiple activities are needed to ensure the synergistic contributions necessary to achieve the project's desired results.*

Selecting a Project for a Whole-of-Project Evaluation

Each Mission determines which project(s) will be evaluated to comply with the WOPE requirement. Evaluations that address project-level concerns are best planned during project design, but a decision to evaluate may be made at any point during project implementation, particularly if new information arises indicating that an evaluation is appropriate for accountability or learning purposes. Missions are encouraged to review the *Deciding to Evaluate During Project Design* and *Conducting an Evaluability Assessment for USAID Evaluations* in the Evaluation Toolkit to help identify the best project(s) for WOPEs. Missions might also consider the benefit of WOPE findings for specific audiences (e.g., to inform future investments including a new CDCS and new projects); high-priority factors of a

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[2] Constituent activities of a project include any existing Program Assistance that is part of the project being evaluated. Program Assistance, historically known as Non- project Assistance, is a generalized resource transfer, usually in the form of foreign exchange, to the recipient government based on meeting defined benchmarks or performance indicators that are not based on cost. With the exception of cash transfers and sovereign loan guarantees (see 201.3.3.3), Program Assistance must be approved through PADs or, where applicable, an AAM (see ADS 201mai, Activity Approval Memorandum Template). Guidance on using Program Assistance is evolving. Therefore, it is recommended that Missions that are considering using Program Assistance consult with PPL/SPP prior to initiating the design process.

project including high financial or political risk, risk to beneficiaries, and high visibility; and the data collected through the project MEL plan that would support a WOPE (e.g., availability of baseline data, performance indicators, documentation of adaptive management, and changes to theory of change). The process of developing the activity-level evaluation questions in the activity MEL Plans may also inform the decision to evaluate using the WOPE model or not. [3] In most cases, PPL discourages selecting projects written at the DO-level for WOPE.[4]

While Missions should select projects based primarily on their own learning and accountability needs, projects with the following design and management characteristics may be particularly strong candidates for informative, well-founded WOPEs:
- Substantial evidence available at the time of project design, and/or an up-to-date evidence base that includes data or information on progress toward achievement of the Project Purpose.
- A theory of change that clearly articulates how the project's set of activities work logically toward the expected project outcomes to achieve the Project Purpose.
- Activities under the project have clearly articulated synergies, highly interdependent implementing mechanisms, and/or important coordination points across activities.
- A project manager who is assigned to:
  o Provide guidance on how activities can work in the most complementary and synergistic manner to achieve the Project Purpose (201.3.3.14); and
  o Communicate early with activity managers/CORs/AORs/implementing partners (IPs) about WOPE, coordinate regularly and align activities as implementation evolves, and update project documents as new evidence emerges.
- The team and/or IPs regularly take time to reflect on progress and use that knowledge to adapt accordingly (e.g., portfolio reviews, CDCS mid-course stocktaking exercises, after-action reviews, partner meetings, and others), as indicated in the MEL Plan (ADS 201.3.5.23).
- Adaptive management practices that are consistently documented to assist:
  o Mission Technical Offices to ensure activities are managed in a complementary and synergistic manner to support achievement of project outcomes (201.3.3.1); and
  o Mission Office of Acquisition and Assistance to ensure "activities are working in the most synergistic manner in support of project outcomes." (201.3.3.1).
- Following portfolio and project reviews, updates and changes to the PAD are systematically documented including the theory of change and MEL Plan (ADS 201.3.3.16.).

For further assistance in selecting a project to evaluate to meet the whole-of-project evaluation requirement, Missions are encouraged to contact their Regional Bureau M&E POC.

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[3] Note that to meet the ADS requirement for one evaluation per project (Requirement 1), Missions may choose to use a WOPE or an activity-level evaluation, but do not have to do both for that project.

[4] DO-level projects, compared to IR-level projects, are less likely to have a single Project Purpose whose achievement can be defined through performance results, making accurate measurement of progression toward Project Purpose especially difficult. There are exceptions to this case. Missions that would like to pursue a DO-level WOPE are encouraged to plan early and consult with their Regional Bureau M&E POCs for additional technical assistance.

Planning and Designing a Whole-of-Project Evaluation

All evaluations "should be timed so that their findings can inform decisions such as, but not limited to, course corrections, exercising option years, designing a follow-on project, or creating a country or sector strategic plan" (201.3.5.13). Broadly, Missions are encouraged to review the guidance on evaluation found throughout the Evaluation Toolkit and apply it to scoping a whole-of-project evaluation. This section provides a few considerations specific to the WOPE purpose, questions, design and planning, resources required, and statement of work.

Whole-of-Project Evaluation Purpose

A WOPE is a particular type of performance evaluation that primarily examines progress of all the constituent parts of the project toward achievement of the Project Purpose. It may also inform how a project was implemented; how it was perceived and valued; and other questions that are pertinent to design, management, and operational decision making (ADS 201.6). Project team staff that are developing a project MEL Plan with a WOPE purpose and questions should, in their MEL plan, state the reasons for conducting a WOPE and which specific interests the WOPE findings will serve. Missions might consider how a WOPE might:

- Illuminate ways in which the entire project is making progress toward the stated Project Purpose or not;
- Identify the assumptions or gaps in the project's design or management approach to help inform course-corrections or a new project design; and
- Contribute to the evidence on effective development approaches.

As with any evaluation, ensuring evaluation findings are used to inform programming and policy decisions is a critical component of whole-of-project evaluations. A WOPE may be a way to explore how progress toward the Project Purpose is greater than the sum of the constituent parts (i.e., the activities). PPL encourages Missions to consider the value of a WOPE that examines the relationships among activities working together in project design and management approaches to achieve a stated Project Purpose. For example, a WOPE may explore findings from a portfolio or project review that suggest most (or all) of the activities are achieving their stated objectives, but the project as a whole is not on track to achieve the Project Purpose. A WOPE might examine the assumptions about the relationships among activities described in the theory of change and logic model; processes for project cohesion; (un)intended outcomes gained through those relationships that influence progress toward the Project Purpose; and lessons for future project management and project design to achieve the Project Purpose. In other words, a WOPE might examine the extent to which all activity-level interventions worked (or are working) in a complementary and coordinated manner to achieve the stated Project Purpose. Please find illustrative WOPE questions below.

In articulating the purpose of a whole-of-project evaluation, it is important to remember that the evaluation should answer questions not answered by other means (e.g., monitoring, activity-level evaluations, etc.). Activity-level monitoring data and activity-level evaluation findings are important sources for project learning. They inform the extent to which an activity contributes to a result, but may not account for contributions from other activities within a project portfolio. Project-level performance monitoring data may not sufficiently answer questions about

the complementarity or synergistic contributions of all the project's activities toward a stated Project Purpose. For these reasons, a WOPE should avoid merely summarizing or compiling activity-level performance evaluations.

As part of establishing the WOPE purpose, PPL encourages Missions to review knowledge gaps as stated in the mission-wide PMP and project and activity MEL plans and identify where those gaps could inform good evaluation questions.

Whole-of-Project Evaluation Questions
The following are illustrative evaluation questions for Missions to consider and revise per their learning needs.

To examine the contribution from all constituent parts of a project to the Project Purpose:
- To what extent has progress been made in achieving [the Project Purpose]?
- To what extent have all of the project's constituent activities contributed to achieving [the Project Purpose]?
- How did positive and negative unintended outcomes of the project and all constituent activities contribute to or detract from achieving [the Project Purpose]?
- To what extent have all of the project's constituent activities contributed to the sustainability of [project outcomes]?

To examine strengths and weaknesses of the project theory of change:
- To what extent were the programmatic and contextual assumptions identified in the project theory of change sufficient to achieve [the Project Purpose]?
- What are the characteristics of the project design that positively or negatively influence activity contributions to [the Project Purpose]?

To examine the interaction among activities as they contribute to the Project Purpose:
- What were the benefits of coordinating all of the constituent activities of a project portfolio to achieve [the Project Purpose]? What were the challenges?
- How well did the internal and external project management protocols and practices implemented in all constituent activities support progress toward [the Project Purpose]?

Those involved in planning whole-of-project evaluations are encouraged to consult with a range of stakeholders on their needs to further inform the purpose and questions.

Whole-of-Project Design and Planning
The ADS specifies that a WOPE must examine an entire project, including all its constituent activities. However, whole-of-project evaluations may not require in-depth data collection and analysis for those activities that do not directly align with the Project Purpose but are still included under the project umbrella. PPL encourages Missions to review the most updated theory of change, PAD details as well as the existing evidence from within the project (e.g., activity-level evaluation findings, monitoring data, etc.), and post-evaluation action plans to consider the

extent to which constituent activities are aligned with the Project Purpose and should be examined. This review will help inform the WOPE design and inform resource considerations.

Activities that have completed or planned activity-level evaluations should not be automatically excluded from further examination under a whole-of-project evaluation because the activity-level evaluation may not sufficiently inform the WOPE question(s). Activities that are not achieving results should not be automatically excluded from in-depth examination because a WOPE may identify potential improvements for activity contribution in the context of the project.

Whole-of-Project Resources and Management
Whole-of-project evaluation will require careful management and adequate resources including time, staffing, and funding. A WOPE will likely require a more complex design and data collection approach than a single-activity performance evaluation.

When including a WOPE in project design and PAD development or updating an existing MEL plan, project teams are encouraged to develop overarching WOPE questions and data collection plans. The project budget should be adequate for the proposed WOPE. The project team should assign responsibility to a project manager or designee to oversee coordination of the whole-of-project evaluation and communicate the intention to conduct a WOPE early with activity managers/IPs.

A few points for the project team to keep in mind when resourcing a WOPE are noted below. Some are specific to WOPE, while others apply to evaluations at-large but bear repeating.

- **Management considerations:** Project teams may adopt strategic engagement protocols with activities and implementing partners (IPs) specific to preparing for a whole-of-project evaluation. These actions may require more time from C/AORs and project managers or indicate the need for additional staffing. WOPE managers should be aware that, as with any evaluation, the need for mid-course changes during the evaluation may arise, requiring built-in resources as a safeguard.
- **Timing considerations:** The project team should determine when sufficient implementation will have occurred and there are experiences and data to assess and analyze. This does not mean that all planned activities must be live, but that some have been launched and a WOPE may inform synergies with others yet to begin.
  - *Scheduling and planning considerations:* WOPE evaluations may require substantially more preparation time before and during fieldwork than a typical performance evaluation. For the project team, this may include diligently articulating and updating the theory of change, documenting adaptive management practices, and organizing background documents from all activities. For evaluators, this may include additional time to review documents from the project and all constituent activities, and negotiate and finalize an evaluation design before initiating fieldwork. PPL suggests award mechanisms incorporate adequate time between award and fieldwork into the evaluation timeline for such tasks.

- **Implementation:** For data collection, fieldwork may also take longer or require more data collectors than that of a single activity-level evaluation because the WOPE will likely collect more data than an activity-level evaluation and require more time for analysis. Additionally, the geographic location of activities will influence travel costs and time requirements. The evaluation fieldwork, including collecting any baseline data, should be planned during a period that does not overlap with major activity milestones (e.g. work planning) to ensure key respondents have the bandwidth to participate.
- **Evaluation utilization:** Post-evaluation Action Plans are required for all evaluations (please see ADS 201.3.5.18.). Strong Post-evaluation Action Plans are built on well-developed, practical, feasible recommendations that are included in evaluation reports. PPL encourages Missions to build in and protect adequate resources (time, staff, capacity, funding) to vet the final evaluation findings and develop recommendations collaboratively with relevant stakeholders. Too often this step in an evaluation is sacrificed to accommodate mid-course issues (e.g., field work). Losing the time, available funds, and/or capacity to reflect on evaluation findings with relevant stakeholders threatens the likelihood of producing strong, useful recommendations.

Because of these resource considerations, it is all the more important for Missions and project teams to consider whole-of-project evaluations at the design phase and include them in the MEL Plan.

Whole-of-Project Statements of Work
A Statement of Work for a WOPE must meet the requirements listed in the ADS 201 Mandatory Reference on Evaluation Statements of Work. Specifically for a WOPE, SOW authors might consider including the following:
- Content on the whole-of-project evaluation requirement and definition, particularly when the evaluation is intended to meet the ADS evaluation requirements;
- Evaluation questions that examine an entire project, including all its constituent activities, and progress toward achievement of the Project Purpose (see the Evaluation Toolkit for tips on developing good evaluation questions);
- A brief history of the project, the Project Purpose, and the most up-to-date theory of change and management plan for ensuring coordination across all activities;
- A project MEL plan including the M&E framework and learning agenda that pull together performance information from all activities contributing to a Project Purpose;
- A list of completed and ongoing activities within the project and their MEL plans, along with brief rationale for those projects that are included under the project umbrella but excluded from in-depth data collection and analysis for the WOPE; and
- A summary of planned activities to be included in the project.

Evaluation SOWs are not evaluation designs. PPL encourages Missions to review Evaluation Toolkit guidance on mixed-methods evaluations and consider soliciting innovative designs where appropriate. All Evaluation Statements of Work should allow for flexibility to accommodate the input from expert evaluators as well as the adaptation needed during implementation of an evaluation in the field. This is especially important for WOPEs that may benefit from complex evaluation designs proposed by contractors as the first step post-contract award. That

means writing flexibility into the SOW to allow evaluators to, with USAID collaboration and approval, (1) adjust evaluation questions and propose evaluation methods to serve the evaluation purpose during the design phase and (2) adapt the scope and expectations for the final report based on opportunities and obstacles encountered during implementation of the evaluation.

Missions might consider establishing a parallel contract to hire an external evaluation team before or at the inception of a project to conduct a WOPE. That agreement would include sufficient resources for baseline and endline data collection and data analysis. The parallel arrangement should provide guidance and advice to the implementers during project implementation so that the whole-of-project evaluation can be undertaken. Parallel contracts for whole-of-project evaluations usually imply that:

1) Activity implementation solicitations and contracts take the WOPE into account (i.e., existing and new implementers know their activity is part of a WOPE), and
2) The WOPE contract is procured early enough to allow the evaluator to collect baseline data and monitor adherence to evaluation design.

Additional tools and guidance for planning, managing, and learning from performance evaluations are available in the USAID Evaluation Toolkit (Technical Note: Mixed Methods Evaluations; Tips for Developing Good Performance Evaluation Questions).