



DFAT DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION POLICY 2023

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) delivers Australia's international development program. Its aim is to advance a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. Robust evaluations are an essential tool for promoting continuous improvement and ensuring we are adapting our approaches to achieve effective outcomes. They support learning, accountability and decision-making by:

- Generating evidence and learning to improve implementation and inform future designs.
- Supporting an organisational culture focused on innovation and continuous learning.
- Reinforcing public confidence in government by credibly demonstrating the performance of the development program.
- Strengthening our program management as well as the knowledge and skills of our staff.
- Assisting us to meet our accountability obligations under the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013, which requires DFAT to assess and report on its financial and non-financial performance.

WHAT IS EVALUATION?

We define evaluation as the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed investment, program or policy.¹ It is an in-depth process which takes place on a periodic basis. Evaluation aims to provide credible evidence which can inform major program management and policy decisions and highlight important development lessons.

Evaluation is distinct from, but related to, monitoring. Monitoring is a continuous process which examines whether an investment, policy or program is on track to achieve its intended results. In DFAT, monitoring is characterised by activities such as dialogue with partners, monitoring visits to field sites, and the collection of data on key deliverables. Evaluation will generally use data gathered through monitoring as one source of evidence.

EVALUATION IN DFAT

Evaluations are initiated and managed by country, regional, global and sector program areas. Program areas identify evaluations that will help account for and improve their work through the multi-year evaluation and learning plan which is updated annually. Programs have flexibility to determine the highest priority issues their evaluations should focus on and are expected to complete a minimum number each year.

DFAT develops a multi-year development evaluation plan each year. The plan comprises the evaluations prioritised in country and regional development partnership plans, and their annual updates, as well as planned evaluations of global, sector programs and thematic programs. DFAT's Development Evaluation Plan is approved by the Secretary and published on the DFAT website. DFAT reports annually on the plan and the quality and use of evaluations in the Performance of Australian Development Cooperation Report.

On occasion, program areas may wish to undertake a rapid management review to help inform immediate decisions required on individual investments. Rapid management reviews are similar to evaluations but involve less time and resources and are generally less rigorous. The requirements of this Evaluation Policy do not apply to rapid management reviews.

¹ This definition is adapted from the OECD's *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management*.

EVALUATION USE

Use is the driving force behind our evaluations. All our evaluations should be commissioned and conducted to maximise the use of evaluation findings and recommendations to improve our work.

To ensure evaluations are useful we focus on three areas: prioritisation; quality; and systems which facilitate use.

Prioritisation

We focus evaluations on the highest priority issues in our programs. Focusing on areas where there is the greatest demand for evidence and improvement will ensure evaluations add value and are used. This includes the need for accountability, particularly for large investments, and to assess impact.

Priority evaluation topics may include areas where there are significant evidence gaps that need to be filled so we can make better decisions; issues that pose significant risks to the effectiveness of our work; or interventions which are high priority for the Australian Government and our partners.

Quality

For evaluation findings to be used they must be credible and robust. For this reason, all our evaluation products and processes will be high quality. Quality is achieved in the following ways:

- We take advantage of both **independent and internal perspectives**. Evaluation teams should be led by an independent person who is not directly involved in program management to ensure the findings are objective. At the same time, evaluation teams should include DFAT staff to the extent possible. This will ensure evaluation teams understand our context and have insight into whether evaluation recommendations are appropriate and feasible. It will also ensure our staff have strong ownership of, and build their capacity in, evaluation and help to embed a culture of learning.
- When conducting evaluations, we **engage early with our partners**, including partner governments and implementing partners, to the extent possible. We will ensure they participate in evaluation design and implementation, and that they understand our quality and publication expectations. Where we choose to undertake joint evaluations or allow evaluations to be led by one of our development partners, we will ensure that our quality, management response and publication requirements can be upheld.
- Evaluations **fulfil our quality expectations**, as outlined in our [Design and Monitoring and Evaluation Standards](#). Our evaluations are also **conducted ethically**. Evaluation teams should adhere to the requirements of DFAT's [Ethical Research and Evaluation Guidance Note](#) and the Australasian Evaluation Society's [Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations](#).

Systems that facilitate use

Our systems and processes facilitate the use of evaluations. For example:

- We provide **management responses** to all evaluations. These outline whether we agree with the recommendations, and how and when recommendations will be implemented.
- All evaluations and management responses will be **published on the DFAT website**. This should be done within three months of an evaluation report being completed.
- We ensure **evaluation findings can be easily accessed**.
- We **link design and evaluation**. Our systems will ensure the design of our strategies, programs and investments takes into account findings from evaluations. Designs should also consider how appropriate data can be collected to ensure high quality evaluations can be conducted.
- We have **senior management oversight** of evaluations.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The **Development Effectiveness and Enabling Division** is responsible for overseeing this policy and associated guidance; providing support to program areas to prioritise and conduct program evaluations; and compiling, reviewing, publishing and reporting against this policy.

The **Development Program Committee** provides oversight and governance of the overall development cooperation program. It is responsible for ensuring evaluation findings are used to inform the development strategies and investments it approves and endorses each multi-year evaluation plan.

The DFAT **Secretary** approves a multi-year evaluation plan each year endorsed by the Development Program Committee. DFAT **program areas** (including country/regional, global and sector programs) are responsible for identifying, completing and publishing a minimum number of evaluations each year, as specified in DFAT's Development Evaluation Plan. First Assistant Secretaries are responsible for deciding which program evaluations will be conducted. Senior managers (e.g. Assistant Secretaries and Minister Counsellors) sign off on management responses.



ANNEX: RECOMMENDED MINIMUM NUMBER OF EVALUATIONS

Last update: 2024

| Country/regional program | Recommended minimum number |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Pacific Regional (excl AIFFP) | 6 |
| Papua New Guinea | 6 |
| Indonesia | 4 |
| Solomon Islands | 3 |
| ASEAN and Mekong | 2 |
| Timor-Leste | 2 |
| Philippines | 2 |
| Vietnam | 2 |
| Southeast Asia Regional | 1 |
| Vanuatu | 1 |
| Cambodia | 1 |
| Fiji | 1 |
| Bangladesh | 1 |
| Samoa | 1 every 2 years |
| Kiribati | 1 every 2 years |
| Nauru | 1 every 2 years |
| Laos | 1 every 2 years |
| Tonga | 1 every 2 years |
| Middle East and North Africa | 1 every 2 years |
| Sri Lanka | 1 every 2 years |
| South and West Asia Regional | 1 every 2 years |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | As needed |
| Nepal | As needed |
| Tuvalu | As needed |
| Mongolia | As needed |
| North Pacific | As needed |
| Bhutan | As needed |
| Maldives | As needed |
| Niue and Tokelau | As needed |

| Global programs | Recommended minimum number |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Humanitarian | 2 |
| Global NGO Programs (ANCP) | 1 every 3 years |
| Australian Volunteers Program | 1 every 3 years |

| Sector programs | Recommended minimum number |
|--|----------------------------|
| Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion | 1 every 3 years |
| Climate Change and Environment | 1 every 3 years |
| Regional and Global Health | 1 every 3 years |
| Education and Scholarships | 1 every 3 years |
| National and Economic Resilience | 1 every 3 years |
| AIFFP | 1 every 3 years |

| Other | Recommended minimum number |
|--|----------------------------|
| Other cross regional, global and sector programs, strategies, processes and policies | As needed |