



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

10 YEARS OF USAID DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

USAID has conducted 14 developmental evaluations (DEs) since 2010. These DEs supported eight sectors and were implemented by 14 distinct Missions and Washington-based Operating Units. The average period of performance was 2.6 years, and the total estimated cost of all these DEs was \$8-\$10 million. All DEs used embedded evaluators and support staff, and most used both expatriate and local staff. The challenges to DE were fears of cost, duplication of efforts, and lack of programmatic buy-in, while the opportunities were enhanced development outcomes, a high level of staff interest, and the approach's increasing relevancy.

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, Dr. Michael Quinn Patton published his landmark book *Developmental Evaluation*, launching a new approach to evaluation to support complex and innovative programs. The use of DE has grown substantially over the last decade because of its emphasis on learning and informing adaptation and decision-making. In October 2019, USAID included DE as a form of performance evaluation in its Operational Policy for the Program Cycle (ADS 201).

To complement this new branch of evaluation sciences, the USAID/Indonesia DE for USAID Jalin conducted a rapid assessment of the Agency's DEs since 2010. For context, USAID commissions an average of about 200 evaluations per year, totaling more than 1,100 evaluations since 2011.¹ This assessment aimed to better understand how USAID has applied DE among the range of USAID evaluations and to identify barriers and enablers to applying DE in the future.

The assessment team contacted as many people as possible who may have been involved in USAID DEs, including **three listservs and approximately 40 identified DE stakeholders**. For more information, see Methodology on page 7.

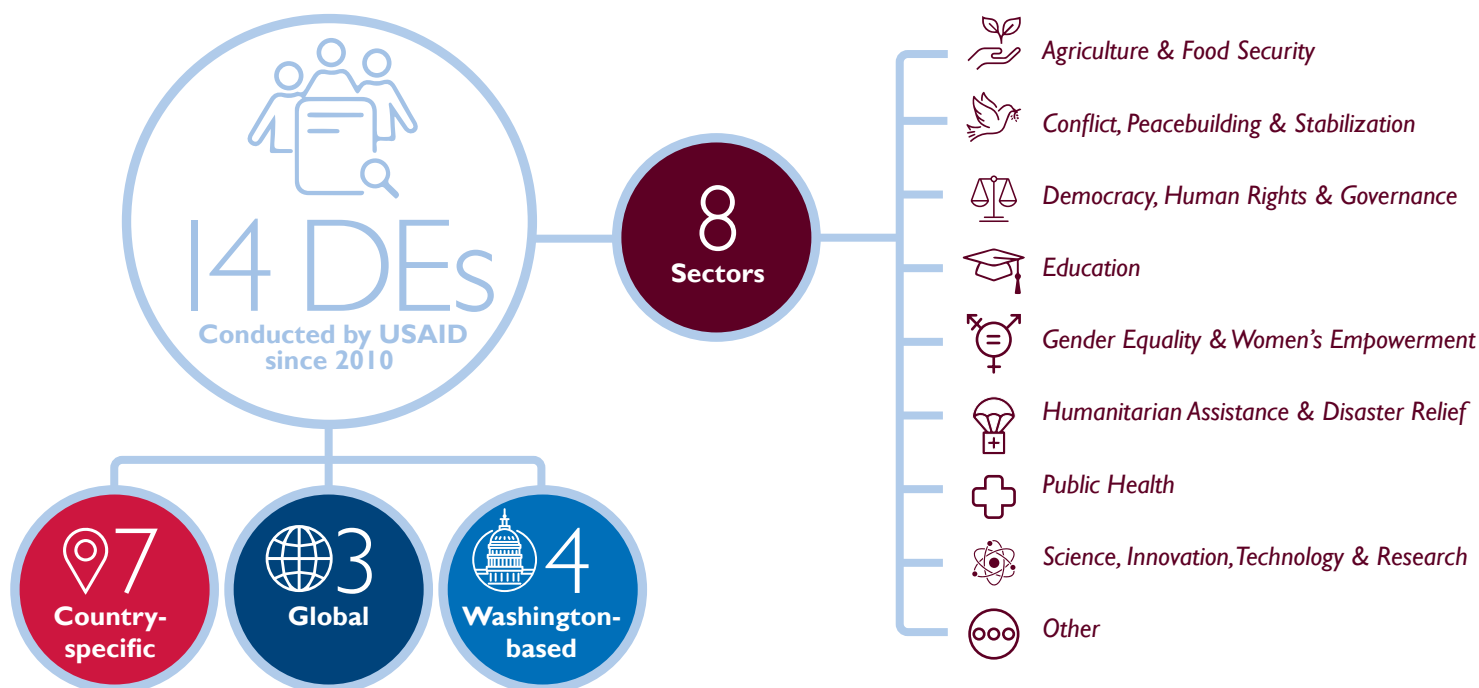
WHAT IS A DE?

DEs can take many different forms and names. This assessment identified an evaluation as a DE if:

1. The evaluator is closely connected with or embedded in the implementation team;
2. The scope supports adaptive management and addresses complexity; and,
3. The scope is not tied to summative evaluation questions.

This assessment may have omitted some USAID DEs due to its limited time and resources. We welcome you sharing your DE or similar initiatives with us by contacting cthompson@socialimpact.com and ddegarcia@socialimpact.com.

WHAT WE FOUND



Bureau for Food Security (BFS)

FUNDER: USAID/BFS

DE IMPLEMENTER: USAID/DEPA-MERL

Consortium: Social Impact (prime), William Davidson Institute, Search for Common Ground

DE STAFF: 8

TIMEFRAME: Dec 2018-Dec 2019

LOCATION: USA

1-2YRS | \$\$\$ | 

Sustained Uptake (SU)

FUNDER: USAID/Global Development Lab

DE IMPLEMENTER: USAID/DEPA-MERL

Consortium: Social Impact (prime) William Davidson Institute, Search for Common Ground

DE STAFF: 8

TIMEFRAME: Apr 2016-Apr 2019

LOCATION: USA

3+YRS | \$\$\$ | 

Digital Strategy (DS)

FUNDER: USAID/Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub (ITR)

DE IMPLEMENTER: USAID/DEPA-MERL

Consortium: Social Impact (prime), William Davidson Institute, Search for Common Ground

DE STAFF: 9

TIMEFRAME: Jul 2020-Jan 2022

LOCATION: USA

1-2YRS | \$\$\$ | 

Selective Integrated Reading Activity (SIRA)

FUNDER: USAID/Education Office

DE IMPLEMENTER: The Mitchell Group

DE STAFF: 46 (core staff and 40 data collectors)

TIMEFRAME: Jan 2020-Jun 2020

LOCATION: Mali

< 1YR | \$\$\$ | 

Alliances for Reconciliation (PAR)

FUNDER: USAID/Colombia

DE IMPLEMENTER: Democracy International

DE STAFF: 9

TIMEFRAME: Mar 2017-Sep 2021

LOCATION: Colombia

3+YRS | \$\$\$ | 

Tanzania Integrated Health (TIH)

FUNDER: USAID/Tanzania

DE IMPLEMENTER: Social Solutions International

DE STAFF: 14

TIMEFRAME: Oct 2017-Dec 2021

LOCATION: Tanzania

3+YRS | \$\$\$ | 

Innovation for Change (I4C)

FUNDER: USAID/Democracy Human Rights and Governance Office (DRG)

DE IMPLEMENTER: Counterpart International (initial), Civicus (overseeing), Innovation for Change (regional)

DE STAFF: 4

TIMEFRAME: Apr 2018-Dec 2021

LOCATION: Global

3+YRS | \$\$\$ | 

USAID LEARNS Contract (LEARNS)

FUNDER: USAID/Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL)

DE IMPLEMENTER: Dexis Consulting Group

DE STAFF: 7

TIMEFRAME: Sept 2016-Apr 2020

LOCATION: Global

3+YRS | \$\$\$ | 

Sharekna Project to Empower Youth and Support Local Communities (Sharekna)

FUNDER: USAID/Middle East Bureau

DE IMPLEMENTER: FHI 360

DE STAFF: 3

TIMEFRAME: Oct 2016-Aug 2018

LOCATION: Tunisia

1-2YRS | \$\$\$ | 

Jalin

FUNDER: USAID/Indonesia

DE IMPLEMENTER: Social Impact

DE STAFF: 9

TIMEFRAME: Jun 2018-Sep 2021

LOCATION: Indonesia

3+YRS | \$\$\$ | 

Early Grade Reading (EGR)

FUNDER: USAID/Education Office

DE IMPLEMENTER: Creative Associates International

DE STAFF: 86

TIMEFRAME: Oct 2016-Jul 2020

LOCATION: Nigeria

3+YRS | \$\$\$ | 

Family Care First (FCF)

FUNDER: USAID/Cambodia

DE IMPLEMENTER: USAID/DEPA-MERL

Consortium: Social Impact (prime), William Davidson Institute, Search for Common Ground

DE STAFF: 8

TIMEFRAME: Nov 2016-Jul 2018

LOCATION: Cambodia

1-2YRS | \$\$\$ | 

People-to-People Reconciliation Fund (P2P)

FUNDER: USAID/Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM)

DE IMPLEMENTER: Social Impact

DE STAFF: 10

TIMEFRAME: Nov 2011-Jan 2015

LOCATION: Global

3+YRS | \$\$\$ | 

Technical and Operational Performance Support Program (TOPS)

FUNDER: USAID/Food for Peace

DE IMPLEMENTER: Save the Children

DE STAFF: 10

TIMEFRAME: Jun 2013-Aug 2013

LOCATION: Global

<1YR | \$\$\$ |   

\$ =<\$500,000 \$\$=\$500,000-\$999,999 \$\$\$=\$1,000,000+

DURATION

The average USAID DE lasted 2.6 years. Two DEs concluded in less than a year, while two others continued for over four years. DEs funded by overseas Missions on average had longer periods of performance than DEs funded by Washington-based OUs.

DEs typically occur over longer periods than performance evaluations because they are conducted alongside an ongoing program. DEs require time for an evaluator to embed in a team and for that evaluator to address learning questions, collect and share data, inform decision-making, and support the utilization of recommendations.

INSIGHTS

2.6 YRS

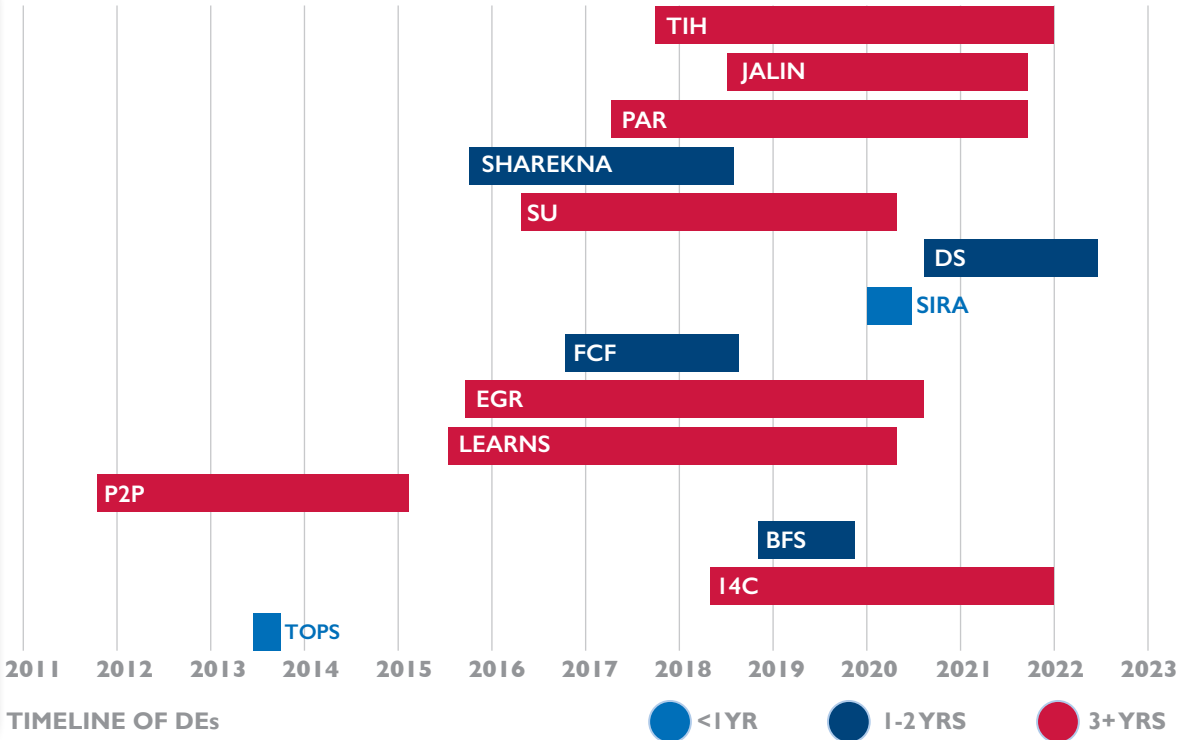
Average length of a DE
Note: The two shortest DEs (TOPS and SIRA) used DE as part of a mid-term performance evaluation rather than as a stand-alone initiative. If these are excluded, the average DE length is almost 3 years.

86%

Of DEs occurred after 2015

50%

Of DEs took 3+ years to complete



BUDGET

USAID expended approximately \$8 to \$10 million total on DEs between 2010 and 2020. DE budgets varied significantly for the 14 DEs. Four had budgets over \$1 million, seven costing around \$500k-\$1 million, and three costing less than \$500k.

DE budgets depend on duration, team structure, level of engagement, activities, and location. Duration is the biggest cost driver. Both DEs over four years cost over \$1 million. However, different team structures can offset costs. DEs costing \$500-\$750k varied from less than one year to almost four years and fielded teams ranging in size from 5 to 86. One of the lowest-cost DEs continued for over three years with a single part-time evaluator.

INSIGHTS

2.86 YRS

Average length of DEs costing \$500,000+

1.67 YRS

Average length of DEs costing <\$500,000

BUDGET RANGE

\$1,000,000+

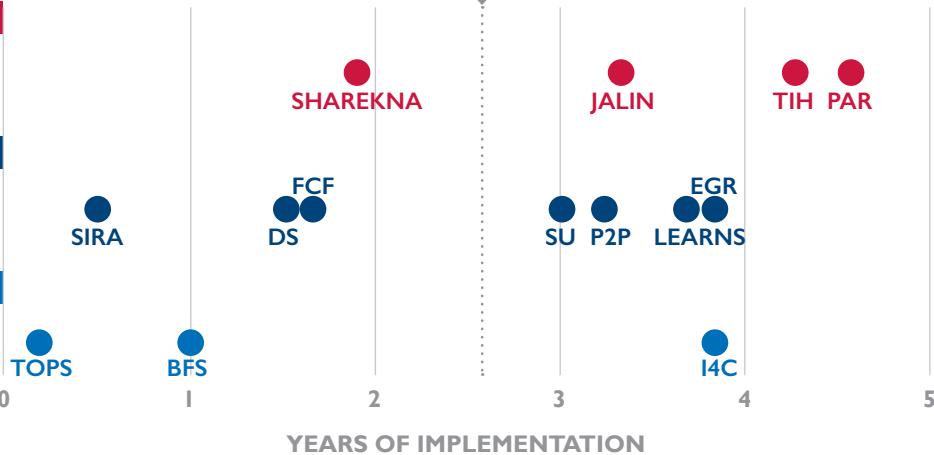
4

\$500,000-\$999,999

7

<\$500,000

3



STAFFING AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Staffing and organization structures varied across DEs. However, each evaluation team had at least two components in common:



1. LEAD EVALUATOR(S)

All USAID DEs indicated having at least one embedded evaluator; most often an expatriate in-country expert. All DEs outside the US reported using a combination of expatriate and local staff, such as USAD/Jalin DE which has an expatriate Chief of Party and five local evaluators and operations staff. Drawing on international evaluation best practice through expatriate staff is advantageous because DE is a new approach without a global knowledge base. Equally important is leveraging local expertise to better inform programmatic adaptations and learning capture by DEs. For context, only 61% of the Agency's evaluations in 2019 had at least one local evaluator.²



2. SUPPORT STAFF

(i.e., project managers, technical experts, enumerators, etc.)

This assessment found varying numbers of DE support staff, with some evaluations citing as few as 2-3 support staff and others citing 40-80. Some teams used higher concentrations of management staff, while others utilized more in-house technical experts to fit their country or sector context. This assessment lacked the time and resources to further investigate DE support staffing, yet it acknowledges that understanding organizational structures and their effects on implementation and budget deserves further study.

INSIGHTS

79%

Of DEs cost \$500,000+

Note: Lower-cost DEs operated for shorter timeframes or used part-time staff. Higher-cost DEs used a combination of full-time and part-time staff to continue for longer timeframes.

64%

Of DEs reported team sizes between 7 and 10 staff—including at least one embedded evaluator and support staff.

3-86

Range of team size for DEs. Team size and structure varied more than other elements of DE, with a wide variety in who was considered part of the team.

“One of the major lessons for the USAID team has been realizing that DE can provide a flexible mechanism to improve a project, beyond the expectations of the formal evaluation question reports.”
—USAID, CASE STUDY OF THE DE FOR USAID JALIN

The USAID Jalin DE assessed the Indonesian Ministry of Health’s national hospital mentoring program in 2021. Here Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital conducts a mentoring visit to Balaraja Regional General Hospital (Credit: USAID Jalin).

CHALLENGES

This assessment investigated 16 reports on the Development Exchange Clearinghouse (DEC) where practitioners expressed interest in DE but subsequently decided not to conduct a DE. In these cases, the common barriers were:

COST

DE was not perceived to be technically or methodologically different enough from performance evaluations to justify its perceived higher cost.

PERCEIVED DUPLICATION

DE would duplicate the MEL systems already in place, either at a USAID Mission or with implementing partners.

BUY-IN

A program’s technical team was not collectively bought into DE which resulted in a lack of buy-in and difficulties pitching DE to the funder.

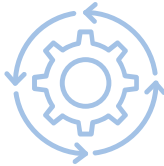
“While [USAID] Missions have an appetite for DE, given its complexity in scope and reputation as being expensive, it can be forgotten and pushed to the side.”
—Implementer Interviewee

“DE would duplicate the M&E advisory roles we already established within the project...[i.e.] using outcome harvests to maintain awareness of important changes related to our activities and guide our adaptive process.”
—USAID Interviewee

“DE does not fit in if your funder’s most important and/or only metrics are ‘activities’ and ‘expenditures.’”
—Implementer Interviewee

OPPORTUNITIES: THE FUTURE OF DE

DE’s future holds opportunities to leverage a growing evidence base showing that DE improves development outcomes, a high level of interest among USAID staff and practitioners, and the approach’s increasing relevancy. This assessment found:



DE represents a powerful alternative to traditional performance evaluations, as USAID becomes more aware of complexity and seeks an evaluation approach that **supports adapting and changing for ongoing development.**



When tracked, the **utilization of DE recommendations has been high** and may exceed the rate of use for performance evaluation recommendations.

For example, the USAID Jalin DE observed outcomes from USAID, the Indonesian Ministry of Health, and stakeholders utilizing **73 out of its 106 recommendations.**



The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated DE’s value in the face of a sudden major change or crisis by **exploring real-time solutions and generating innovative responses.**

Even with the restrictions and complexities of COVID-19, remote DE has shown to be viable. (See [Remote DE: A Guide for Funders and Practitioners.](#))

Other international development agencies, such as UNICEF, have used DEs to support their COVID-19 response programs.

Looking ahead, DE would benefit from further socializing and standardizing the approach within the broader MEL field. Creating more comprehensive communities of practice may create forums to discuss solving barriers to entry. DEPA-MERL has developed a suite of resources on implementing and managing DEs by evaluating DE pilots, making important strides towards broadening learning around DEs (see Additional Resources on pg. 7).

INSIGHTS

60%

Of DEPA-MERL’s stakeholders preferred DE over traditional evaluation

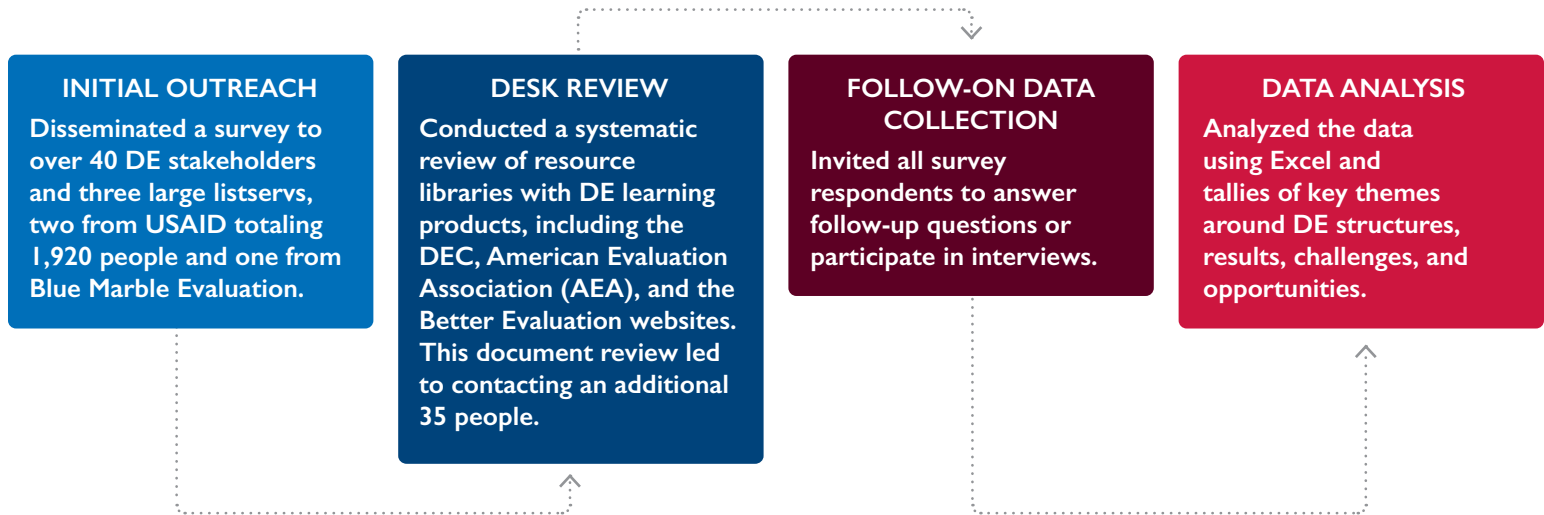
85%

Of DEPA-MERL’s stakeholders would recommend DE to other organizations

METHODOLOGY

This assessment was sparked by the most common question posed by participants in the launch event for Remote DE: A Guide for Funders and Practitioners with Dr. Michael Quinn Patton in February 2021: **“Is there a comprehensive list or study of all DEs ever implemented?”** A participant survey indicated that 71 percent of respondents—of whom 33 percent were USAID staff—had this question. Capitalizing on this interest from USAID (and maximizing their limited resources), the assessment team decided to research DEs conducted at USAID only. Further research can and should be done on DEs outside of USAID.

To achieve this objective, the assessment team used the following methodology:



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

USAID’s Developmental Evaluation Pilot Activity

DEPA-MERL’s website includes many resources to better understand DE, including a series of DE case studies and the following guides on how to successfully design and implement a DE:

- **A Practical Guide for Evaluators and Administrators**
- **A Practical Guide for Funders**

Remote DE: A Guide for Funders and Practitioners

A guide outlining how DE has adapted to overcome the challenges of working remotely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

BetterEvaluation’s overview of Developmental Evaluation with multiple resources.

Developmental Evaluation by Michael Quinn Patton, the landmark book that launched DE into the evaluation sciences in 2010.

¹ See [usaid.gov/evaluation](https://www.usaid.gov/evaluation).

² See “USAID Agency Financial Report Fiscal Year 2020,” p. 26, [usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USAID_FY2020_AFR-508.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USAID_FY2020_AFR-508.pdf)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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