MONITORING & EVALUATION

ShortCuts

Capacity-Building Guidance

Guidelines for Getting the Most from Your Technical Assistance

September 2008

Introduction

This *Short Cut* provides guidance on the planning, evaluation, documentation, and follow up of the delivery of capacity-building technical assistance. This tool is applicable to all sectors (e.g., agriculture, health, and food aid), all themes (e.g., global solidarity and peacebuilding), and all functions (e.g., monitoring and evaluation and finance). Capacity building can take many forms, from improving an organization's information technology and equipment, and growing its membership, to increasing its fundraising ability. Most commonly, capacity building means building staff skills through training, workshops, and seminars. It may also include on-the-job training, another powerful capacity-building tool. Capacity-building technical assistance can be provided by advisors from organizational headquarters, regional offices, country programs, local partners, or communities; by partner staff to their peers; and by outside consultants contracted at any level.

4 Steps to Capacity-Building Guidance

Step 1 Prepare a Scope of Work

What is a scope of work?

A scope of work (SOW) describes the nature of the relationship and the commitment between the private voluntary organization (PVO) and the technical assistance (TA) provider. The SOW may be part of a formal contract if an external TA provider is involved. Internal TA providers often require only a SOW.

Prior to writing the SOW, it is useful to consider the following questions:

- What products or results do you want to have at the end of the proposed TA? What are your deliverables?
- What expertise do you need to accomplish these tasks and results?
- Who will manage or support the TA provider? How much time will that involve?
- What will be the level of staff involvement in producing the deliverables?
- Given the level of support, what will be the time required to produce these deliverables?
- What is your budget? Does the budget correspond with the time needed? Does your budget allow for the necessary equipment and transportation?

Tips from the Field

Build flexibility into the SOW and the timeline in case of potential delays in completing the fieldwork. Any substantive changes in the SOW should be written into a formal amendment and approved at the appropriate levels within your organization.

Remember to be realistic and allow adequate time for a quality project. Be specific in answering these questions and in drafting the SOW. A detailed and complete SOW will smooth the process for both you and the TA provider. Ultimately, the SOW will better align the final product with your needs and expectations.

Internal and External Service Providers

SOWs for longer-term assistance often differ in content for internal and external service providers. For internal TA providers, the SOW should include the ways in which the tasks relate to the staff member's job description and work plan and should include a degree of flexibility should the work ultimately require more steps or additional time than originally thought.

For longer-term assistance from external TA providers, draft a SOW for the immediate tasks and build flexibility into the contract to allow for future task orders.

Basic Elements of a SOW

- Specify the background and purpose of assistance to clarify the specific deliverables and the broader programmatic context in which the work will be conducted.
- Clearly define and describe the tasks and deliverables. Break the tasks and deliverables into steps and assign a certain number of days to each. See table 1 for examples.
- State the TA provider responsibilities, including, as appropriate, procedures for submitting invoices, proprietary rights to final products, and document standards or templates to be used. TA provider responsibilities are also often stated in the contract. The contractor's expectations about the place of work, review of materials, editing, and

revisions should also be included. Clearly state whether the TA provider is responsible for the final product. Check with your organization to see if boilerplate material is available for this information.

- Define contractor responsibilities and outline what the contracting staff person will be providing, such as technical support, equipment (e.g., a laptop and printer), background information, work space, payment, travel arrangements, and expenses. Include in this section any special circumstances that may influence the nature of the work, the work environment, or the final product.
- Include a detailed budget showing the total amount required for the work and a breakdown of expenses by category, such as transportation, communication, and per diem allowances.

Table 1: Specific Tasks and Deliverables

Tasks	Details	Days
Review background materials and initial planning	The contractor provides some background materials; the TA provider will find supplementary sources as needed. Some modification of the products and their descriptions may be made as a result of this task if mutually agreed upon by the TA provider and contractor. Due date:	2
Produce needs assessment tool	The TA provider will adapt materials from existing needs assessments and produce a needs assessment questionnaire. An adapted version of this questionnaire will also serve as an assessment tool to use with partner organizations. Due date:	2

Step 2 Evaluate the Technical Assistance

Evaluation Benefits

Evaluating the TA and contracting processes provides the evaluator with information on what did and did not work well. Find ways to ensure that the findings inform future capacity-building events.

Design the Evaluation Tools

Develop simple standardized sheets for the final evaluation of all training and workshop events included in the capacity-building TA and of the assistance given. The training and workshop evaluation form should be short, but it should permit the facilitator to ask workshop-specific questions. The form should include, but is not limited to, the following:

Note:
Private voluntary organization (PVO) staff are primarily responsible for steps 1 and 2, while step 3 is the TA provider's responsibility. Either party may be responsible for step 4, depending on the nature and duration of the tasks and the relationship between the TA provider within or outside the PVO.

- The utility of different tools, exercises, case studies, and so on
- The usefulness of innovative practical exercises or field trips
- Personal suggestions for improvements

Give participants a scale (1-5) to rate each aspect of the training or workshop. Allow up to 30 minutes for participants to complete the form and emphasize that detailed feedback is important. The facilitator should compile a summary of the evaluation feedback to be shared with key staff members and the TA provider.

The evaluation of technical assistance form should be similar in format to the training and workshop evaluation form. Again, the form should be short, but permit detailed feedback. Ask respondents to include their organizational title so that the feedback may be better interpreted. This form can be used for on-site technical visits and consultancies as well as for electronic or other forms of TA delivery. Arrange for a neutral party to compile the feedback so that the TA provider receives anonymous feedback. Share these results with all relevant staff members.

Step 3 Write the Technical Assistance Delivery (Trip) Report

Purpose of a Trip Report

A trip report serves several purposes, but it is primarily a record of activities that were completed during a field visit or during any form of TA. It is helpful to develop a standardized form for use within your organization so that standard information will be reported and shared after each TA delivery. Your primary audience is your task manager.

Required Sections of the Report

- Title page, including the name of the TA provider, report title, date and site of visit, task manager name and title, and date of report submission;
- Executive summary containing a brief overview of each section of the report. The summary should explain the purpose and outcomes of the trip;
- Main sections with the sectoral and thematic focus, including the purpose of the trip and the programmatic context;
- Findings and recommendations, in the form of problem statements with proposed alternative solutions. Identified strengths should also be included. Recommendations on technical, partnership, policy, emergency preparation and mitigation, general staffing, training, M&E, donor relationships, fundraising, and so on;
- Next steps based on the recommendations. A table format illustrating the follow-up action, the individuals responsible, the timeline, and relevant comments is useful in presenting this information; and

- Appendixes including the original SOW, the trip itinerary, and the list of people contacted as part of the assignment.

Step 4 Follow Up on the Technical Assistance

Send Thank-You Letters

Upon completion of the field trip and submission of the trip report, it is good practice to send a thank-you letter to the TA provider. In addition, it is a good idea to send a letter to other individuals who played a key role in the work, including partner staff or other stakeholders who were involved.

The Thank-You Letter

The thank-you letter should state the specifics of the field assignment and the aspects of the work or contribution that were particularly insightful or impressive, and include a statement about the action plan for follow-up activities. Use your organization's letterhead and copy the letter to relevant colleagues. See exhibit 1 for a suggested thank-you letter format.

Finally, check to see that the TA provider's recommendations are considered and, if appropriate, implemented.

Exhibit 1: Proposed Thank-You Letter Format

Date

Recipient Name
Recipient Address

Dear (insert recipient name);

Thank you for your assistance and support in (specify activities / tasks). I want to express my particular appreciation for (include specific personal or professional contribution). As discussed, I am moving ahead with (action items discussed).

Again, thank you for your valuable support.

Sincerely,

Insert your name
Insert your title

The Capacity-Building Module contains:

- Specific tasks and deliverables
- Budget worksheet for a SOW
- Trip report template
- Thank-you letter template
- Final evaluation form for trainings and workshops
- Final evaluation form for technical assistance

This edition of Short Cuts was produced in 2008. Please send your comments or feedback to: m&efeedback@crs.org.

This publication is part of a series on key aspects of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for humanitarian and socioeconomic development programs. The American Red Cross and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) produced this series under their respective USAID/Food for Peace Institutional Capacity Building Grants. The topics covered were designed to respond to field-identified needs for specific guidance and tools that did not appear to be available in existing publications. Program managers as well as M&E specialists are the intended audience for the modules; the series can also be used for M&E training and capacity building. The *Short Cuts* series provides a ready reference tool for people who have already used the full modules, those who simply need a refresher in the subject, or those who want to fast-track particular skills.

The M&E series is available on these Web sites:

- www.crs.org/publications
- www.foodsecuritynetwork.org/icbtools.html
- www.redcross.org

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MONITORING & EVALUATION

Short Cuts

Guidelines on Monitoring and Evaluation Planning

Monitoring and Evaluation Planning

September 2008

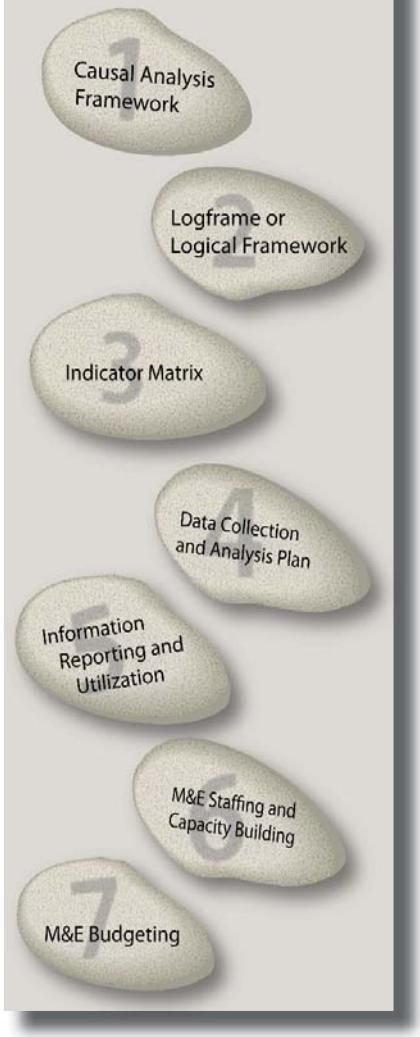
Introduction

This edition of *Short Cuts* is intended to provide concise guidance needed to develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system for international humanitarian relief and development programs. It covers the key planning documents and processes needed to set up and implement an M&E system for project planning, implementation, and evaluation. It is designed for use by M&E specialists, managers of humanitarian and development programs, and decision makers who are responsible for program oversight and funding.

The first four key components of M&E planning trace a logical train of thought, from hypotheses on how the project will bring about change in a specific sector, to the specific objectives needed for these changes, methods for measuring the project's achievement of its stated objectives, and protocols for collecting and analyzing data and information used in the measurement. The latter three components of M&E planning are key considerations for implementing an M&E plan.

Keep in mind that M&E planning should begin during or immediately after the project design stage and should involve stakeholders. Early planning will inform the project design and allow sufficient time to arrange for resources and personnel prior to project implementation. Involvement of project staff and key stakeholders will ensure feasibility, understanding, and ownership of the M&E system.

Seven Key Components of M&E Planning



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1 Causal Analysis Framework

The causal analysis framework seeks to identify the following:

1. The major problem and condition(s) that the project seeks to change
2. The factors that cause the condition(s)
3. The ways to influence the causal factors, based on hypotheses of the relationships between the causes and likely solutions
4. The interventions to influence the causal factors
5. The expected changes or desired outcomes (see Table 1).

Table 1: Causal Analysis Framework

Causal Analysis	Hypothesis Development	Project Design
Cause/Conditions Mothers do not know that unclean water will make infants sick (knowledge).	**IF** mothers are aware of the dangers of unclean water	**Interventions** Educate mothers about the dangers of unclean water
Mothers believe that breastmilk alone does not satisfy infants younger than 6 months (attitude).	**AND** that breastmilk is nutritionally sufficient for infants younger than 6 months	Educate mothers about the nutritional value of breastmilk for infants younger than 6 months
Mothers are giving breastmilk substitutes to infants younger than 6 months (practice).	**THEN** they will breastfeed their infant exclusively to avoid exposure to unclean water	**Desired Outcomes** Increased breastfeeding of infants younger than 6 months
Problem High diarrhea rates among infants younger than 6 months	**THEREBY** contributing to reductions in diarrhea among infants younger than 6 months	Reduced diarrhea among infants younger than 6 months
Consequence High rates of infant mortality	**THEREBY** contributing to reductions in infant mortality	**Overall Goal** Reduce infant mortality

Source: Author.

The framework presented in Table 1 hypothesizes that mothers will breastfeed their infants once they learn about the dangers of unclean water. However, if mothers are not breastfeeding for other reasons, such as cultural norms or working away from home, then different interventions are needed. In effect, the M&E system tests the hypotheses to determine whether the project's interventions and outputs have contributed to the desired outcomes.

Causal analysis should be based on a careful study of local conditions and available data as well as consultation with potential beneficiaries, program implementers, other stakeholders, and technical experts. Such information may be available in needs assessments, feasibility studies, participatory rapid appraisals, community mapping, and other forms of analysis.

Other forms of analysis include problem analysis, such as problem trees, to isolate conditions and consequences that help identify objectives and strategies, and theory of change analysis, which uses backwards mapping to identify conditions required to bring about desired outcomes.

2 Logframe or Logical Framework

A logframe or logical framework shows the conceptual foundation upon which the project's M&E system is built, identifying what the project is intended to achieve (objectives) and how this achievement will be measured (indicators). Other frameworks can be used (such as a results framework). The logframe is a valuable M&E planning tool and is widely used for development projects. Table 2 defines the key terms and components of a classic logframe matrix. Note that different organizations in the development community use different formats and terms for the types of objectives.

Indicator selection is critical. Indicators should have validity (be able to measure the intended concept accurately) and reliability (yield the same data in repeated observations of a variable); be easy to interpret and explain; and be timely, cost-effective, and technically feasible. Indicators should also be developed with consideration of donor requirements and any recognized industry standards.

It is also important to understand the logframe's hierarchy of indicators. For instance, it is usually easier to measure lower-level indicators such as the number of workshop participants, whereas the higher-level indicators, such as behavioral change, typically require more analysis and synthesis of information. This affects the M&E data collection methods and analysis and has implications for staffing, budgets, and timeframe.

Table 2: Logframe Definition Table

Project Objectives	Indicators	Means of Verification	Assumptions
Goal Simple clear statement of the impact or results that the project should achieve	**Impact Indicator** Quantitative or qualitative means to measure achievement or to reflect the changes connected to stated goal	Measurement method, data source, and frequency of data collection for stated indicator	External factors necessary to sustain the long-term impact, but beyond the project's control
Outcomes Set of beneficiary and population-level changes needed to achieve the goal (usually knowledge, attitudes and practices, or KAP)	**Outcome Indicator** Quantitative or qualitative means to measure achievement or to reflect the changes connected to stated outcomes	Measurement method, data source, and frequency of data collection for stated indicator	External conditions necessary if the outcomes are to contribute to achieving the goal
Outputs Products or services needed to achieve the outcomes	**Output Indicator** Quantitative or qualitative means to measure completion of stated outputs (measures the immediate product of an activity)	Measurement method, data source, and frequency of data collection for stated indicator	Factors out of the project's control that could restrict or prevent the outputs from achieving the outcomes
Activities Regular efforts needed to produce the outputs	**Process Indicator** Quantitative or qualitative means to measure completion of stated activities	Measurement method, data source, and frequency of data collection for stated indicator	Factors out of the project's control that could restrict or prevent the activities from achieving the outcomes
Inputs Resources used to implement activities (financial, materials, human)	**Input Indicator** Quantitative or qualitative means to measure utilization of stated inputs (resources used for activities)	Measurement method, data source, and frequency of data collection for stated indicator	Factors out of the project's control that could restrict or prevent access to the inputs

Source: Author based on an example from Caldwell (Project Design Handbook, 2002, 130).

3 Indicator Matrix

The indicator matrix expands the logframe to identify key information requirements for each indicator and summarizes the key M&E tasks for the project. The indicator matrix—also known as a data collection plan or M&E plan—may have different formats, but the overall function remains the same. Table 3 provides a sample format for an indicator matrix, with column definitions in the first row and a sample indicator in the second row.

It is critical that the indicator matrix be developed with the participation of those who will be using it. Completing the matrix requires detailed knowledge of the project and context to be provided by the local project team and partners. Their involvement contributes to data quality because it reinforces their understanding of what data they are to collect and how they will collect them.

Table 3: Indicator Matrix Example

Indicators	Indicator Definition	Methods / Sources	Frequency / Schedules	Person(s) Responsible	Data Analysis	Information Use
Indicators can be either quantitative (numeric) or qualitative (descriptive observations) and are typically taken directly from the logframe.	Define key terms in indicator for precise measurement and explain how the indictor will be calculated, i.e., the numerator and denominator of a percent measure; also note any disaggregation, i.e., by sex, age, or ethnicity	Identify information sources and data collection methods/tools Indicate whether data collection tools (surveys, checklists) exist or need to be developed	Identify how often the data will be collected, i.e., monthly, quarterly, or annually List start-up and end dates for data collection and deadlines to develop tools	Identify the people responsible and accountable for data collection/ analysis List each person's name and position title to ensure clarity in case of personnel changes	Describe process for compiling and analyzing data, i.e., statistical analysis	Identify intended audience and use of data, i.e., monitoring, evaluation, or reporting to policy makers or donors State ways the findings will be formatted and disseminated
Sample Indicator **Outcome 1a** percent of target schools that successfully conduct a minimum of one disaster drill per quarter	1. "Schools" refers to K-12 in Matara District. 2. Criteria of "Success": unannounced drill through early warning system; response time under 20 minutes, school members report to designated area per the School Crisis Response Plan 3. Numerator: # of schools with successful scenario per quarter 4. Denominator: total # of targeted schools	1. Pre-arranged site visits during disaster drill 2. Complete disaster drill checklist & entered into quarterly project report 3. School focus group discussions (FGDs) (teachers, students, administration)	1. Checklist data collected quarterly 2. FGD: every 6 months 3. Begin data collection on 4/15/06 4. Scenario Checklist completed by 3/8/06	School Field Officer (SFO): Shantha Mande	1. Post-drill meeting with School Disaster Committee, facilitated by SFO 2. Project management team during quarterly reflection meeting	1. Project implementation with School Disaster Committees 2. Monitoring school outreach training with management with Sri Lankan Red Cross Society 3. Tsunami Recovery Program management 4. Impact evaluation to justify intervention to Ministry of Disaster Relief, donors, etc.

Source: Author.

4 Data Collection and Analysis Plan

The data collection and analysis plan expands upon the information provided in the indicator matrix, typically with a detailed narrative that explains how each type of data will be reliably collected with sound research practices. Key plan components include: the unit of analysis; the link(s) between indicators, variables, and questionnaires; the sampling frame and methodology; data collection timing and mode; research staff responsibilities; enumerator selection, training and supervision; fieldwork timing and logistics; data quality checks; data entry and storage; hypothesized relationships among the variables; data analysis methods; and any special analyses, such as disaggregating data by gender, age, or location and socio-economic status.

It is important to provide the rationale for the data collection and analysis methods. This includes the triangulation of methods (quantitative and/or qualitative) and sources to reduce bias and ensure data reliability and completeness. Planning should be informed by standards that guide good practice of project evaluation and ensure ethical, accountable, and quality evaluations.

Some major data sources that should be described include any secondary data, sample surveys, project output data, qualitative studies, checklists, external assessments–midterm and final evaluations–and participatory assessments.

Practical considerations in data collection planning include:

- **Prepare data collection guidelines to ensure standardization, consistency, and reliability** over time and among different people
- **Pretest data collection tools** to detect problematic questions or techniques, verify collection times, identify potential ethical issues, and build the competence of data collectors
- **Train data collectors** to reliably understand the data collection system, collection techniques, tools, ethics, and culturally appropriate interpersonal communication skills
- **Address ethical concerns** by identifying and responding to any concerns expressed by the target population; ensure that the necessary authorization has been obtained, that customs and attire are respected, and that confidentiality and voluntary participation are maintained
- **Plan for data management**, including the set of procedures, people, skills, and equipment needed to systematically store and manage data to ensure that the data are reliably recorded.

A data analysis plan should identify:

- Timing of data analysis: The data analysis is not an isolated event at the end of data collection, but an ongoing task from project start; it can be structured through meetings and other forums to coincide with key project implementation and reporting benchmarks.
- The extent to which analysis will be quantitative and/or qualitative, and any specialized skills and equipment required for analysis
- Who will do the analysis – i.e., external experts, project staff, beneficiaries and/or other stakeholders
- If and how subsequent analysis will occur, i.e., to verify findings, or to inform future programming.

An important consideration in planning for data collection and analysis is to identify any limitations, biases, and threats to the accuracy of the data and analysis. Data distortion can occur due to limitations or errors in design, sampling, field interviews, and data recording and analysis. To avoid data distortion, it is best to monitor the research process carefully and seek expert advice, when needed.

5 Information Reporting and Utilization

Collecting information on project activities and achievements can serve many important functions, such as improving the quality of services; ensuring accountability to beneficiaries, donors, and other stakeholders; and advancing learning. Project reporting is closely related to M&E work, since data are needed to support the major findings and conclusions presented in a project report. Often the focus and frequency of M&E processes are determined by reporting requirements and schedules.

Practical considerations in information reporting and utilization planning include:

- **Design the M&E communication plan around the information needs of the users**: The content and format of data reports will vary, depending on whether the reports are to be used to monitor processes, conduct strategic planning, comply with requirements, identify problems, justify a funding request, or conduct an impact evaluation.
- **Identify the frequency of data reporting needs**: For example, project managers may want to review M&E data frequently to assess project progress and make decisions, whereas donors may only need data once or twice a year to ensure accountability.
- **Tailor reporting formats to the intended audience**: Reporting may entail different levels of complexity and technical language; the report format and media should be tailored to specific audiences and different methods used to solicit feedback.
- **Identify appropriate outlets and media channels for communicating M&E data**: Consider both internal reporting, such as regular project reports to management, and progress reports to donors, as well as external reporting, such as public forums, news releases, briefings, and Internet Web sites.

6 M&E Staffing and Capacity Building

Staffing is a special concern for M&E work because it demands special training and a combination of research and project management skills. Also, the effectiveness of M&E work often relies on assistance from staff and volunteers who are not M&E experts. Thus, capacity building is a critical aspect of implementing good M&E work. (See the *Hiring M&E Staff, Preparing for an Evaluation*, and *Capacity-Building Guidance ShortCuts* and modules for further information on this topic.)

Suggestions for ensuring adequate M&E support are to:

- **Identify the various tasks and related skills needed**, such as adequate data collection systems in the field, research design, and data entry and analysis
- **Assess the relevant skills** of the project team, partner organizations, and the community beneficiaries themselves
- **Specify to what extent local stakeholders will or will not participate in the M&E process** (Table 4 identifies some of the potential advantages and disadvantages in participatory M&E.)
- **Assign specific roles and responsibilities to team members and designate an overall M&E manager**
- **Recruit consultants, students, and others to fill in the skill gaps and special needs** such as translation, statistical analysis, and cultural knowledge
- **Identify the topics for which formal training is needed and hold training sessions**
- **Encourage staff to provide informal training** through on-the-job guidance and feedback, such as commenting on a report or showing how to use computer software programs
- **Give special attention to building local M&E capacity.**

Table 4: Participatory M&E

Potential Advantages	Potential Disadvantages
• Empowers beneficiaries to analyze and act on their own situation (as "active participants" rather than "passive recipients") • Builds local capacity to manage, own, and sustain the project as people are likely to accept and internalize findings and recommendations that they provide • Builds collaboration and consensus at different levels—between beneficiaries, local staff and partners, and senior management • Reinforces beneficiary accountability, preventing one perspective from dominating the M&E process • Saves time and money in data collection compared with the cost of using project staff or hiring outside support • Provides timely and relevant information directly from the field for management decision making to execute corrective actions	• Requires more time and cost to train and manage local staff and community members • Requires skilled facilitators to ensure that everyone understands the process and is equally involved • Can jeopardize the quality of collected data due to local politics; data analysis and decision making can be dominated by the more powerful voices in the community (related to gender, ethnic, or religious factors) • Demands the genuine commitment of local people and the support of donors, since the project may not use the traditional indicators or formats for reporting findings

7 Budgeting for M&E

A key function of planning for M&E is to estimate the costs, staff, and other resources that are needed for M&E work. It is important for M&E specialists to weigh in on M&E budget needs at the project design stage so that funds are allocated specifically to M&E and are available to implement key M&E tasks.

Program managers often ask what proportion of a project's budget should be allocated to M&E. There is no set formula; various donors and organizations recommend that between 3 to 10 percent of a project's budget be allocated to M&E. A general rule of thumb is that the M&E budget should not be so small as to compromise the accuracy and credibility of results, but neither should it divert project resources to the extent that programming is impaired.

Suggestions for building a realistic budget:

- **List all M&E tasks and overall responsibilities, analyze the necessary items associated with each task, and determine their cost**
- **Budget for staffing,** including full-time staff, external consultants, capacity building/training and other human resource expenses
- **Ensure that the budget includes all capital expenses,** including facility costs, office equipment and supplies, travel and lodging, computer hardware and software, and other expenses
- **Determine whether all tasks are covered in the overall project budget**, such as support for an information management system, field transportation and vehicle maintenance, translation, and publishing M&E documents/tools
- **Review the donor's requirements to determine whether there are any extra items that need to be budgeted,** or conversely, that the donor can fund directly
- **Allow for unexpected contingencies** such as inflation, currency devaluation, equipment theft, or the need for additional data collection/analysis to verify findings
- **Write a narrative explaining each line item** to clarify or justify expenses; this budget justification may help to guard against arbitrary budget cuts.

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- www.redcross.org

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MONITORING & EVALUATION

Short Cuts

Guidelines and Tools for the Preparation and Use of Indicator Performance Tracking Tables

Using Indicator Performance Tracking Tables

September 2008

Introduction

This edition of *Short Cuts* provides practical instructions in preparing and using the Indicator Performance Tracking Table (IPTT). The IPTT provides a snapshot of project status, providing management, partners, and donors with information they can use to make necessary changes to implementation strategies.

This edition refers to the Food for Peace (FFP) Title II format, as there are many different types of tables used to track the combination of monitoring and impact indicators required by donors and implementing organizations. Additional material is available on how to construct indicators and develop an M&E system (see the appendixes in the complete module for detailed bibliographies). FFP also has required indicator definitions and methods for different sets of activities.

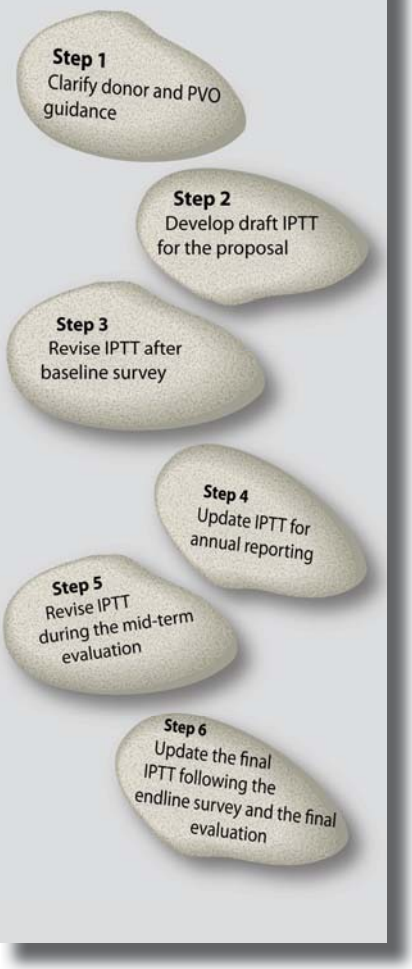
Who Works on the IPTT?

There are three key focal points for the different steps in an IPTT, and three additional resources that should be involved (see table 1). Field staff are critical. The IPTT should not be a static donor requirement that is updated just before a due date; rather, it should be used to help inform project management throughout the life of the project. Once project implementation starts, changes to the IPTT are inevitable. In terms of information provision, the greater the continuity the project can provide, and the more changes that are documented and the accompanying files maintained by field staff, the better the project staff can answer questions about project status.

Table 1

Field Staff	Additional Resources
Project technical staff	PVO headquarters staff
Project technical staff	FANTA Project staff
Project manager	Consultants

7 Steps to Preparing and Using an IPTT



All field staff involved in programming need to understand how to:

1. Use the IPTT to quickly determine project status
2. Explain the data components in each indicator
3. Collect and analyze the information
4. Convey the information to different audiences (beneficiaries, other partners, and so on)
5. Revise the IPTT as donor requirements change

Additional staff resources can help with all these tasks, which are often overwhelming. Additional staff can also assist field staff in responding to technical questions about data collection or on interpreting findings, but it must be noted that these individuals are generally far removed from the specific project history and context.

Table 2

INDICATOR	Base Line	YEAR 1			YEAR 2 Mid Term Evaluation			YEAR 3			YEAR 4 Final Evaluation			YEAR 5		
		Exp	Act	Ratio	Exp	Act	Ratio	Exp	Act	Ratio	Exp	Act	Ratio	Exp	Act	Ratio
Impacts (Data only available for Baseline, Mid-Term and Final Evaluation Years)																
Maize yields (kg/ha)	850				1275	900	71%				1.700	1,400	88%			
Outcomes (Data only available for Baseline, Mid-Term and Final Evaluation Years)																
% farmers scoring at least 3 on Improved Practices Score Index	12%				60%	15%	25%				80%	82%	102%			
% of farmers' plots where improved maize practices were adopted	7%				60%	65%	108%				75%	60%	80%			
Repayment rate among agricultural credit borrowers	75%				85%	91%	107%				95%	97%	102%			
Outputs (Data available yearly)																
Number of farmers trained in Maize Improved Practices	0	400	485	121%	500	620	124%	600	630	105%	600	591	98%	600	650	108%
Number of model farmers completing course	0	25	25	100%	20	25	125%	20	20	100%	20	20	100%	20	20	100%
Number of farmers completing credit applications	0	400	185	46%	500	210	42%	600	430	72%	600	520	67%	600	550	92%

Sources: USAID Office of Food for Peace/FANTA, M&E Workshop, August 2007; Personal Communication with Alison Tamilowicz Torres, FANTA project, August 2008.

Note: Exp = expected; Act = actual.

IPTT Notes

1. Calculating the ratio data: if you expect a decrease in the indicator (e.g., percentage of children with low weight-for height), the column is expected/actual (E/A); if you expect an increase (e.g., percentage of mothers exclusively breastfeeding), the column is A/E. Note that this does not take into account the baseline and therefore does not give information on the amount of progress that is made toward an indicator target. However, USAID's current expectation is to report only E/A or A/E, depending on the direction of the expected change.

2. The project needs to report on annual monitoring indicators each year, while impact and outcome indicators are only to be reported on in certain years as determined by the Cooperating Sponsor (CS), under the CS's M&E plans. If the CS adjusts indicators or targets (for example, if targets are set too high or low), a clear explanation should be provided. Explicit FFP approval is required for decreases in the scale of targets. The CS should provide explanations in its annual results report submission and clearly identify proposed indicators and target adjustments in the report narrative and cover page.

3. Clearly specify the fiscal year being reported, (e.g., FY09), as well as the CS name, country, and page numbers on each page of the IPTT.

4. Programs implementing activities to improve health, nutrition, and hygiene behaviors should define the behaviors being measured, such as improved personal, food, water, and environmental hygiene.

Final comment: The IPTT template included in recent versions of the Multi-Year Assistance Program Proposal Application Format (annex A) is different from the one shown above. Both are acceptable.

Step 1 Clarify Donor and PVO Guidance

Donor guidance can change. Technical assistance can also change. Make sure to use the most current guidance from both donors and advisors when starting the design process.

Keep copies of any previous guidance used with the project documentation (e.g., for CRS, in the project's M&E Operating Manual).

Follow the Guidelines

Most major proposals contain detailed IPTT guidance. FFP is no exception; it has many requirements for each component in the proposal, as well as for a particular type of M&E system. The types of indicators and the required reporting format are detailed in annual guidance documents and in the general expectations of how the information collected will be used.

Make sure the most recent guidance is used so that the IPTT is as current as possible.

The FANTA project (see www.fantaproject.org) has produced a useful series of indicator guides that can help PVOs determine the definition and timing of indicators, and other aspects of data collection.

Most PVOs have internal standards and guidance for M&E systems that include indicators. These indicators are often more rigorous than the donor-required indicators or they may reflect a specific commitment from the PVO. In Table 2, the project reported on maize yields. The project may have also emphasized production in other crops, and collected those data as well, but did not report them in this format.

Determining the Number of Indicators

The number of indicators varies with each project, and the balance between impact and monitoring indicators varies as well. When selecting the number of indicators, be clear about what is both necessary and sufficient. The IPTT can include both the FFP and PVO indicators. If the project is partnering with other donors, there may be other indicators as well.

Step 2 Develop a Draft IPTT for the Proposal

The IPTT in the proposal is a key visual aid for the project design. There are many ways to design a project (see the bibliography in the IPTT module) that often involve months of discussions with beneficiaries, project field and headquarters staff, and other stakeholders.

Developing the IPTT

The IPTT needs to evolve with the description of the project activities. With a Strategic Objective, for example, develop a list of the indicators that most effectively captures the project's anticipated results. Are there any donor or PVO requirements for indicators in this sector? Add those to the list. Are there variations between required indicators among different stakeholders (e.g., exclusive breastfeeding for four months rather than for six months)? Sort those out as part of step 2. Get a consensus on the indicators right from the start of a project.

How frequently do the indicators need to be collected? Some indicators come with instructions, others vary depending on the types of activities the project will implement. Organize and schedule the data collection for the indicators (baseline and final only, or annually). Group the indicators under each Strategic Objective and Intermediate Result. There should be impact and monitoring indicators for most of the higher level results, although there may only be monitoring indicators for lower level results. Strive for balance—and determine which indicators are the most useful for project management purposes.

Once the required indicators and frequency of their collection are listed in the IPTT, try to estimate targets for each proposed indicator. National norms can be a good starting point until the baseline is done; more robust data from field-based needs assessments are even better. If this is a follow-on project, it may be best to start with the final values for indicators from the previous project.

Step 3 Revise the IPTT after Completing the Baseline Survey

The Baseline

First, ensure that the baseline survey will include all the indicators to be measured. There are many different resources that can be used to set up a baseline survey, from sampling to survey design and data analysis. There may be some activities that are not scheduled to start for several years in the project life, but even those indicators need to be measured during the initial survey to attempt to measure change over time.

What to look for following an IPTT baseline

- Starting values for project **impact** indicators
- Targets for **impact** indicators, based on best practices
- Starting values for project **monitoring** indicators
- Targets for **monitoring** indicators, based on best practices
- Notes about data collection **definitions or challenges**

Incorporate Baseline Research Results

After using estimates from different sources in the initial proposal, the baseline survey will provide a consistent baseline data source. Enter the new data into the IPTT, and, with your partners, determine the best targets for each entry in the IPTT. If data are collected annually, of course, annual targets are needed. If survey data is to be collected only at the baseline and final, then the next survey date will be when the project ends.

Setting Targets

Figuring out how to target appropriately is an important challenge. The good news, however, is that there are a number of places to go for advice, such as:

- Donor recommendations for required indicators
- PVO standard practices
- Staff with previous country experience or reports from similar projects

Once targets are set for the new baseline values, the IPTT is complete. Make sure to incorporate these values in the project's M&E plan and the subsequent M&E system. Project reporting must include updates on the selected indicators. With this information, reporting on the indicators will be more meaningful for IPTT users.

Step 4 Update the IPTT for Annual Reporting

IPTT Updating

Although IPTT updating is presented as step 4, it is really an annual requirement. In some cases, the IPTT can be updated by combining the values from quarterly reports. In other cases, a separate data collection exercise may be needed for annual indicators. It is often useful to have an updated IPTT (with explanations) available at annual stakeholder meetings. In many cases, however, the IPTT is

updated at the last minute just before an annual report is due. This approach misses an opportunity to learn more about the project's annual performance.

Targets and Results

What happens when IPTT results don't match the targets? Even with all the best intentions in the world, sometimes projects start more slowly than expected, or there is an outside event, such as a cyclone or flood, or the project manager becomes ill, or a donor policy changes. These all happen. What should be done?

Targets are a big advantage to an M&E plan because of their flexibility; they can be changed easily. While changing indicators, particularly at the impact and outcome levels, usually means changing the project, often requires donor permission, and can raise a red flag for management. Changing targets, however, involves a small course correction, and these can and should be adjusted. If the project is consistently over-achieving its targets, the target levels should be increased. If, however, the project is consistently under-achieving its targets, they may need to be decreased or further refined. Investigate what caused the missed target, document it, and make sure that this revision is discussed with the stakeholders. Write up the new targets and document the rationale when submitting the annual report.

Step 5 Revise the IPTT following the Mid-Term Evaluation

The Mid-Term Update

If the project has steadily revised and updated the IPTT on an annual basis, then the mid-term update should be simple. However, many organizations do not update the IPTT consistently.

The mid-term evaluation is a great opportunity to have an outside project review; the project staff can see what's going on, what should be changed, and what should remain as is. The answers to these questions will have data implications. The starting point, though, is the IPTT update; this ensures that the evaluation team is working with the most current data available.

Organizing Questions for Project Staff

- Who is responsible for IPTT updates?
- What are the specific data definitions for each indicator?
- Who are the different sectoral leads for the respective IPTT indicators who can discuss the indicators with the evaluators?
- Where are the data maintained that are fed into the IPTT?
- How has the project been following up on changes in performance in the IPTT?

Organizing Options for the Mid-Term Evaluation Team

- Use the IPTT project structure to frame the evaluation report.
- Determine the validity of the current targets and likelihood of achieving those targets, based on the project's performance to date.
- Discuss the findings with the project team and other stakeholders.
- Recommend changes to targets based on evidence and determine any resulting changes to other parts of the M&E system or project objectives.
- If negotiated with the project team, include the annotated IPTT with the evaluation report.

Using Evaluation Results

Many agencies promote a user-focus to evaluations. Commissioning an evaluation and then ignoring the report is a waste of both time and money. So what should be done with an evaluation report with lots of recommendations?

There are four tasks to keep in mind with respect to the IPTT at this point in the project cycle:

1. Mid-term evaluation recommendations require a response. Adopt all of them or some of them or don't use them—whatever is decided, document the decision process.

2. Discuss the proposed revisions with key stakeholders to ensure that they are understood and that the changes reflect a shared perception of what is needed. Don't make changes without this important discussion.

3. Update the IPTT based on any changes made based on the report's recommendations.

4. And don't forget to update the M&E plan at the same time (it's not good to have two different versions concurrently).

All these changes can be documented as part of the annual report following the mid-term evaluation. Make sure the changes are real and not just on paper.

Step 6 Update and Finalize the IPTT after Final Survey and Evaluation

It's a very good thing when...

1. The final survey team can find documentation about the baseline—the survey instrument, the sampling frame, and the baseline data. A final survey should measure change over time in the impact indicators. In most cases, the data from the final survey provide the last input into the IPTT for the impact indicators.

2. The most current data are in the IPTT that is distributed to the evaluation team. While the final survey may take into account the impact indicators, there are frequently additional data collection times for the monitoring indicators—even after a final survey. This should be updated prior to the evaluation team's arrival in-country.
3. There is documentation available on any changes in the IPTT (e.g., indicators deleted, changed targets, data definitions, and so on). It is very helpful when project staff can explain the rationale behind the changes.
4. The project staff discusses any planned IPTT changes with the stakeholders so that they are kept informed (and can provide information on the effects those changes may have on their constituents).

Try to avoid situations where...

1. The final survey methodology baseline doesn't match the baseline. It's hard, if not impossible, to compare apples with oranges. Results cannot be compared over time unless the same indicator is being measured.
2. No one on the project team ever looked at the IPTT until just before the evaluation team arrives. Then no one can explain what the data mean.
3. The project makes changes based on the mid-term recommendations, but never changes what data they collect, so the indicators do not reflect what the project actually did.
4. The project makes changes to the IPTT, but never discusses the changes with the stakeholders, who continue to collect information based on the older indicators.

IPTT Rules of Thumb

1. Borrow from others. Why reinvent the wheel?
2. Compare your project with similar ones. Use standard indicators where possible, especially if it is necessary to aggregate data across projects.
3. Take advantage of expert help, especially from the FANTA Project. Other PVOs are a good resource, as well, especially if they have worked (or are working) in your project area.
4. Don't ignore FFP (or other donor's) guidance on indicators or format. Do assume that many of these indicators can be negotiated if you make a good enough case.
5. Be careful of overachieving targets and underachieving targets. The idea is to be on target or at least reasonably close.
6. Changing indicators or targets without permission is not a good policy. Changing targets based on demonstrated need is a smart move.
7. Management and project staff need to understand and use the IPTT.
8. If data collection methods change, make sure these are documented.

The full IPTT module includes examples of the following:

- Step-by-step instructions on completing the table
- Case histories of use in Title II projects
- Tools for managing and using the IPTT effectively
- Detailed resource bibliography
- Sample FFP guidelines

This edition of Short Cuts was produced in 2008. Please send your comments or feedback to: m&efeedback@crs.org.

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The M&E series is available on these Web sites:

- www.crs.org/publications
- www.foodsecuritynetwork.org/icbtools.html
- www.redcross.org

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MONITORING & EVALUATION

ShortCuts

Guidelines for Hiring Strong Candidates

Hiring M&E Staff

September 2008

Introduction

This edition of *Short Cuts* provides guidance on identifying, recruiting, and hiring the right staff. Hiring is a strategically important process; it requires careful thought and a significant time commitment. The Hiring M&E Staff module provides generalized examples that can be customized to fit a specific context. The module's goal is to increase the quality of an organization's M&E activities by connecting the organization with the best-qualified candidates to meet its M&E needs. The module is organized into seven steps. Follow these steps to guide and support the M&E staff hiring process.

Note that it is important to follow applicable labor laws throughout the hiring process.

7 Steps to Hiring

Step 1 Identify M&E Needs

A Participatory Process

Reviewing M&E needs should be a participatory process that includes M&E staff and representatives from various sectors. All available resource persons, including M&E technical advisors and headquarters-based M&E technical staff, should be engaged in this initial step and throughout the hiring process. This review is used to determine the organization's current M&E capacity and identify the activities that the M&E team would like to accomplish with increased capacity.

Hiring M&E staff involves:

- Collecting M&E job descriptions
- Using listservs to post job listings
- Developing questions to pre-screen candidates
- Developing interview questions
- Preparing M&E discussion points and tests for candidates
- Developing a matrix for shortlisted candidates

Types of M&E Team Positions

In general, there are four types of M&E positions:

- **Level 4** is a senior regional position, housed within a regional office or a headquarters team. Level 4 staff have 5 to 10 years of technical experience and are responsible for conducting M&E training, designing surveys, analyzing data, and disseminating results and lessons learned. Level 4 staff are also responsible for the overall direction for strengthening M&E.
- **Level 3** is a senior country position. They provide the majority of in-country technical skills. Level 3 staff have 3 to 5 years of M&E experience and work to build the capacity of level 1 and 2 staff.
- **Level 2** is a mid-level country position. They participate in the design and implementation of M&E systems and activities, have 1 to 2 years of M&E experience, and manage level 1 staff.
- **Level 1** is an entry-level position. They have 1 to 2 years of related experience and are responsible for collecting field data and completing activity reports.

M&E Staff Funding

Before beginning the hiring process, determine if there is adequate funding for an M&E position. Contact the Human Resources Department to find out the available funding levels and the proposed salary range for the new M&E position. If there is not adequate funding or if the organization's M&E needs can be met by regional staff or with a consultant, follow the office protocols for obtaining this type of support.

Step 2 Create a Job Description

A job description states the job responsibilities and the experience required so potential employees know if their qualifications match the job requirements.

A useful job description includes the following information:

- **Organizational overview,** including the organization's history, mandate, and guiding principles
- **Description** of the job location
- **Focus areas,** including specific technical sectors
- **Purpose of the position**—for example to strengthen M&E capacity

M&E technical skills

- M&E plan development
- Tool design
- Participatory Rural Appraisal methods
- Sampling techniques
- Qualitative and quantitative data analysis

through a newly established M&E unit, or to provide technical support for ongoing M&E activities

- **Primary responsibilities** and the estimated amount of time to be dedicated to each task
- **Key tasks,** including activities and stakeholders, regions, and programs involved
- **Key working relationships** within the organization and with other stakeholders and partners
- **Qualifications**, both required and preferred, including technical skills, experience, language(s), educational level, expertise, and other qualifications relevant to the position
- **Description of the work environment**, including management responsibilities and travel time required.

Step 3 Create a Hiring Committee and Outline the Hiring Process

Hiring Committee

The hiring committee should include three to four members who each contribute skills and experience to the group. The committee chairperson should provide an added degree of overall coordination and be able to make decisions should disagreements arise among committee members. Specific tasks , such as posting the job advertisement, should be delegated to individual committee members. The committee should set a realistic timeframe to complete the hiring process; the timeline should take into account the urgency of the organization's M&E needs and current work demands of committee members. Follow a realistic timeline to help maintain a sense of momentum throughout the hiring process.

M&E and Listservs:

- American Evaluation Association: www.eval.org
- The Evaluation Center at the University of Western Michigan: www.wmich.edu
- Evaluation Network of Latin America and the Caribbean: www.lacea.org
- Relief Web: www.reliefweb.int/vacancies
- UK Evaluation Society: www.evaluation.org.uk
- DevNetJobs: www.devnetjobs.org
- Interaction: www.interaction.org

Step 4 Advertise for the Position

First, determine how widely the organization should advertise for the position. Positions can be advertised internally and externally, nationally and internationally. There are advantages and disadvantages associated with any approach. Advertising internally limits the search to candidates who are familiar with the organization and have a demonstrated ability in the organizational environment; it excludes candidates who are potentially better qualified. Advertising externally increases the applicant pool, but outside candidates are likely not to have as deep an understanding of the organization's internal operations.

Advertising internationally also increases the applicant pool, but it introduces additional complications and potential costs in the hiring process, including moving and relocation costs. Decide in advance whether or not the organization will fly in candidates from overseas.

Contact the Human Resources Department and follow their protocol to post the position internally. If posting the position externally, the Human Resources Department may have a current list of useful job sites and venues.

Generally, level 4 positions should be advertised internationally and externally, in addition to nationally and internally. Level 1, 2, and 3 positions are commonly limited to national advertising, either internally or externally.

Applications should include a cover letter, a resume, and references. For level 2, 3, and 4 positions, a writing sample should also be included in the application.

Develop a summary job description that can easily be placed in magazines and newspapers. Internet sites can generally post full job descriptions. The summary description should state the minimum level of education and experience needed as well as key technical skills, job responsibilities, computer skills, and language proficiency, if relevant. Include the application requirements and the submission deadlines in the summary. If time permits, allow applicants at least one month to submit applications after the job has been posted.

Step 5 Review, Sort, and Shortlist Applicants

- **If you do not find an ideal candidate for the position**, consider re-advertising the position. Use your organization's regional and headquarters M&E staff and technical consultants until a better candidate becomes available.
- **Maintain good communication** with shortlisted candidates and inform them of any delays in the hiring process.

Review: Standard Criteria Check

A hiring committee member should review all applications according to standard criteria used to evaluate a candidate's qualifications. These criteria should include the required years of experience, education level completed, and technical skills that correspond to the job description.

Sort Applications into Groups

From this initial review, the committee should sort the applications into three groups: **group 1** applicants do not qualify for the job; **group 2** applicants meet some, but not all, of the minimum qualifications; and **group 3** applicants meet or exceed all the stated criteria.

Send group 1 applicants a letter thanking them for their interest and informing them that their application was not selected. Group 2 applications should be kept on file in case an ideal candidate is not found among the group 3 applications. Send a letter of receipt to group 2 applicants, but wait until the position is filled before thanking them for their interest and letting them know that their application was not selected. Group 2 applications may also be of interest in the future, when hiring for other M&E positions.

Committee members should review all group 3 applications, including the writing samples, and create a shortlist of three or four outstanding candidates. Create a matrix for committee members to rank each application according to specific criteria.

Prescreening

Prescreen shortlisted applicants with an initial call. Ensure that their desired salary range matches the budget and that they are still interested in the position given its location, especially if it is a hardship post, and given the required amount of travel. Also confirm that the applicants will be available to begin work on the anticipated start date. Schedule interviews with all shortlisted candidates interested in the position.

Step 6 Interview Candidates

In the remaining steps, the Hiring Module focuses primarily on level 2, 3, and 4 staff, given that the hiring process for these positions is more technically rigorous and M&E–specific than for level 1. Hiring for level 1 positions should closely follow your organization's standard hiring procedures for junior staff.

Develop Interview Questions

Convene a hiring committee to select the final interview questions and determine if any technical tests or discussions are to be included in the interviews. In addition to M&E–specific questions, the interview should include standard, more general, questions. Each committee member should assume responsibility for several questions during the interview.

Ask open-ended questions. Follow up with any questions that need more clarification by asking "How did you accomplish this?" or "Would you please elaborate?"

If you do not have any M&E staff on the hiring committee, find ways to include M&E staff in the recruitment process. M&E staff are better positioned to evaluate the answers to more technical questions.

- **Given that interviewees may have a limited background** on any local projects discussed, the questions raised by the applicants in these discussions may be equally interesting as the answers they provide, if not more so.
- **Note which interview questions worked well** and which were less useful. Share this feedback with the regional office to contribute to improved hiring practices.

Include technical tests and discussions when hiring level 3 and 4 staff. These discussions and tests should include, but not be limited to, designing M&E systems and activities and analyzing data. To determine an applicant's skill level in M&E design, consider asking each candidate to review and discuss an example of a logical framework planning tool from a project in the country program. In addition, consider including an indicator performance tracking table for the candidate to review and discuss. To test the candidate's analytical ability, provide him or her with qualitative or quantitative data well in advance of the interview so that s/he can become familiar with the data. As part of the interview, ask the candidate to comment on, or to develop, an analysis plan within a typical programmatic context.

To include a discussion of a current M&E issue in the interview, consult regional or headquarters-based M&E staff for examples of tests or discussions that have worked well in the past.

Interview Scoring Sheet

Provide each committee member with a scoring sheet to be used to evaluate the interviewee's responses. The hiring committee should include criteria in the scoring sheet that are most relevant to the position responsibilities and skills.

Structure the interview into four main components:

1. **Opening:** Introductions are made, and the committee presents a summary of the job description and clarifies the applicant's background according to the CV that was submitted as part of the application.
2. **Fact-finding:** The committee asks the interview questions and the applicant responds.
3. **Summary/Reflection:** Summarize the main points made by the interviewee.
4. **Closing:** This is an opportunity for the interviewee to provide additional information and to ask any further questions about the position or the organization.

After the interview, collect the candidate's scores from all committee members and identify the first and second choice candidates. Discuss these findings with the committee to ensure all members agree with the results.

Step 7 Hire & Orient New Staff

Check References

The Human Resources Department can help with this task.

- Create a standard list of questions for references.
- Follow up with the top candidate's references and ask each about the candidate's technical work, skills, and relevant strengths and weaknesses.
- Ensure that each type of reference is crosschecked.
- If the references provide positive feedback and instill confidence in the candidate, contact the Human Resources Department and ask them to offer the position to the candidate. However, if the references give negative impressions that make the hiring committee leader reconsider the candidate, it is advisable to reconvene the hiring committee to decide whether or not to proceed with hiring the second-choice candidate. If so, repeat the above process with the second-choice candidate's references.
- Continue this process until satisfied that the candidate is suitable for employment at your organization. For longer-term assistance from external TA providers, draft a SOW for the immediate tasks and build flexibility into the contract to allow for future task orders.

- You may receive a negative impression from a reference, based either on what that person does or, equally important, does not say. **Try to read between the lines or ask additional questions to clarify unclear responses.**
- **New staff** need to become familiar with each sector's programming and to develop strong working relationships with key staff in each sector.

Make an Offer

The Human Resources Department will send the selected candidate an offer letter that states the job title, salary, full range of benefits, stipulated length of contract (if any), and starting date. Once the candidate accepts the position, the hiring process is complete. Contact the remaining candidates, thank them for their time, and let them know that the position has been filled.

Orient New Staff

Provide the new appointee with standard orientation materials and arrange for him/her to spend a half-day or a day with staff in each sector. Include the new staff in any relevant meetings during their first weeks. It is ideal for the new staff to participate in an M&E activity, whether planning, data collection or analysis, during the initial weeks. After the first few weeks, check in to see if s/he is settling in well and address any questions that may have arisen.

The Hiring M&E Module includes the following annexes:

1. Job descriptions for levels 1 and 2
2. Summary job table
3. Listservs for job postings
4. Matrix for shortlisting
5. Pre-screening questions
6. List of interview questions for levels 3 and 4
7. Interview do's and don'ts
8. Examples of a results framework
9. Indicator Performance Tracking Table
10. Matrix for scoring interviews
11. Questions for references

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The M&E series is available on these Web sites:

- www. crs.org/publications
- www.foodsecuritynetwork.org/icbtools.html
- www.redcross.org

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MONITORING & EVALUATION

ShortCuts

Guidelines and Tools to Plan for an Evaluation

Preparing for an Evaluation

September 2008

Introduction

This *Short Cut* provides practical instructions in how to prepare for an evaluation. Most donors require midterm and final evaluations, and these periodic assessments often provide the most detailed information of a project's progress and achievements. However, when expectations and requirements are poorly defined or misunderstood, evaluations can be very stressful to staff and beneficiaries.

To streamline and simplify the evaluation process, it must be planned well ahead of time. Ensure that standard information requests, project documentation, and an understanding of the purpose and utility of the evaluation contribute to improved communication and coordination, better evaluation management, and, in the best case, enhanced use of the evaluation results among field, donor, and partner staff. Communication is key to all seven steps described below, as it clarifies expectations, defines responsibilities, and encourages ownership of the evaluation results. Even with good communication, however, steps are often missed during an evaluation that can compromise its utility; the full module details ways to remedy these issues.

7 Steps to Preparing for an Evaluation

Step 1 Identify and Empower the Evaluation Manager

The Evaluation Manager's Role

The first step in conducting a well-planned evaluation is to assign one person as the evaluation manager. This person is often the project manager or the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officer,

but it can be anyone with a clear project commitment. The evaluation manager is responsible for ensuring that specific pre-evaluation tasks are completed in a timely manner. In larger projects with multiple teams and many timelines, an evaluation manager's responsibilities can be split among several people. When responsibilities are divided, however, they need to be made very clear, and good communication is crucial between the people involved.

The project manager or country director should inform all staff about the evaluation manager's new responsibilities and ensure that the manager has enough time to accomplish this new role. This will establish the individual as the clear focal point for the evaluation and help ensure cooperation from the field staff over time.

The Evaluation Manager's Location

Some organizations want the evaluation manager to be based at headquarters, others at a regional office, or at the main in-country project office. But as long as communication is reliable (Internet, phone, and so on), the location doesn't matter as much as the individual's ability to organize, coordinate, and get things done. However, if the evaluation manager is not in the same country where the evaluation is going to take place, then a local staff person should backstop the process to ensure that the field is well represented throughout and that field coordination is good. This will help ease communication between the evaluation team and the project staff.

Step 2 Clarify Guidance and Expectations

Determine Requirements

Donors generally have standards for an evaluation. Implementing organizations also have standards that are frequently more rigorous. Before writing the scope of work, find out what the evaluation requirements are. This will inform the evaluation process including the timeline and the evaluation team skills needed. There are two places to find the evaluation standards: the donor's original proposal writing guidance and the project's approved M&E plan. In addition, other resources can provide information on the indicators that the evaluators will need to measure directly and the ones that will require additional data collection (such as a survey). Project staff can provide input on who can take charge of different elements (by Strategic Objective, for example).

Including all these resources and other relevant M&E documents in a briefing book—at CRS, it is called an M&E operating manual—ensures that all the information will be readily accessible to the evaluation team and all project staff. The senior management can use

Tips from the Field

Get organized before the evaluation team arrives. Don't leave this until the last minute. Every project office has boxes of papers, from the initial proposals to trip reports, and many more electronic files on each computer. Prepare an organized file or directory to get the evaluation team off to a good start.

the briefing book (see table 1) as a reference for different evaluation components; with this information, they can make informed choices about how to deploy existing resources or decide if they need additional help.

Communication Needs

The next step is to convene a meeting with the evaluation manager, project manager, and senior management to discuss evaluation requirements. This meeting will give senior management advance notice about resource allocation and a brief background before they are asked to review the evaluation scope of work (SOW). It also prepares these individuals for more substantial project organizational tasks.

Briefing books make great handouts for donors and current and potential partners. A briefing book should be short and to the point, packed with facts, and easily customized!

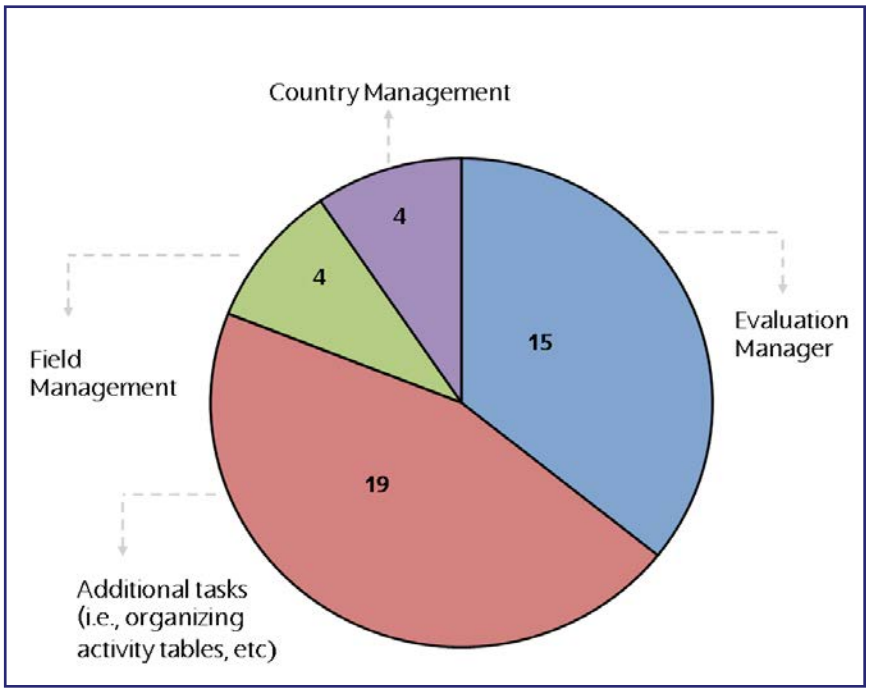
Table 1: Evaluation Briefing Book Contents

Contents	Why Is This Needed
Donor Guidance	The evaluation SOW needs to match the most current donor requirements. However, two versions should be included in the briefing book: the first is from when the proposal was approved, and the second is the most current version. Note the changes between the two and contact the appropriate donor representative to determine the best compromise between the two versions.
M&E Plan	Use the original approved M&E plan, with any modifications. Make sure all staff review this document.
Other Donor-Sanctioned Guidance	Some donors provide additional technical assistance on data collection, especially for indicators that were recently added to donor requirements. This will also help establish the evaluation team requirements.
Internal Private Voluntary Organization (PVO) Guidance	Many PVOs have their own standards for conducting evaluations. Make sure you have a copy of these standards.
Briefing Book Summary	Because many senior managers and field staff are inexperienced in working with evaluators, a simplified briefing book can help the evaluation manager to communicate the evaluation process to all these individuals. Try to summarize all the different evaluation requirements on a single page. This will also be helpful in writing the SOW.

Step 3 Draft the Evaluation Scope of Work and Work Plan

Develop a Timeline

Set the timing for the pre-evaluation by working backwards from the evaluation start date (see exhibit 1). For Title II projects, the evaluation manager should plan on 15 days of work, and some project staff should plan on 19 days. Field and country management will likely take about 4 days each. This could entail a total of 42 staff days before the evaluation, spread out over different staff members and usually not consecutively (see section 2 of the complete module for more suggestions about timing). The number of days could be higher or lower depending on the project complexity and the organization of existing materials.



Draft the Evaluation SOW and Work Plan

What is the difference between an evaluation SOW and an evaluation work plan? The SOW provides details on what is to be done and why the evaluation is needed, while the work plan describes who is doing what, when, and how. Both are needed to organize an evaluation effectively.

The draft SOW gives the project team a chance to focus on the most important questions to ask during the evaluation and on the methods to be used. The evaluation manager can modify an existing SOW to fit the evaluation needs. The manager does need to ensure that there is sufficient time in the SOW for the field office staff and stakeholders to review the draft, provide comments, and think about the evaluation requirements.

The work plan helps to organize the evaluation step-by-step, including the logistics, and helps the field staff to manage their time in preparing for the evaluation.

Standard SOW Elements

- *Project overview*
- *Evaluation objectives*
- *Suggested technical expertise of the evaluation team*
- *Major evaluation issues and questions*
- *Key documents and information*
- *Timetable*
- *Report format*

Things to Consider

There are many things to consider when organizing the SOW and work plan. If a lot of field time is needed, who will organize this process? Are specific permissions from local authorities that will be needed ahead of time? Are there specific evaluation questions that address the design elements, such as partner capacity building or project management, that need to be added to an existing template? Get as many answers as possible before moving to step 4. Better communication and organization now mean improved coordination later.

An Internal or External Evaluator?

An additional challenge is determining whether to use internal or external evaluators. There are advantages and disadvantages with each—the complete module discusses this in more detail—but the bottom line basically comes down to three factors: the learning curve, objectivity and access. Internal evaluators tend to have shorter learning curves and better access. External evaluators tend to be more objective as they see events without the institutional context and bring a fresh perspective. Setting up a team that combines the advantages and minimizes the disadvantages of each can work well.

Step 4 Identify the Evaluation Team and Finalize the Scope of Work

Select an Experienced Team Leader

Good team leaders should have demonstrated experience evaluating this type of project or experience with a similar type of project. This background is important to ensure that the evaluation meets donor expectations.

Team leaders must also have a demonstrated ability to manage and synthesize the input and participation of the core evaluation team members as well as that of various government officials, PVO partners, and donor teams. Each of these individuals or groups has a different mission goal or agenda. The team leader's job is to involve the different individuals and groups so that each core team member can satisfy some of their specific evaluation questions, while still working toward the common goal of a constructive evaluation. Good verbal and written communication skills are essential. Note that communication doesn't just mean talking; it also means active listening. This is a key skill that cannot be assessed through a writing sample. References are critical!

Choosing an Evaluation Team

The first step in hiring an evaluation team—especially the team leader—is to identify a suitable pool of candidates. Organizations often have a list of people who they have used before and want to use again. Start with that institutional list, then ask other organizations—those in the same sector and those in the same country—for recommendations. Start small, with no more than five candidates. Once the candidates are identified, send around the draft SOW, and ask the candidates for expressions of interest and for writing samples.

Next, choose a team leader from among the candidates. This individual needs to be available for the entire evaluation, including additional time before and after the evaluation. The extra time is needed for the team leader to discuss the evaluation methodology, the other team members, and the logistics with the evaluation manager; to ensure that the evaluation is appropriately organized; and to ensure that the evaluation report is submitted on time.

The evaluation team leader's input is key to finalizing the scope of work with the evaluation manager. There may be specific data collection methodologies that are preferable based on seasonality or other local issues (for example, if it's the rainy season and many of your communities are inaccessible—so random sampling at site visits is going to be less than perfectly random). The team leader should incorporate these variables in the final SOW.

A Balance of Experience

Make sure the evaluation team represents a balance of experience, preferably country experience, sectoral experience, or other specific technical expertise. Once the team is selected, finalize the SOW based on the team's input, place the final version in the briefing book, and send a copy to the donor and senior management. The evaluation manager or team leader may also want to attach a memo about the reasoning behind some of the methodological choices while the decision is still fresh.

The donor and the implementing organization may prefer certain evaluation methods, and, in some cases, require particular approaches. The evaluation team leader may recommend alternatives, but it is important to respect requirements; ultimately, the team leader is responsible for the choice of evaluation methods.

Step 5 Organize Project Documentation

Project Documentation Defined

Project documentation refers to the existing paper files, starting with initial assessments. Two products should emerge from step 5: a bibliography and a project briefing book.

A Bibliography and a Briefing Book

The project bibiliography is the list of core project documents by category. The project briefing book includes only the most important documents. Include an updated project bibliography in the briefing book. Organize all the project files. Delete files that are no longer useful. Many documents will also be available electronically—indicate which ones in the project bibliography. Create a CD (or place on a flash drive) the most important project documents.

The evaluation manager should ensure that the field staff organize their files for the evaluation team in advance of the team's arrival. Getting all the project documents organized is not something anyone wants to do after flying for 20 hours, and it's not something the project should pay a consultant to do! Here's a golden opportunity for everyone to get all their shelves and electronic files cleared out and organized.

Knowing about an evaluation in advance means that this task can be scheduled a little at a time, rather than in a rush before the evaluation team leader arrives. With the evaluation manager providing oversight and coordination, everyone in the office can take responsibility for assembling key documents, often in magazine boxes or in some type of smaller cardboard boxes that fit onto shelves. Have a supply of labels handy to organize the documents by box.

Review

- *Clean up and organize project files (Clean, clean, clean & organize!)*
- *Organize the project documents in a project briefing book and list them in a bibliography*

Step 6 Organize Project Information

Project information is not the same as project documentation. Project information consists of the nuts and bolts of the project, and this will take some effort to assemble. Most of the information may be found in annual reports, but often it has not been put into summary tables.

In the *Key Project Information* text box to the right are the key project information elements. The full module provides more details on how to assemble each element and why each is useful. A few illustrative elements follow:

Key Project Information

- *Chronology and history (timeline)*
- *Staffing patterns and turnover*
- *Training—summary of outputs and expenditures*
- *Major meetings (partners and donors)*
- *Institutional capacity building*
- *Financial system and accounting*
- *M&E system and methods (the M&E operating manual)*
- *Indicator Performance Tracking Table (IPTT)*
- *Technical sector updates*
- *Village/community/activity matrices*
- *Maps*

Chronology and Staffing Patterns

Knowing the chronology of project events and staffing patterns is useful when evaluating project outcomes. For example, if three project managers were hired over the first two project years and this information is reviewed side-by-side with some other events (such as civil unrest) in the project history (see table 2), it can create a picture of external events affecting staff retention. A view of the big picture is needed, or the conclusion may be wrong. Having staff contribute to this type of timeline or chronology is a useful group exercise; this process can include the administrative and finance support staff. Their contributions to project success are often neglected components in an evaluation, yet such staff frequently have the best institutional memory and do not have a particular technical bias. The health team can do a sectoral timeline and the agricultural team its own timeline—management and external factors should be included, so as not to miss key connections and interactions.

Indicator Performance Tracking Table

Most evaluators will note that the indicator performance tracking table (IPTT) is a helpful project overview. However, many projects don't keep this table up-to-date, and there is often a mad scramble each year to get the numbers updated before the annual report is due, despite it being a Title II requirement. This is not a good process either at the time of the midterm evaluation or during the final evaluation. And worse, projects often expect the evaluator to fill in, not only the most current numbers, but all the missing data. Many IPTT indicators are required yet challenging to collect in the midst of implementation. Staff may have changed, and no one knows how to collect that information any more. Or the project has shifted focus, and a particular set of activities has stopped. These may all be good excuses for postponing an IPTT update.

Table 2: Project Calendar								
Chronology and History	2006				2007			
	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr
Civil Unrest								
Earthquake								
Manager A								
Manager B								
Manager C								

Step 7 Plan Evaluation Logistics

Good logistical planning is key to a successful evaluation. As armies move on their stomachs, so do evaluation teams. If logistics are poorly thought out and funded, even the best evaluation design will fail. The result of the seventh, and final, evaluation step should be a detailed, clearly coordinated, logistics plan.

Critical pre-planning must:

- Have a key individual—who reports to the evaluation manager—tasked with logistics responsibility
- Negotiate preliminary dates and objectives of the site visits with local PVOs, organizations, government officials, and village-level leaders, and finalize the site visit times and dates one to two weeks before the evaluation team arrives at the project site
- Identify dates when district officials will be notified by the evaluators of the schedule for visits to specific villages
- Develop a one-page announcement, to be signed by a representative of the project's host ministry, informing communities of the upcoming visit; the announcement should include a brief description of the purpose of the visit, the anticipated dates of the site visits, and the names of the evaluation team members (in the local language)
- Organize food, transportation, office space, computing and printing facilities, and lodging for the team.

Why Can't a Pre-Evaluation Be Part of the Evaluation?

It can! The problem is that when the pre-evaluation and evaluation processes are combined, it slows down the evaluation unless the process of producing the pre-evaluation outputs is built into the evaluation work plan. Planning for an evaluation takes time (the module has a detailed estimates for each level of staffing). An evaluation will probably take an evaluation manager about a month of dedicated time.

In most cases, the options are clear:

- Pay up front—in staff time—to produce the pre-evaluation products; or
- Pay later—in staff time—to produce the pre-evaluation products during the evaluation exercise; or
- Pay later and pay more for external consultants to assemble both products.

If the pay later option is chosen, it tends to cost much more in terms of staff time and for payment to consultants to supervise these efforts. In addition, there is the risk of frustrating partner organizations that have to find information, while they are hosting the evaluators, instead of being able to collect the information prior to the evaluators' visit.

Four Basic Options for a Pre-Evaluation

1. Project management takes responsibility for steps 1 and 2, and then an experienced evaluation manager conducts a one-week workshop with project staff to assemble the other products listed in steps 3 to 7. This process can happen over several months in advance of the actual evaluation. If the evaluation manager is part of the field staff, this workshop could actually be shifted to separate meetings, with homework assigned for different sectors or different products.

2. A facilitator works with the evaluation manager to assemble most of the products, and the evaluation team leader has steps 5 and 6 added to his/her scope of work. This is a good choice when the evaluation manager is a novice, but it is an added expense to the evaluation.

3. Separate the pre-evaluation into two phases. The first phase occurs several months (or even a year) before the evaluation itself and includes steps 1 to 4. The second phase begins about a month before the evaluation and includes steps 5 to 7. The evaluation manager serves as the critical bridge, especially when there is more than one implementing organization.

4. Conduct steps 1 to 4 as a separate phase and assign steps 5 to 7 to existing project staff in addition to their regular duties. However, this decision may overburden project staff and, as a result, steps 5 to 7 may not be done until the last minute, right before the evaluation team leader arrives. This is not a recommended scenario.

The Preparing for an Evaluation full module includes numerous sources for developing a SOW:

- Specific tasks and deliverables, including the project timeline
- Planning checklist for each step
- Institutional capacity assessment tool
- Stakeholder analysis
- Sample bibliography
- Detailed bibliography of additional resources

This edition of Short Cuts was produced in 2008. Please send your comments or feedback to: m&efeedback@crs.org.

Other Sources Include:

- USAID TIPS No. 3 "Preparing an Evaluation Scope of Work" (www.usaid.gov/pubs/usaid_eval/#02)
- The CRS ProPack II (www.crs.org/publications)

This publication is part of a series on key aspects of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for humanitarian and socioeconomic development programs. The American Red Cross and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) produced this series under their respective USAID/Food for Peace Institutional Capacity Building Grants. The topics covered were designed to respond to field-identified needs for specific guidance and tools that did not appear to be available in existing publications. Program managers as well as M&E specialists are the intended audience for the modules; the series can also be used for M&E training and capacity building. The *Short Cuts* series provides a ready reference tool for people who have already used the full modules, those who simply need a refresher in the subject, or those who want to fast-track particular skills.

The M&E series is available on these Web sites:

- www.crs.org/publications
- www.foodsecuritynetwork.org/icbtools.html
- www.redcross.org

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MONITORING & EVALUATION

Short Cuts

Guidelines on Managing and Implementing a Successful Evaluation

Managing and Implementing an Evaluation

September 2008

Introduction

This edition of *Short Cuts* provides guidance on how to manage and implement an evaluation. The *Managing and Implementing an Evaluation* module's goal is to increase the quality of an organization's M&E activities through a well-managed evaluation. It highlights the necessary skills that an evaluation manager needs and explains the Managing an Evaluation Checklist (see exhibit 1).

This edition of Short Cuts emphasizes two key elements from the *Managing and Implementing an Evaluation* module:

1. Necessary skills—or attributes—of an evaluation manager
2. Understanding the Managing an Evaluation Checklist

Steps to Managing and Implementing an Evaluation

Step 1 Choose the Right Evaluation Manager and Define the Evaluation Manager's Role

Part of the challenge in managing an evaluation is that an organization rarely has extra staff dedicated to M&E who can be detailed for the duration of an evaluation, and the job can fall to staff who are less contractually critical to project implementation. The staff member is often also more junior and younger than the evaluator, so the evaluator may consider the evaluation manager to be support staff if the role is not clearly delineated for the organization, the staff involved, and the consultant. The role of the evaluation manager is to ensure that the evaluation runs smoothly.

There are seven talents that a good evaluation manager should have (see text box). Not only will these help to identify the best evaluation manager, they will also enhance the evaluation manager's performance and the quality of the evaluation. It is better not to think of the evaluation manager as the sole project staff member responsible for the success of an evaluation; instead, think of the evaluation manager as the principal contact for the evaluation. The evaluation manager will contribute to an evaluation's success or failure.

7 Talents of a Good Evaluation Manager

PERSONAL

- Organizational ability
- Institutional memory
- Knowledge of evaluation or methods
- A serious attitude
- People skills
- Sense of humor

ORGANIZATIONAL

- Support system

Strong organizational ability is the hallmark of the most successful evaluation managers. These managers maintain and update schedules and make sure that papers and other deliverables are well-structured and timely. Think about who has this ability in your office. This might be a good first step in identifying an in-house evaluation manager.

Institutional memory is another important skill of a good evaluation manager. S/he should already know the organization and the project well enough to answer questions from the evaluator. While some evaluators will work for an organization many times, organizations do change staff, and it is helpful to have an evaluation manager who can answer questions about the organization, its history, and internal roles and responsibilities. It is even more helpful if that individual is also knowledgeable about the project. Having an evaluation manager with good institutional memory probably means that s/he will not be a summer intern, but it could be a local staff person assigned to the project manager's office from the start of the project.

Having a strong knowledge of evaluation or methods is another attribute of good evaluation managers. This skill will make communicating with the evaluator easier. And it will be easier to communicate with the rest of the project staff about revisions to the methods or why different tasks take longer. Probably the best selection for an evaluation manager is someone who has already participated in an evaluation, preferably in the same country, and will therefore have a specific frame of reference for the methods being discussed. It is recommended that the evaluation manager review training materials and reading lists ahead of time and become familiar with the evaluation vocabulary. This process should be part of the evaluation scope of work (SOW), so that building staff capacity can be an integral part of the evaluation process.

Someone with a **serious attitude** can also be a trusted evaluation manager. This is an unusual quality. A junior person frequently does not have the personal resources to be credible when they are making decisions or organizing resources. Look for a person that both the project and the country staff routinely go to when they want to address a work problem, someone they trust will be able to find a solution that is fair and just.

People skills is perhaps the easiest talent to identify. Who remembers birthdays and family events, and will listen to staff problems? Think of someone who is a genuinely nice person and who wants to help. Most people who work in international development want to help, but not everyone can connect emotionally. Having the ability to make that personal connection creates an atmosphere more conducive to open communication and contributes to a task where people are willing to work and to adapt to changes in a schedule.

Having a **sense of humor** is another important skill for evaluation managers as they need to set the tone for an evaluation, which is often a very stressful event. The evaluation manager can help reduce stress through a judicious use of people skills that lets people connect. And if the humor is culturally sensitive, all the better. Evaluators frequently use these strategies to lessen tensions and let people relax. Because the evaluation manager will often be seen as the timekeeper or the gatekeeper, being able to joke about his/her role may soften the process.

Finally, a strong **organizational support system** is extremely critical for the evaluation manager. This support system provides someone (or a group of people) that the evaluation manager can go to for emotional support, for management insights, for vetting different ideas, or for other tasks. It need not be the project manager—except for budget or personnel matters—but it should be someone with whom the evaluation manager already has a relationship where there is mutual trust on both sides.

Step 2 Use the Managing an Evaluation Checklist

The Managing an Evaluation Checklist (see exhibit 1) is designed to give the evaluation manager a quick way to assess the status of different tasks during the evaluation process, starting from the scope of work and continuing through deliverables and contingency plans. The 11 major tasks on the checklist are as follows:

1. Scope of work
2. Personnel
3. Financial
4. Logistical
5. Relations
6. Psychological elements
7. Contractual
8. Deliverables
9. Communication
10. Workplan and timeline
11. Contingency plans

Each task is defined in more detail in the full module. Each task can be broken down into smaller tasks that will vary depending on how the PVO organizes the evaluation. The evaluation manager needs to take charge of tracking the different tasks (both major and smaller), even though the evaluation manager may not be the person responsible for accomplishing individual tasks. For example, contractual issues are likely to be handled by the management office, while financial issues would be the responsibility of the budget or accounting office. Where elements may need changing (for example, extending the length of the contract or otherwise modifying the scope), the evaluation manager should track the approval process so that the lines of communication between the evaluation manager and the evaluators are clear.

Exhibit 1: Managing an Evaluation Checklist

Major Task	Tasks	Lead Person or Office	Status	Due Date	Date Completed	Approval Needed	Comments
Scope of Work	Scope of work drafted						
	Consultant(s) identified						
	Scope of work finalized						
Personnel	Consultant references checked						
	Project staff deployed (assigned & existing workload reallocated for duration of evaluation)						
	Team assembled						
	Teambuilding meeting conducted						
Financial	Evaluation budget developed						
	Consultant fees negotiated						
	Per diem and travel advances arranged for local and international staff						
	Evaluation budget revised						
	Expense report and invoice forms sent to consultant(s)						
	Timing and instructions for expense reports provided to consultant(s)						
Logistical	Vehicles and drivers arranged						
	Translators arranged						
	Additional staff arranged						
	Lodging arranged near main office						
	Lodging arranged up-country						
	Airline tickets arranged						
	Visas, work permits, security clearances arranged						
	Support staff and office space arranged						
Relations	Stakeholders (PVO, donor, ministries) notified						
	Scope of work circulated with team leader resume						
	Communities engaged in/aware of evaluation timing and purpose						
	Communication schedule worked out between evaluation manager and project manager						
Psychological Elements	Evaluation manager mentor chosen						
	Safety valve for evaluation team developed (weekend options, half day excursions, etc.)						
	Staff engaged in/aware of evaluation timing and purpose, implications of shifting workloads						

Exhibit 1: Managing an Evaluation Checklist (continued)

Major Task	Tasks	Lead Person or Office	Status	Due Date	Date Completed	Approval Needed	Comments
Contractual	Contract(s) finalized for consultant(s)						
	Logistical arrangements finalized						
	Signed copies of contracts received						
Deliverables	Deliverables negotiated with consultants						
	Organizational deliverables assigned with timeframes						
	Review period (consolidating comments)						
	Revision period/final approval						
Communication	Schedule worked out between evaluation manager and evaluation team leader (type of communication, day of the week, time, etc.)						
	Schedule worked out between evaluation manager and project manager (type of communication, day of the week, time, etc.)						
	Protocol for contacting local authorities and mechanism ready for when communities are chosen for field visits						
	Communication options (local cell phones, VSAT, shortwave radio, etc.) arranged						
Workplan and Timeline	Evaluation process milestones developed with consultant(s)						
	Evaluation process defined and tasks allocated among evaluation team						
	Milestones mapped on calendar						
	Workplan/timeline written out and distributed with tasks highlighted						
Contingency Plans	Medevac insurance purchased for consultants						
	Emergency contact numbers organized						
	Security briefing given to consultant(s)						
	Contingency plan packet distributed (weather, political unrest, etc.)						

In working through the sample checklist (see exhibit 2, below), the data in the table are explained in the corresponding text immediately below. Note that this is a sample evaluation checklist, assuming that this is a mid-term evaluation scheduled for October – November of the third year of a five-year project. The date for the checklist is October 15th, which means that the team has already arrived in the field and that the evaluation is underway.

With the Managing an Evaluation Checklist, the evaluation manager can shade tasks in the past, or highlight tasks that require management action. This will help to keep track of what still needs to be done, and the file can be password protected so that only one person can update the file. People can read the file or send in updates, but only the single owner of the document can update the file; with this process, there is less confusion about what has been accomplished.

Exhibit 2: Sample Managing an Evaluation Checklist

Major Task	Tasks	Lead Person or Office	Status	Due Date	Date Completed	Approval Needed	Comments	Short Cut Key
Scope of Work	Scope of work drafted	Project Manager	Done	15-Mar	15-Mar	No	Sent to first choice consultant for review; also to home office M&E Advisor. Project manager forgot that there was an existing format until the last minute.	1
	Consultant(s) identified	Project Manager	Done	30-Apr	15-Apr	Yes	Approval from donor required; submitted in quarterly report. Email received with approval on 15 July	
	Scope of work finalized	Project Manager	Done	30-May	1-May	Yes	Approval from donor required; submitted in quarterly report. Email received with approval on 15 July	
Personnel	Consultant references checked	Project Manager	Done	30-Aug	15-Aug	No	Prior experience with consultant expedited the review; also checked with another PVO office	2
	Project staff deployed (assigned and existing workload reallocated for duration of evaluation)	Project Manager	Done	15-Sep	1-Sep	Yes	Project manager needed to coordinate with manager of another project to ensure that desired staff were available; options were discussed in a senior staff meeting with the country director	
	Team assembled	Project Manager	Done	1-Aug	15-Sep	Yes	Took longer for desired team to come together because of home leave and R and R schedules over the summer	
	Teambuilding meeting conducted	Evaluation Manager	Done	30-Sep	30-Sep	No	Evaluation manager held teambuilding meeting once lead evaluator arrived in country	

Exhibit 2: Sample Managing an Evaluation Checklist (continued)

Major Task	Tasks	Lead Person or Office	Status	Due Date	Date Completed	Approval Needed	Comments	Short Cut Key
Financial	Evaluation budget developed	Finance Officer	Done	15-Mar	1-Mar	Yes	Budget developed as part of SOW, needed review by finance office to ensure that there were sufficient funds.	3
	Consultant fees negotiated	Contracts Office	Done	1-Aug	31-Jul	Yes	Preferred consultant's rates had increased by 5% over budget estimates, but project manager had known about this and was prepared to increase line item.	
	Per diem and travel advances arranged for local and international staff	Finance Officer	Done	15-Sep	15-Sep	Yes	Evaluation manager arranged for this with the finance office, having prepared all the materials ahead of time based on budget estimates. Evaluation Manager had told finance office to expect the forms and process the payments prior to team's arrival.	
	Evaluation budget revised	Finance Officer	Done	15-Aug	10-Aug	Yes	Evaluation manager is keeping a copy of this, which needed approval from the project manager because they negotiated an addition to the days allocated and the number of days were therefore slightly higher than budgeted.	
	Expense report and invoice forms sent to consultant(s)	Evaluation Manager	Done	n/a	1-Aug	No	Evaluation manager sent this with an orientation packet once the evaluator was identified and approved.	
	Timing and instructions for expense reports provided to consultant(s)	Evaluation Manager	Done	n/a	1-Aug	No	Evaluation manager sent this with an orientation packet once the evaluator was identified and approved.	

Short Cut Key #1 In this section, the key point is that clearance from the donor generally takes several months (unless a specific email is sent from the evaluation manager about this point). If the donor had not approved the candidate, this project would still have had several months to find an alternative, but the pool of available consultants would have become smaller, as the best people are booked a long time in advance.

Short Cut Key #2 One deadline was missed, although this did not affect the evaluation's start up. It is difficult to arrange for additional or replaced workloads and the project manager clearly tried to start the process earlier, but got caught up in the usual summer schedule of vacations and home leave.

Exhibit 2: Sample Managing an Evaluation Checklist (continued)

Major Task	Tasks	Lead Person or Office	Status	Due Date	Date Completed	Approval Needed	Comments	Short Cut Key
Logistical	Vehicles and drivers arranged	Evaluation Manager	Done	25-Sep	15-Sep	Yes	Evaluation Manager contacted logistics office to arrange for vehicles and drivers.	4,5
	Translators arranged	Evaluation Manager	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes	No translators needed; project staff will translate - this would have been an additional cost.	
	Additional staff arranged	Evaluation Manager	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes	No additional staff are needed for this evaluation.	
	Lodging arranged near main office	Evaluation Manager	Done	15-Sep	30-Aug	No	Initial reservation made via phone with preferred hotel as soon as dates were finalized for initial stay.	
	Lodging arranged up-country	Evaluation Manager	Pending	5-Oct	15-Oct	No	Precise travel schedule still in flux; Evaluation manager will need to monitor situation and revise reservations as needed.	
	Airline tickets arranged	Evaluation Manager	Done	30-Aug	20-Aug	No	Consultant had initiated process; Evaluation manager needed to authorize ticket, done in a phone call to the local travel agent for the PVO.	
	Visas, work permits, security clearances arranged	Evaluation Manager	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes	Consultant already had necessary visa for multiple entries.	
	Support staff/ office space arranged	Evaluation Manager	Done	25-Sep	25-Sep	Yes	Accomplished during project staff meeting; formalized in meeting notes.	
	Airport pickup/ dropoffs arranged	Evaluation Manager	Done	25-Sep	25-Sep	No	Arranged in a phone call with the security office.	

Short Cut Key #3 No real problems, although some of the benchmarks were very close. Having a close relationship with the finance office and giving them all the paperwork almost completed no doubt helped in expediting the process.

Short Cut Key #4 If a task on the checklist is not needed, either delete that line or simply put n/a (not applicable) in the space.

Short Cut Key #5 Up-country travel schedules are often difficult to predict; sometimes evaluations choose to stay longer in a more central location to the fieldwork sites, so there is a base of operations and the teams can spread out. Not knowing which field sites will be visited means that there will not be much time to notify the communities in advance, so the focus groups might have much more limited participation than is ideal.

Exhibit 2: Sample Managing an Evaluation Checklist (continued)

Major Task	Tasks	Lead Person or Office	Status	Due Date	Date Completed	Approval Needed	Comments	Short Cut Key
Relations	Stakeholders (PVO, donor, ministries) notified	Evaluation Manager	Done	15-Aug	10-Aug	No	Evaluation manager circulated notification with team leader resume in an email to relevant stakeholders.	6,7
	Scope of work circulated with team leader resume	Evaluation Manager	Done	15-Aug	10-Aug	No	Evaluation manager circulated notification with team leader resume in an email to relevant stakeholders	
	Communities engaged in/ aware of evaluation timing and purpose	Evaluation Manager	Done	20-Sep	15-Sep	Yes	Evaluation manager developed formal letter, signed by project manager, circulated to all communities during monthly supervisory meetings	
	Communication schedule worked out between Evaluation Manager and project manager	Evaluation Manager	Overdue	1-Oct		No	Evaluation manager met with team leader but has yet to come to an agreement on communication schedule	
	Evaluation manager and team leader meet to determine working style for the evaluation	Evaluation Manager	Done	2-Oct	2-Oct	No	Evaluation manager and team leader met after team planning meeting to discuss working styles	
Psychological Elements	Evaluation manager mentor chosen	Project Manager	Done	n/a	n/a	No	Project manager will serve as mentor	8
	Safety valve for evaluation team developed (weekend options, half-day excursions, etc.)	Evaluation Manager	Pending	n/a	n/a	No	Evaluation manager has list of options for lead evaluator and team; waiting for weekly phone call to reserve possibilities	
	Staff engaged in/aware of evaluation timing and purpose, implications of shifting workloads	Project Manager	Overdue	15-Jul		No	Project manager has delayed presentation until arrival of team leader despite reassigning staff to compensate for those participating in evaluation.	

Short Cut Key #6 The evaluation manager has done a good job arranging for multiple different logistics—— everything has been done in a timely manner (except one element in number 7).

Short Cut Key #7 Communication is absolutely critical between the evaluation manager and the project manager. Too much or too little communication can result in poor decisions. If the evaluation manager cannot come to some agreement before the evaluator leaves for the field, then the project manager may need to impose a communication schedule on both of them. Having this element in red should be a good visual clue for the project manager during routine meetings with the evaluation manager that this is something to be addressed. In a worst case scenario, evaluation communication may need to be redirected from the evaluator to the project manager and then to the evaluation manager. But adding this additional layer will diminish the evaluation manager's efficiency.

Short Cut Key #8 The safety valve mechanism is less critical as most team members will be thrilled just to have a half-day of free time and do not necessarily need entertainment. What is more critical for the entire evaluation and the participating staff is the delay by the project manager in presenting the evaluation scope to the project staff. This delay can increase anxiety and resistance, and can make the evaluator's job much harder (because s/he will have to spend more time reassuring staff about the purpose of the evaluation). This may also indicate that the evaluation manager is not able to manage strong personalities and bigger stakeholders in the evaluation. It is always possible, of course, that the staff are sufficiently experienced or that the project manager's personality is sufficient to carry this off without much more advance notice. It is a significant concern, however.

Exhibit 2: Sample Managing an Evaluation Checklist (continued)

Major Task	Tasks	Lead Person or Office	Status	Due Date	Date Completed	Approval Needed	Comments	Short Cut Key
Contractual	Contract(s) finalized for consultant(s)	Evaluation Manager	Done	30-Aug	20-Aug	Yes	Contracts office updated an older form with the lead consultant	9
	Logistic arrangements finalized	Evaluation Manager	Done	30-Aug	20-Aug	Yes	Contracts office updated an older form with the lead consultant	
	Signed copies of contracts received	Evaluation Manager	Done	30-Aug	25-Aug	Yes	Consultant contract scanned and sent signed copy upon receipt	
Deliverables	Deliverables negotiated with consultants	Evaluation Manager	Mostly done	30-Aug	2-Oct	Yes	Contracts office signed off on contract; consultant still dubious about evaluation manager capacity-building element but signed because of prior history with PVO	10, 11
	Organizational deliverables assigned with timeframes	Evaluation Manager	Done	10-Nov		No	Consultant to provide based on pace of fieldwork	
	Review period for consolidating comments	Evaluation Manager		30-Nov		No		
	Revision period/final approval	Evaluation Manager		10-Dec		Yes		

Exhibit 2: Sample Managing an Evaluation Checklist (continued)

Major Task	Tasks	Lead Person or Office	Status	Due Date	Date Completed	Approval Needed	Comments	Short Cut Key
Communication	Schedule worked out between evaluation manager and evaluation team leader (type of communication, day of the week, time, etc.)	Evaluation Manager	Pending	2-Oct	10-Aug	No	Team leader very resistant to evaluation manager accompanying evaluation team; may need arbitration from project manager	12
	Protocol for contacting local authorities and mechanism ready for when communities are chosen for field visits	Evaluation Manager	Done	15-Sep	10-Oct	No	Evaluation manager contacted communities through local channels (cellphones, etc.) as soon as sites were identified	
	Communication options (local cell phones, VSAT, shortwave radio, etc.) arranged	Evaluation Manager	Done	15-Sep	15-Sep	No	Evaluation manager arranged local cellphone for lead consultant; all vehicles accompanying evaluation will routinely have VSAT	
Work plan and timeline	Evaluation process milestones developed with consultant(s)	Evaluation Manager	Done	4-Oct	1-Oct	No	Initial discussions held prior to consultant arrival in-country; revised over dinner the first night based on best guesstimates of completion. Still some ongoing discussion about scope of capacity-building for evaluation manager	13,14
	Evaluation process defined and tasks allocated among evaluation team	Evaluation Manager	Done	1-Oct	4-Oct	No	Initiated during team planning meeting and written up by evaluation manager over the weekend with input from team leader	
	Milestones mapped on calendar	Evaluation Manager with team leader	In progress	10-Oct	Pending	No	Evaluation manager is overburdened with initial logistics and could not complete task by due date; estimated completion date is Oct 22	
	Work plan/ timeline written out and distributed with tasks highlighted	Evaluation Manager	In progress	10-Oct	Pending	No	Evaluation manager overburdened with initial logistics, could not complete task by due date; estimated completion date is Oct 22	

Short Cut Key #9 The contracts office is clearly experienced and able to manage such a straightforward contract. No problems noted, encountered, or anticipated.

Short Cut Key #10 Most of the deliverables are still pending, which is completely normal at this stage of the evaluation.

Short Cut Key #11 With respect to the deliverables in the evaluation SOW, the capacity-building for the evaluation manager is more critical. Given the difficulties the two have already encountered in communication, this could be very difficult to manage. It is likely that the evaluation manager will push for this, and the evaluator is equally likely to push back by complaining to the project manager about not having enough time to concentrate on the primary task. This may require some additional negotiation by the project manager to ensure that the evaluation manager does get some capacity building, but it is within fairly small parameters that work primarily for the evaluator.

Short Cut Key #12 The communities have finally been contacted, and there will hopefully be enough notice before the field visits occur so that there will be more sufficient numbers of people for focus group interviews. The team leader and the evaluation manager have worked out a communication schedule, but the team leader emphatically does not want the evaluation manager in the field with the team. There are generally good reasons for this decision; a central contact point is needed for decisions and communications, and it is easier to do this from the country headquarters. The evaluation manager would benefit from seeing how the evaluation operates in the field, and at least being an observer to some of the field practices. It may require additional mediation or outright coaxing from the project manager for this to happen without further adverse conditions on the evaluation process.

Short Cut Key #13 The communication and concern about the capacity-building aspects continue. The project manager is going to have to step in, with a possible solution of having the evaluation manager work with the evaluator at the end of the fieldwork to contribute to the fieldwork analysis, so the capacity building will focus more on the use of the evaluation and less on the data collection mechanics.

Short Cut Key #14 More troubling is that the evaluation manager has not been able to devote the time needed to create the organizational frameworks to keep track of the evaluation's progress. The project manager (in the role of mentor) should query this during their routine meetings; the evaluation manager may need technical help in creating those flowcharts or simply an afternoon to concentrate on those tasks. Having the graphic is clearly not critical, but it is very helpful to keep track of where things are and what still needs to be done.

Exhibit 2: Sample Managing an Evaluation Checklist (continued)

Major Task	Tasks	Lead Person or Office	Status	Due Date	Date Completed	Approval Needed	Comments	Short Cut Key
Contingency Plans	Medevac insurance purchased for consultants	Evaluation Manager via contracts office	Done	15-Sep	12-Sep	No	Email sent to consultant to verify continued coverage	15
	Emergency contact numbers organized	Evaluation Manager	Done	15-Sep	12-Sep	No	Evaluation manager updated records from last evaluation; slight delay in making sure all team members had the same coverage	
	Security briefing given to consultant(s)	Evaluation Manager with security office	Done	1-Oct	1-Oct	No	Security office representative met consultant at airport to go over briefing elements and provide emergency numbers and local phone	
	Contingency plan packet distributed (weather, political unrest, etc.)	Evaluation Manager with security office	Done	15-Sep	20-Sep	Yes	Project manager needed to approve the decision tree leading to postponement or other actions; also needed to be reviewed by country director to make sure it was in line with PVO policies	

Short Cut Key #15 No real problems in this section. The project manager should meet with the country director to make sure that the contingency plans are in line with the organization's policies and in accordance with the organization's own contingency plans for most of those events.

Concluding Remarks

As with any evaluation, some tasks will be done on time and others will not. There may be personality clashes and some personalities that will work well together. There will be challenges in getting an evaluation accomplished given the resources available, whether it is in terms of time or budget. The evaluation manager's job is to ensure that the different tasks for an evaluation are tracked and accomplished, and smooth the path for the evaluation. Completing these tasks in a timely manner will help to ensure a successful evaluation. This is not an easy exercise, and an organization should cultivate and support staff who can serve as evaluation managers and help create a process where the evaluation is not only done, but is done well and serves a useful purpose for those interested in its findings.

This publication is part of a series on key aspects of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for humanitarian and socioeconomic development programs. The American Red Cross and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) produced this series under their respective USAID/Food for Peace Institutional Capacity Building Grants. The topics covered were designed to respond to field-identified needs for specific guidance and tools that did not appear to be available in existing publications. Program managers as well as M&E specialists are the intended audience for the modules; the series can also be used for M&E training and capacity building. The *Short Cuts* series provides a ready reference tool for people who have already used the full modules, those who simply need a refresher in the subject, or those who want to fast-track particular skills.

The M&E series is available on these Web sites:

- www.crs.org/publications
- www.foodsecuritynetwork.org/icbtools.html
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MONITORING & EVALUATION

Short Cuts

Communicating and Reporting on an Evaluation

Guidelines on Designing an Evaluation Reporting and Communication Strategy

September 2008

Introduction

This edition of *Short Cuts* provides practical instructions on how to design an evaluation communication and reporting strategy using tailored reporting formats that are responsive to audience profiles and information needs. Most donors require midterm and final evaluations, and best practice indicates that these periodic assessments provide the most detailed information about a particular project's progress. An evaluation represents a large investment in time and funds, yet private voluntary organizations (PVOs) often report that evaluation reports are not read or shared, and in some cases, a report's recommendations are not used.

In planning a communication and reporting strategy, it is important to include a variety of reporting formats—tailored to audience information needs—to engage evaluation stakeholders in discussion and decision making. Clear, jargon-free language should be used, accompanied by graphics to help ensure the evaluations are understood, used, and contribute to organizational learning.

4 Steps to Effectively Communicate and Report on Evaluation Results

Step 1 Identify Communication and Reporting Challenges

The first step is to identify communicating and reporting challenges, and, in turn, to learn from the results. These challenges are listed in table 1.

Table 1: Communication and Reporting Challenges	
Challenge	How it affects communicating and reporting
General evaluation anxiety	• Just the word "evaluation" can provoke anxiety among staff and cause resistance, because the results can affect decisions about staffing or resource allocation. • External evaluators, who need time to establish trust and relationships, may increase anxiety.
Failure to plan from the start	• Not communicating regularly with stakeholders can cause disengagement, disinterest, and, ultimately, the non-use of findings. • Evaluation teams can find out too late that no budget was allocated for report production, verbal presentations, or dissemination.
Organizational culture—defined as management operating style, the way authority and responsibility are assigned, or how staff are developed	• Preconceptions are held about the project that are resistant to change. • Staff may view negative or sensitive evaluation results as shameful criticism and resist discussing them openly. • Communication may be inefficient due to the loss of institutional memory because of rapid staff turnover or other reasons. • Leaders who do not want to share performance information in open meetings hinder dissemination of performance findings. • Ongoing communication during an evaluation is inhibited by the organization's dysfunctional information-sharing systems.

Overcoming Challenges

In theory, anxiety and resistance should be lessened by the participatory, utilization-focused evaluation approach and mitigated by a focus on evaluation as dialogue and learning, rather than on judgment and accountability. Treating evaluation stakeholders respectfully, in a way that protects their dignity, will also help to lessen anxiety.

Step 2 Define the Communication Purpose

Once the challenges are identified, the next step is to define the purpose of the communication. How can you best meet stakeholder and other audience needs? First, identify stakeholder and audience needs and then match those needs with the appropriate communication and reporting strategies. Think about why you are communicating with the stakeholders and what you want to communicate. Review the evaluation purpose from the scope of work and consider the expectations that stakeholders express. Then, answer the questions below for each individual or group of stakeholders.

Questions About Stakeholders/Audiences	Answers
1. Do they need to be informed about evaluation decisions? If so, when and for what reason?	☐ To build awareness ☐ To gain support ☐ To show respect
2. Do they need to review interim or final findings? If so, when and for what reason?	☐ To review evaluation progress ☐ To learn and improve ☐ To promote dialogue and understanding among partners
3. Do they need to be involved in decision making? If so, when and for what reason?	☐ To assess the likelihood of future support ☐ To help develop recommendations ☐ To ensure use of the recommendations

Step 3 Select Communication Methods

Now that you have identified the audience needs, the next step is to select the best communication methods. Start by asking the following questions of each individual or group:

Questions for Stakeholders/Audiences	Answers
1. What is their familiarity with the program or the project being evaluated?	☐ Very familiar ☐ Somewhat familiar ☐ Not at all familiar
2. What is their experiences using evaluation findings?	☐ Long experience ☐ Some experience ☐ No experience
3. What is their reading ability?	☐ High ☐ Mid ☐ Low or non-reader (illiterate)
4. What language(s) do they use to communicate?	☐ _____ for writing ☐ _____ for reading
5. How accessible are they?	☐ Easily ☐ With some effort ☐ Isolated

(Adapted from Torres et al. 2005.)

For example, if the group has a high degree of literacy, written communication can be used. If the audience is largely illiterate, however, visual and oral communications will be better communication methods.

Step 4 Develop a communication and reporting strategy

With this assessment of stakeholder characteristics and knowledge of information needs, the next step is to develop a responsive communicating and reporting strategy. The strategy should describe who, what, when, and how to communicate. Use the example in table 2, below, to plan the strategy.

Table 2: Sample Planning Communication and Reporting Strategy Worksheet

Stakeholder and audience group or individual and summary of characteristics and purpose	What information (content) do they need?	What format is best for them?	When do they need it?	Who will prepare and deliver the information?	What are the costs?
Program donor, located in Washington, D.C., needs to review final evaluation report for decision making about future funding	Findings and recommendations	Final evaluation report with executive summary Debriefing meeting to be held at donor offices to present findings, recommendations, and intended actions	June 15th June 30th	Evaluation team to prepare written reports; PVO headquarters staff to prepare debriefing meeting agenda and presentation	Printing costs for 25 copies of written report; travel costs of staff to Washington, D.C., for meeting; and time to prepare and debrief

Reporting Menu of Options

A final written report is an important way to communicate and report on an evaluation, and the full evaluation report should be distributed to program staff, partners, government officials, and donor agencies, but other formats should also be considered for other audiences. Based on stakeholder characteristics and information needs, and funding options, consider other formats such as brochures, debriefings, panel presentations, print and broadcast media, video presentations, drama, poster sessions, working sessions, or electronic communications.

Table 3, below, presents a wide range of reporting options and descriptions of each option. Use table 3 to choose formats that fulfill the evaluation purposes and meet the needs of different stakeholders and dissemination audiences (Patton 1997).

Table 3: Evaluation Reporting Menu

Written Reporting	Verbal Presentations	Creative Reporting	Critical Reflection Events	Reporting Using Electronic Formats
• Final evaluation report • Executive summary • Interim or progress reports • Human interest, success and learning stories • Short communications such as newsletters, brochures, memos, e-mails, postcards • News media communications (print media)	• Debriefing meetings • Panel presentations • Broadcast media (radio or television) • Informal communication	• Video presentation • Dramas or role-plays • Poster sessions • Writeshops	• After-action Reviews • Working sessions	• Website communications • Synchronous electronic communications such as chat rooms, teleconferences, video and web conferences • Podcasts

Sources: Patton 1997; Torres et al 2005.

WRITTEN REPORTING

The final evaluation report presents the full view of the evaluation. It serves as the basis for the executive summary, oral presentations, and other reporting formats, and is an important resource for the program archives. Many program donors have a prescribed format for required reports; follow this format carefully. Usually, at least one draft evaluation report is circulated to stakeholders for comments and additional insights prior to the final report production.

An executive summary is a short version—usually one to four pages—of the final evaluation report, containing condensed versions of the major sections. Placed at the beginning of the final evaluation report, it communicates essential information accurately and concisely. Executive summaries are typically written for busy decision-makers and enable readers to get vital information about the evaluation without having to read the entire report. The executive summary may be disseminated separately from the full report and should be understandable as a stand-alone document.

Condensing 50 pages of a final report into a one-page summary can take considerable time. Use the tips in the box below to make this job easier.

"I'm sorry that the letter I have written you is so long. I did not have time to write a short one."

George Bernard Shaw

Tips for Writing an Executive Summary

- *Read the original document from beginning to end*
- *Start the executive summary with conclusions and recommendations*
- *Underline all key ideas, significant statements, and vital recommendations*
- *Edit the underlined information*
- *Rewrite the underlined information*
- *Edit the rewritten version by eliminating unnecessary words and phrases*
- *Check the edited version against the original document to ensure that the essential information is captured, including the project successes and challenges*
- *Ensure that only information from the original report is included*

Interim or progress reports present the preliminary, or initial, draft evaluation findings. Interim reports are scheduled according to specific decision-making needs of evaluation stakeholders. While interim reports can be critical to making an evaluation more useful, they can also cause unnecessary difficulties if interpreted incorrectly. To avoid this problem, begin interim reports by stating the following:

- Which data collection activities are being reported on and which are not
- When the final evaluation results will be available
- Any cautions for readers in interpreting the findings (Torres et al. 2005).

Human interest, success, and learning stories are different ways to communicate evaluation results to a specific audience. Donors are increasingly interested in using short narratives or stories that put a human face on M&E data.

- **Human interest stories** document the experiences of individuals affected by PVO projects and help to personalize the successes and challenges of PVO work.
- **Success stories** are descriptions of "when, what, where, how, and why" a project succeeded in achieving its objectives.
- **Learning stories** narrate cases of unanticipated project difficulties or negative impacts, how these were identified and overcome, and what was learned that might be helpful in the future to others (De Ruiter and Aker 2008; Long et al. 2006). These stories can be included in the final report or in an appendix.

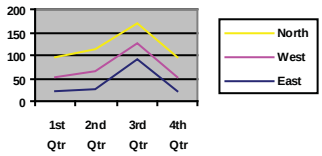
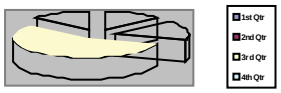
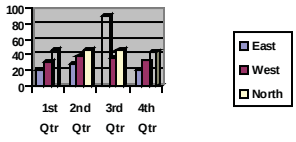
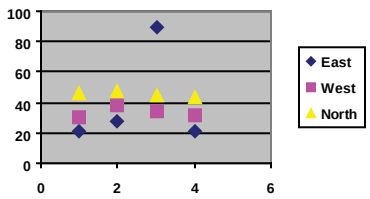
For more information on how to write these stories, consult *Human Interest Stories: Guidelines* and *Tools for Effective Report Writing* (De Ruiter and Aker 2008) and *Success and Learning Story Package: Guidelines and Tools for Writing Effective Project Impact Reports* (Long et al. 2006); and *Writing Human Interest Stories for M&E* (Hagens 2008).

Short communications—newsletters, bulletins, briefs, and brochures—serve to highlight evaluation information, help to generate interest in the full evaluation findings, and serve an organization's public relations purposes. Their format can invite feedback, provide updates, report on upcoming evaluation events, or present preliminary or final findings. However, the short formats may be less useful if the evaluation is primarily qualitative, and when a full description of the evaluation context is critical to interpreting results (Torres et al. 2005). These types of communication use photos, graphs, color, and formatting to be attractive and eye-catching to the reader.

News media communications are another method for disseminating evaluation results. The project can send the evaluation report to the news media, send them press releases on the report findings, or encourage interviews of evaluation team members or evaluation stakeholders (Torres et al. 2005). The news media provides access to a larger audience, such as the general public or a specific professional group.

Use of media can also be tricky—there are no guarantees of what the reporter will write. For this reason, it is important to promote a clear message to the media, to brief the evaluators and stakeholders on the main points to speak on, and to contact the media only after other key stakeholders have reviewed the evaluation findings—no one likes to be surprised by reading about their program in the press.

Table 4: Overview of Graphics

Graphic Types	Information Communicated	Tips
Line Graph 	• Shows trends over time, movements, distributions, and cycles	• Label lines rather than using a legend • Try to use three lines at most • Use different colors or different textures if in black and white
Pie Chart 	• Shows parts of a whole	• Use six or fewer slices • Arrange slices from largest or most important from "12 O'Clock" • Use bright contrasting colors • Label pie slices
Bar Chart/Cluster Bar Chart 	• Compares differences between similar information (for example, percent distribution) • Cluster bar chart compares several items	• Use as few bars as possible • Use color or texture to emphasize data aspects • Place numbers showing bar values at top or inside the bar
Other Charts (flow, time series, scatterplot) 	• Show processes, elements, roles, or parts of a larger entity	• Use white space effectively • Convey the message in the title • Add the data source

Tables 		Title1	Title2	Title3	Title4
---	---	---	---	---
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
						• Describe, tabulate, show relationships and compare • Conveniently present large quantity of data	• Assign each table an Arabic numeral • Place the title immediately above the table • Clearly label rows and columns • Show the data source
Illustrations (diagrams, maps or drawings) 	• Effectively convey messages or ideas that are difficult to express in words • Show organizational structures, demonstrate flows • Show direction • Use flow charts to show issues • Use map charts to show results comparable across geographic regions or countries	• Keep it simple—if a lot of explanation is needed, use text instead • Use illustrations creatively as they help to communicate • Include a legend to define any symbols used • Use white space

Sources: Torres et al 2005; Kusek and Rist 2004; Tufte 1989.

VERBAL PRESENTATIONS

Oral or verbal presentations communicate evaluation progress and findings to stakeholders and other audiences. With this method, audiences can ask questions and communication is more interactive. Oral presentations with facilitated discussions can lead to dialogue among stakeholders and commitment to actions (see critical reflection, below) (Torres et al. 2005).

Debriefing meetings typically begin with a brief presentation, followed by discussion of key findings or other issues. Ongoing debriefing meetings may be held to communicate evaluation progress to program managers. A final debriefing meeting can be held with stakeholders to share and discuss key findings and recommendations from the final evaluation report.

Panel presentations can be used to bring together evaluation stakeholders to present key evaluation findings and recommendations or other evaluation components. Usually composed of three to four panelists, each individual makes a short presentation on some aspect of the evaluation. A moderator then facilitates discussion among panelists and between panelists and the audience (Kusek and Rist 2004).

Broadcast media can be useful when evaluation findings need to be disseminated beyond the primary stakeholders. Radio is a very effective way to disseminate information. Community radio stations—with a mandate for development—provide low-cost production and often have local language translation capacity.

CREATIVE REPORTING

Consider using creative but less-traditional communication formats to report on evaluation findings. These formats can be crucial when reporting information to illiterate stakeholders, as they show respect for local communication traditions such as oral history. Information on how to use video presentations, dramas or role plays, roster sessions, writeshops, critical reflection events, after action reviews, and working sessions are presented below.

Video presentations bring the combined power of visual imagery, motion, and sound. Videos can be shot in digital formats, edited on computers, and disseminated in CD-ROM or digital videodisk (DVD) formats. Although it is advantageous to have a presenter, videos can be distributed and viewed by wide numbers of audiences. Videos are especially useful to do the following (Torres et al. 2005):

- Present qualitative evaluation findings, such as interviews
- Document evaluation processes
- Present evaluation findings about new programs
- Shares evaluation findings with illiterate groups

Video Tips

- *Establish the video purpose and criteria for selecting program events to be filmed.*
- *Obtain permission from program participants before videotaping.*
- *Ensure the videos for stand-alone pieces include sufficient background information about the program and the evaluation.*
- *Consider the intended audience when determining length; shorter videos (20–30 minutes) have a better chance of being included in meeting agendas.*

Dramas or role plays are powerful ways to portray evaluation findings and to illustrate potential applications of recommendations. Torres (2005) describes three theatrical formats where evaluation findings are presented and used to spark dialogue.

1. **Traditional sketches** are developed from evaluation data—especially interviews and focus groups—and may also portray evaluation findings. Actors perform a sketch and then exit. The sketch is followed by a facilitator-guided discussion with audience members.

2. **Interactive sketches** are provocative scenarios that engage audience members in thinking and talking about evaluation issues and findings. Following an interactive sketch, the audience discusses their reactions with the actors, who stay in character, again guided by a facilitator who also provides evaluation data. After the facilitated discussions, actors repeat the sketch, changing it according to the audience discussion outcomes.

3. **Forum theater workshops** use role playing. A facilitator presents evaluation findings; participants can be both actors and audience members. Participants create mini-scenes based on evaluation findings and their own experiences. These are dynamic scenarios; participants can move in and out of acting roles, and actors can change strategies mid-scene. A facilitator then elicits questions and leads discussions about each mini-scene.

Drama followed by a sequence of open questions—*What did you see happening here? Why does it happen? How does it happen in our situation? What can we do about it?*—is a powerful way to communicate evaluation findings, especially those on sensitive topics to groups. For example, role plays are used in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa to communicate findings on stigma related to HIV/AIDS.

Poster sessions provide quick, visual, and easily read information to audiences with little or no knowledge about a program or organization. An informative display is combined with a verbal presentation. Posters typically include photographs, diagrams, graphs, tables, charts, drawings, and text on poster-size boards. Poster sessions are often used at large, multi-session conferences to display condensed evaluation information. Audience members see the displays and can stop be for brief discussion. Evaluators can be present at poster sessions to communicate key ideas and issues and elicit questions, but poster sessions can also be set up to as stand-alone events (Torres et al. 2005).

Poster Session Tips

- *Audiences should be able to read a poster from a distance.*
- *Posters should convey main ideas clearly and concisely, using report headings with bulleted points.*
- *Posters should include visuals and graphics and attract attention through color.*
- *Consider juxtaposing pictures of participants next to direct quotes from interviews.*
- *When making posters, use lined flip chart paper and extra broad markers to write clearly.*

Source: Torres et al 2005.

Writeshops are an innovative technique that can involve even low-literate project stakeholders in report writing. The writeshops help program participants to be active creators of information, not just passive providers of information. Writeshops consist of two- or three-day workshops where program participants, PVO staff, and artists work together. PVO staff interview participants and elicit stories that highlight evaluation findings, best practices, or lessons learned. These stories are transcribed and edited. Artists prepare illustrations as per participant instructions. Participants and the PVO facilitators review the drafts reviewed by for content, language, and appropriateness prior to their publication.

CRITICAL REFLECTION EVENTS

Critical reflection events help to validate information coming from the evaluation, analyze findings, and then use this knowledge to inform decision making. Critical reflection can occur throughout the evaluation process, for example, during weekly review meetings or at the end, during a lessons-learned workshop.

Critical reflection involves individuals or groups who are invited to interpret and analyze information—such as evaluation findings—in a respectful, open atmosphere. Dialogue is promoted; this exchange of ideas and opinions produces new learning and raises awareness of underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions.

Sequenced open questions are used in critical reflection to encourage people to discuss, reflect, and analyze information (see text box, above). Authentic dialogue also requires that a facilitator

or group establish an environment of trust, respect, and collaboration among evaluators and stakeholders. Critical reflection is enhanced when people:

- Ask pertinent questions and display curiosity
- Admit what they do not know
- Uncover and examine beliefs, assumptions, and opinions against facts, evidence, and proof
- Listen carefully to others
- Adjust opinions when new facts are found
- Examine successes and problems closely and deeply

After action reviews are a sequence of reflective activities that can be used during an evaluation to process an evaluation team's initial findings or to review progress or obstacles in the evaluation process. As with other critical reflection events, after action reviews work best in a safe environment where people can express their ideas openly; a facilitator poses open questions and leads the group discussions. After action reviews are conducted while memories are still fresh. The facilitator asks a series of sequenced questions as follows and records key points made by the group, such as:

- What was supposed to happen?
- What actually happened?
- Why were there differences?
- What did we learn?
- What were successes or shortfalls?
- What should we do to sustain successes or improve upon shortfalls?

Working sessions with evaluation stakeholders are the hallmark of a collaborative participatory evaluation and can be conducted at any time during the evaluation (Torres et al. 2005). Effective working sessions apply adult learning principles, such as those used for workshops. Guidance for conducting productive working sessions is described in the box, below.

Guidelines to Planning and Facilitating an Effective Working Session

- *Clearly define the session purpose*
- *Prepare an agenda*
- *Choose appropriate procedures—such as brainstorming and small group tasks—and prepare all necessary materials, such as flipcharts or whiteboards and markers to record ideas, handouts, and documents*
- *Set up the meeting room to promote exchange and discussion*
- *Choose a meeting time that is convenient to participants*
- *Share the agenda well in advance and review it at the start of the meeting*
- *Use short games to help participants to get to know each other*
- *Invite participants to set ground rules or norms for how everyone will work together*
- *Clarify roles such as who is facilitating, who is recording ideas, and so on*
- *Use facilitation techniques or hire a competent facilitator to paraphrase comments, synthesize and integrate ideas, encourage diverse viewpoints to surface, manage time, invite the group to refocus when necessary, and build consensus*
- *Balance dialogue with decision making*
- *Plan and articulate next steps*
- *At the end, ask for feedback and use this information to improve the next working session*

Source: Torres et al 2005.

REPORTING USING ELECTRONIC FORMATS

Web sites can be used to disseminate written evaluation reports and evaluation documents. Web sites may be hosted by a donor, a particular development community—relief, peacebuilding, public health, communications, and so on—a PVO consortia, a UN- or government-hosted working group, and/or a resource center. Possible Web postings include reports, video presentations, PowerPoint presentations, newsletters, meeting schedules, and press releases. In the peacebuilding community, a number of Web sites have begun to post evaluations of peacebuilding projects (Lederach et al. 2007).

Synchronous electronic communications, such as web communication systems and conferencing tools, can facilitate collaboration with stakeholders in different locations during all evaluation phases. Chat rooms, teleconferences, videoconferencing, live Web conferencing, virtual meetings, and podcasts are online events and tools that allow stakeholders who may be located across the globe to work together easily (Torres et al. 2005).

- **A chat room** is an area on the Internet where two or more people can have a typed conversation in real time; this method is ideal for routine conversations about data collection or evaluation procedures.

- **Teleconferences** can be arranged through communication service providers. A single number is given to participants to call; speaker phones are used to accommodate many people. Teleconferences are especially useful for discussing and getting feedback on evaluation documents that are distributed and reviewed by participants prior to the call.

- **Videoconferences** are meetings between people at different locations using a system of monitors, microphones, cameras, computer equipment, and other devices. Videoconferences can be used with evaluation stakeholders in place of face-to-face meeting. Note that reliable videoconferencing technology can be costly to use and that technical expertise and information technology professionals are needed to facilitate a successful videoconference.

- **Web conferences** are meetings between people at different locations done through an Internet connection that allows them to view the same document or presentation on computer monitors simultaneously, along with audio communication. Features of Web conferencing software vary and may include a chat room feature or video and/or audio communication. Web conferences can be used for planning, presenting information, soliciting input and reactions, and editing evaluation plans and reports. Web conferences can be arranged through companies specializing in the service or through the Internet.

- **Podcasts** are a series of digital media files that are distributed over the Internet for playback on portable media players (e.g., iPods) and computers. Podcasts enable evaluators to communicate and report information with stakeholders at any time. For example, if a stakeholder is unable to attend a final debriefing meeting, a meeting podcast allows him/her to download the podcast of the event. Although used infrequently at present, this electronic format holds much promise for the future.

DIFFERENT OPTIONS TO COMMUNICATE EVALUATION RESULTS

There are many options in evaluation communication and reporting, and often several techniques or formats are used or sequenced to promote greater dissemination of results. For example, evaluators may draft a written report with preliminary findings, and then hold a working meeting with key evaluation stakeholders to validate findings, followed by a radio program to disseminate the final results. Sequencing a series of communication formats in a skillful way can be very influential in communicating a written report's findings and recommendations (Torres et al. 2005).

See the full module for references and suggestions for further reading.

This edition of Short Cuts was produced in 2008. Please send your comments or feedback to: m&efeedback@crs.org.

This publication is part of a series on key aspects of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for humanitarian and socioeconomic development programs. The American Red Cross and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) produced this series under their respective USAID/Food for Peace Institutional Capacity Building Grants. The topics covered were designed to respond to field-identified needs for specific guidance and tools that did not appear to be available in existing publications. Program managers as well as M&E specialists are the intended audience for the modules; the series can also be used for M&E training and capacity building. The *Short Cuts* series provides a ready reference tool for people who have already used the full modules, those who simply need a refresher in the subject, or those who want to fast-track particular skills.

The M&E series is available on these Web sites:

- www.crs.org/publications
- www.foodsecuritynetwork.org/icbtools.html
- www.redcross.org

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MONITORING & EVALUATION

Short Cuts

Guidelines on Writing Human Interest Stories and Managing the Writing Process

Writing Human Interest Stories for M&E

September 2008

Introduction

Human interest stories personalize project impact results and reports by documenting the personal experience of individuals who were influenced by the project. These stories are a perfect complement to other M&E data collection techniques that provide a different account of project impact.

There are two types of human interest stories: the success story and the learning story.

- A success story illustrates a project's impact by detailing an individual's positive experiences in his or her own words. Success stories include the when, what, where, how, and why of a project's impact.
- A learning story focuses on the lessons learned through an individual's positive and negative experiences (if any) with a project. Learning stories examine individual responses to challenges that arise out of the project.

This edition of *Short Cuts* summarizes the content of two modules: *Human Interest Stories* and *Success and Learning Story Package*. This edition provides guidance to those responsible for writing the human interest story and to those managing the process. Seven key steps are outlined to guide and support effective project impact report writing. These steps will lead to a high quality, interesting, and accessible final story.

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Step 1 Select the Right Type of Human Interest Story

The first step is to **determine what to document**: success stories or learning stories. In selecting the story type, consider the primary audience for the story. Which type of story will resonate most with this audience? Donors or stakeholders may stipulate which type of story is of most interest to them. In many cases, current donors are interested in learning stories—as a part of a midterm or final evaluation—whereas donors for future projects may be most interested in project success stories. Be sure to follow any guidance provided by the primary audience, whether donors, other stakeholders, or your own agency.

The story's primary purpose will also influence whether it should be a learning story or a success story; however, both types of stories can contribute greatly to a range of information needs. Success stories are often more appropriate for agency marketing and funding proposals. Learning stories are usually better suited as a contribution to ongoing M&E systems and reporting.

Both types of stories may be useful for the impact report. In this case, make sure to differentiate between the two types of stories when developing the tools, choosing sites, and selecting participants.

Step 2 Determine the Story Focus

Once the type of human interest story is identified, then attention is turned to the story itself. **Identifying a specific focus** will help guide the development of the tools and to structure the writing. Decide whether the story will concentrate on one sector or all sectors of a project (if applicable) and which type(s) of learning or success are to be highlighted.

Step 3 Write a Scope of Work, Identify a Team, and Draft an Action Plan

Next, **draft a scope of work** (SOW), a major step in the planning process. The SOW will help different team members to clarify their expectations and to reach a consensus on methods and other issues. Generally, the SOW should include the project staff's expectations in developing the stories, the deliverables or final products, and the responsibilities of different team members in the process. Make sure to reference how the stories will fit in with broader evaluation objectives and methods. Include partners and other stakeholders, as appropriate, in developing the SOW. The Human Interest Stories module provides a sample SOW with the key components.

Identify the team members (staff and consultants, as appropriate) to be involved in each step of the process. Determine whether it is appropriate to rely solely on internal staff or whether a consultant would add value by providing needed technical assistance and increasing the validity of the findings for a broader audience. The donor or your organization may have certain expectations about the inclusion of external consultants for the process. Select staff and consultants to ensure the team

has strong skills in program evaluation and photojournalism—writing good human interest stories requires a balance of both.

Develop a draft action plan that outlines the logistical support required, the estimated number of person-days for each task, the staff assigned to the process, recommendations for sites and participant selection, and the dissemination plan. At this stage, the action plan is a draft and will likely be revised as the work proceeds.

Key Components of a SOW

- Brief overview of the program, project, or development context
- Purpose and type of story, target audience, and how the story fits into the broader evaluation process
- Major issues and questions that the story should address
- Suggested data-gathering methods
- Explicit reference to the need for respecting the security, dignity, and self-worth of individuals being interviewed and photographed
- Key documents that the country program will provide
- Schedule of deliverables and place of performance
- Story format
- Production timeline
- Dissemination plan

Step 4 Select Sites and Participants

There are no clear rules to **determine how many sites or interviews are needed** to produce a human interest story or which sites to select. For areas that are similar in context, in level, and in project impact, fewer sites or interviews are needed. Greater similarity will allow sites to represent larger areas while, conversely, more sites are needed to represent areas that have had different types of impact or have largely different contexts. The story focus, project budget, and feasibility of reaching different geographic areas will also ultimately influence the number of sites visited. Sites should be selected based on the story focus and the site's relevance to the story. Include partner staff and other stakeholders who have good knowledge of project communities in team discussions about site selection.

Human interest stories require information from multiple sources including a combination of project participants—such as individuals, households, and committee members—non-project households, private voluntary organization (PVO) staff, partner staff, and local leaders. Again, there is no rule about the number of participants required for each story, but include enough participants to validate the data and the information collected.

With input from local leaders and partner staff, create a list of possible participants from which to choose. In the list, include information about how and for how long each person has participated in the project and whether or not each has experienced difficulties or successes. Select participants best

suited to provide the perspectives sought. Remember that these individual stories do not have to be representative of the broader population.

Including interviews with local community leaders will provide a greater context and background information on the project, the community, and possibly the household (or other subject of the story). In human interest stories, data is collected only from individuals who have been successful or learned from the project. This element of bias is not necessarily negative, but PVOs should be transparent and explicit in explaining how subjects were selected and state the limitations in generalizing the results in representing the broader population in the evaluation report.

Step 5 Gather the Information Needed

There are many methods for collecting information for human interest stories, but a combination of secondary information, a review of project documents and reports, observations and photographs, and semi-structured interviews have proven to be very effective and efficient. Semi-structured interviews use open-ended questions and allow the interviewer to ask follow-up questions to gather more detailed information.

Data for these stories can be separated into four components:

1. Basic project information
2. Project-specific information
3. Participant-specific information
4. Story subject

Data should be collected in different phases (see table 1):

- Phase 1: Collect basic project information through a review of secondary information and reports or through interviews with PVO or partner staff.
- Phase 2: Gather project-specific information from PVO partner staff familiar with the project through semi-structured interviews.
- Phase 3: Collect participant-specific information from PVO or partner staff who are aware of how the project affected the participant.
- Phase 4: Conduct a semi-structured interview with the story subject.

Following Ethical Guidelines

- Brief overview of the program, project, or development content
- As with all data collection methods, it is important follow ethical guiding principles at each step in the process. In particular:
- Ensure that participation in human interest stories will not cause physical or emotional harm by violating rights or privacy
- Obtain consent prior to interviewing or observing individuals or taking their photograph
- Do not share information that individuals would prefer to keep private
- Respect and observe local cultural values

Refer to the American Evaluation Association's *Guiding Principles for Evaluators* for further guidance and the *M&E and Ethics* edition of *Short Cuts* for additional considerations.

The tools for the semi-structured interviews should be tailored to the information needs of each human interest story and developed either by or with input from the person responsible for writing the stories. Examples of useful tools are provided in the *Human Interest Stories* and in the S*uccess and Learning Story Package* modules. Field-test all tools prior to use.

Table 1: Information Gathering

Component	Description of Information Collected	Tool	Interviewee
Basic project information	Project title; start and end dates; location and number of participants; primary project activities; primary partner(s) and donor(s); project's financial value	Secondary data or semi-structured interviews	Project documents, PVO or partner staff
Project-specific information	General characteristics of the community or site; type of project activities implemented at the site; targeting criteria for participants; participants' involvement in project For success stories, include major project accomplishments For learning stories, include challenges and lessons learned	Semi-structured interviews	PVO or partner staff
Participant-specific information	Individual's (story subject's) or the household's demographics; situation of individual or household prior to project; rationale for targeting this individual or household; the staff's perception of the impact on the individual or household	Semi-structured interviews	PVO or partner staff
Subject of the human interest story	Individual or the household's current situation and the situation prior to the project; the ways the project impacted the individuals' life	Semi-structured interview and photographs	Subject of story

The data quality generated for the story will depend on the quality of the tool and the interviewer's skills.

Tips for conducting a good interview include:

- Be clear about the purpose of the interview at the beginning.
- Create a supportive environment that encourages dialogue and allows the interviewer to build rapport with the interviewee. Treat the interview as a conversation.
- Minimize the social distance between the interviewer and the interviewee by following cultural norms and appearing to be a neutral party.

- Select a skilled translator if the interviewer does not speak the language of the interviewee.
- Record the conversation in the interviewee's words to capture quotations that can be used in the story. Consider the pros and cons of using a tape or digital recorder during the interview. For example, a tape or digital recorder should not be used if there is a risk it will make the interviewee hesitant during the interview.
- Use photographs to record observations during or after the interview. Photographs should be simple, clear, and evoke emotions to complement and enrich the human interest story.

Tips for Taking Photographs

- Ask permission first.
- Create a comfortable atmosphere.
- Create a setting that will explain, clarify, and strengthen the story.
- Get close to the subject.
- Use the "rule of thirds" and place the subject in the top or bottom and left or right third of the frame.
- Use available light instead of flash whenever possible.

Provide copies of the photos to the subject. The *Human Interest Stories* module provides examples of strong and weak photos.

Step 6 Write the Story

Writing human interest stories should follow the basic principles of good journalism. The opening paragraph should answer the basic six questions: who, what, where, when, why, and how. If possible, begin with an anecdote about the subject that quickly engages the reader in the story. The body of the story should focus on either the success or learning achieved, depending on story type, as recounted by the subject. Include enough background information on the household and community, and on project activities so that readers are able to frame the success or learning in the local context.

Keep the story short. Between 500 and 750 words is ideal for maintaining readers' interest and conveying the information.

Do . . .

- Keep your target audience in mind. Check the story's readability by asking a target audience member to read the story prior to publication.
- Include the subject's personality, surroundings, and his/her appearance (if relevant to the story).
- Focus on qualitative information, adding supporting quantitative information where appropriate.
- Include direct quotes from all information sources. If staff are quoted, present their background, qualifications, and project experience.
- Avoid acronyms, jargon, and foreign words.

- Include details to help non-technical readers understand any technical information provided.
- Proofread the final story.

Don't . . .

- Overdramatize the information as this may lessen credibility.
- Make subjective judgments, whether positive or negative, about an individual's appearance, character, or experiences.
- Dehumanize interviewees by using impersonal language (for example, it is better to write "a person improved his/her situation," rather than "a person was rehabilitated").

Step 7 Disseminate the Story

The final phase is **developing a dissemination plan** to outline when, how, and with whom the story will be shared (see step 3 on developing a draft action plan, including dissemination). Plan in advance to increase the timeliness of the information shared. The initial dissemination plan can be amended to include additional audiences. Discuss the plan with the project manager and other appropriate staff. Be sure that the plan includes adequate time for these managers to review and finalize the stories before they are disseminated.

Often, projects take time to develop high-quality human interest stories, but set aside too little time to share them. Avoid this common mistake by planning ahead! In addition to pursuing standard dissemination audiences and avenues, think creatively about how and when these stories can be best shared.

Tailor the submission to each audience. Standard dissemination audiences include community members, partners, country program staff, regional and headquarters staff of your agency, and donor agencies. Dissemination avenues and spaces include community of practice knowledge spaces (internal and external), handouts at partner meetings, donor newsletters, United Nations newsletters and listservs, academic journals, and Web sites. Communities may prefer a reading of the story during a community meeting if literacy rates are low. For Web pages or newsletters, plain text with a photo and caption may be sufficient. For donor agencies, include a cover letter explaining the story purpose and links to other relevant human interest stories that your organization has published. Within the story, edit the level of background information for different audiences; for example, provide more background information for those less familiar with the project and context.

Refer to the Human Interest Stories module for suggested dissemination avenues and the corresponding contact information. The *Communication and Reporting on an Evaluation* module (and corresponding Short Cuts) provides additional guidance on dissemination to a variety of stakeholders.

The Human Interest Stories module includes the following:

1. Example of a SOW for a human interest story writer
2. Sample data collection packet for human interest stories and semi-structured interview guides
3. Examples of human interest stories
4. Suggested dissemination avenues
5. Tips for taking good photographs
6. Suggested further readings

This edition of Short Cuts was produced in 2008. Please send your comments or feedback to: m&efeedback@crs.org.

The Success and Learning Story Package module includes the following:

1. Recommended do's and don'ts for Title II success story writing
2. Sample data collection tools and templates
3. Examples of human interest stories

For further guidance, please visit the American Evaluation Association Web site at www.eval.org.

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The M&E series is available on these Web sites:

- www. crs.org/publications
- www.foodsecuritynetwork.org/icbtools.html
- www.redcross.org

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MONITORING & EVALUATION

ShortCuts

M&E and Ethics

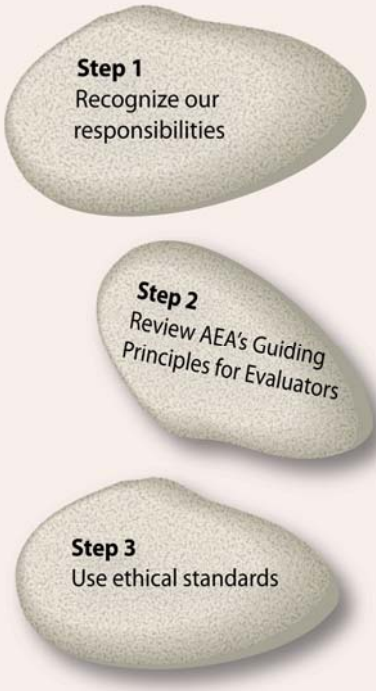
A Framework for Addressing Ethical Concerns in M&E

September 2008

Introduction

This *Short Cut* illustrates the inherent challenges and often conflicting responsibilities that accompany monitoring and evaluation (M&E) work. Recognizing that there are no standard, or even easy, answers to ethical challenges that arise, *M&E and Ethics* provides a framework for resolving these challenges by recognizing our responsibilities, highlighting ethical principles, and reflecting on and addressing ethical concerns with stakeholders during the planning phase. On a general level, the domain of ethics deals with moral duty and obligation, involving actions that are subject to being judged as good or bad, right or wrong (Mathison 2005: 131). Various groups of evaluators have developed standards and guidelines that provide guidance to practitioners in preventing or coping with ethical issues. The ethical principles presented here are taken from the American Evaluation Association (AEA) *Guiding Principles for Evaluators,* regarded as an authoritative source in the M&E arena. By adhering to these principles, program managers further commit themselves to the communities they serve by providing them with a clearer voice, informing smarter programming, and guaranteeing that their programs "do no harm."

3 Steps: M&E and Ethics



Step 1 Recognize Our Responsibilities

Ethical issues frequently arise in the course of M&E work. Here some examples of these situations:

- You are asked to conduct an M&E activity that is not appropriate given the project's information needs or the local cultural context.
- After your evaluation report is published, you learn that the limitations section was removed, thus implying that your findings are broadly applicable.

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Local communities are exhibiting signs of survey fatigue, especially among control groups that are not participating in the project or receiving services.

Each of these dilemmas raises ethical alarm bells. Such dilemmas arise frequently in M&E work, and thus it is important for program managers to become familiar with key ethical guiding principles.

Program staff are responsible for engaging in and addressing ethical issues to the best of their ability. Clarifying responsibilities helps to ensure that their work is undertaken systematically and competently, with integrity, honesty, and respect for people, local values, and cultural norms. The goal is to promote honesty, justice, and development to improve the quality of life of those being served. Working in a complex and interconnected environment, it is impossible to predict with certainty the outcomes and impacts of project interventions. To this end, M&E findings should provide adequate knowledge to inform programmatic decisions in changing contexts to help decision makers avoid possible harmful effects associated with an intervention.

When ethical issues arise, program staff and stakeholders need to acknowledge them and to discuss them with interested parties to reach a resolution. Program managers and M&E specialists should develop a strong working relationship with project staff to discuss M&E ethical issues openly and honestly. In some instances, it may be appropriate to involve community members in resolving ethical challenges. Local residents can often provide valuable insights into devising a culturally appropriate solution.

AEA developed a series of ethical principles to guide M&E professionals (see AEA 2004). These principles are intended to stimulate discussion among M&E professionals and can actively guide M&E design and implementation, not just support problem-solving efforts. AEA principles should not serve as constraints, since AEA recognizes that all principles may not apply equally across contexts and cultures. Nevertheless, M&E professionals should strive to meet each principle and clearly document the reasoning if any principles are not met.

AEA's five principles are summarized below—systematic inquiry, competence, integrity and honesty, respect for people, and responsibilities for general and public welfare. Many of the key concepts highlighted below are drawn from G. Jackson, "Evaluation Ethics Considerations."

1. **Systematic inquiry** maintains that M&E staff must adhere to the highest technical standards for each activity.

   - Acknowledge and attempt to eliminate bias in M&E activities. Bias may result from inadequate methodologies, for example, if the data collection team only surveys men in a community or only visits communities easily accessible from the main road. M&E staff may bias results if they hold a strong opinion (either positive or negative) about an M&E activity or project. Staff must remain neutral and promote evidence-based reporting by ensuring that data are allowed to speak for themselves in an objective and unbiased way.
   - Ensure that M&E activities are ***systematic, accurate, and fair***, and identify the project's strengths and weaknesses. Allow critical and complementary voices to be heard in the data collected.
   - Clearly communicate the methodology or approach to allow stakeholders to understand and critique M&E activities. Methodologies should include tools and questions to capture both the intended and unintended project impact, whether positive or negative. ***Openly explore the***

approach's strengths and weaknesses with clients and stakeholders so that the results can be accurately interpreted within their context and limitations. Acknowledge any evident weaknesses in the planning stage and any additional unanticipated weaknesses in reports and documentation. Reflection events and M&E reports should include a thorough methodology section and document all limitations of the approach.

Ethical Dilemmas

- Your organization is a member of a food security consortium with five other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). NGO #4 is responsible for leading the baseline survey and proposes to collect data in the least secure communities. You are concerned that they will bias the sample to demonstrate greater food insecurity. Other NGOs in the consortium seem to support this strategy and want to do everything possible to secure resources. Some have hinted that this will only increase the project impact in the end.

  In what circumstances would you support the strategy of NGO#4? In what circumstances would you oppose this?

- The donor for a child nutrition project requested that anthropometric data from control groups be included in the baseline survey and mid-term and final evaluations. The donor believes that control groups are the best way to demonstrate impact.

  In what circumstances would you support including control groups? (See step 2 for more about the ethical considerations associated with control groups.)

2. **Competence** means that M&E staff should hold the skills and cultural competencies required to conduct an M&E activity.

- ***Decline to participate*** in any M&E activity that falls outside of your skill set or competencies (or that of the M&E team collectively), if adequate technical support is not provided. Ask other technical experts in your organization or your communities of practice to support you in all aspects of the M&E activity of which you are unsure.
- Do not undertake an M&E activity if stakeholders doubt your ***credibility*** due to your past work or publicly stated views. If key stakeholders find fault with your work or position on related activities, they may discredit your approach or findings in future assignments.
- Continually seek to ***improve your skills*** and competencies through technical trainings and by reflecting on the lessons learned from each M&E activity. Seek additional experience and on-the-job learning opportunities. Keep up-to-date on new developments in your field through list servs and by reading current literature.

Ethical Dilemmas

You have serious doubts that there is enough time to conduct a survey and analyze the data in time to present it at a donor conference the following month. After all, the evaluation is still in the planning stage. Your supervisor suggests you omit the four-day training for the data collection teams, stating that the data collection team members have all conducted surveys before and do not need training.

In what circumstances would you agree? Are there any other typical evaluation activities could be omitted instead of the training?

3. **Integrity and honesty** should be demonstrated in all stages of the M&E activity and to the stakeholders —beneficiaries, program staff, donors, or other groups of interested parties—and participants.

- Disclose any potential conflicts of interest to stakeholders and donors prior to finalizing the plans for an M&E activity. These include, for example, a stakeholder's interest in presenting only project success instead of maintaining neutrality, or a stakeholder interested in demonstrating needs in one sector at the expense of needs in another (i.e., focusing on agricultural needs and not acknowledging water issues). It is also important to disclose the source of financial support to stakeholders so that they are aware of donor interests in the M&E activity.
- Honor agreements made with stakeholders (including communities and participants) regarding the timing of surveys, plans for sharing results, community participation in data collection, and any other relevant aspects of the M&E activity. If adjustments to the agreements are necessary, consult stakeholders to determine the best alternative for all parties.
- Do not undertake M&E activities for which there are insufficient resources to provide quality data and results. If there is not enough staff or money to conduct the fieldwork as planned or to analyze and report on the data collected, develop an alternative methodology for which there are sufficient human and financial resources.
- Ensure that, to the best of your knowledge and ability, the M&E data are accurate. Address any questionable M&E practices observed during data collection or analysis, whether due to negligence or mistakes by M&E team members. Correct any questionable practices even if additional data must be collected.
- Ensure that M&E results are accurately represented and attempt to prevent their misuse. It is the evaluator's obligation to present the full and unbiased picture that the data provide and to correct misperceptions if stakeholders should try to present only the favorable results in a public forum, to use the data out of context (level of representation), or to disregard the noted limitations of the approach.

- You generally follow the good practice of sharing the funding source for all M&E activities with stakeholders. However, country A is interested in financially supporting the government of country B, among the world's poorest, to address poverty and vulnerability in rural areas. Country A has asked your organization to conduct the survey, which is a requisite for receiving the funding. Local communities resent country A, which is not seen a positive force in the region. Field staff think local community leaders will refuse to participate if they know that country A is funding the survey.
  What is the best way(s) to negotiate this conflict? What information should be shared with local leaders?
- An organization that works in many of the same communities as your agency presented high success rates from their education activities. You believe their project was successful based on informal feedback from community members, but that they did not collect adequate data to support their claims. The donors seem very impressed by the results and are discussing expanding the project coverage area.
  What questions should be raised, if any, during this discussion?

4. **Respect for people** begins with the premise that M&E staff have a solid understanding of contextual elements that may influence the M&E activity and respect relevant differences in stakeholders, such as gender, socio-economic status, age, religion, and ethnicity.

- Follow standards and regulations regarding ***informed consent for participants***. Consent should be documented in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (see step 2). Determine the appropriate method for collecting and documenting informed consent, whether in writing or orally, given the level of literacy in local communities. A lack of refusal is not considered informed consent. (See p. 8 for more on informed consent.)
- Follow standards for ***confidentiality and anonymity*** of data collected from participants, as appropriate. Confidentiality guarantees that data that could link information to respondents, such as name, location of household, or identification number, are not to be shared. Anonymous data are not linked to respondent's names or any other identifiable information, and do not allow for follow up with respondents. Be sure to clarify with respondents whether the data will be anonymous or confidential.
- M&E activities should ***maximize benefits and minimize harm***. Both the human and financial time and resources required to conduct the M&E activity should be far outweighed by the benefits of knowledge gained or results demonstrated. Also consider environmental resources in this equation. Respondents should not be put at risk physically, subject to discrimination, or disadvantaged in any way due to their participation in the M&E activity.

Ethical Dilemmas

- Your organization recently expanded programming into the eastern part of the country. Local leaders expressed frustration at repeated time-consuming surveys in the past that did not result in any changes for their community. You had planned to conduct a survey in the next month prior to the beginning of the rainy season; however, this is planting season and households are very busy.
  Would providing an incentive for participation be appropriate in this circumstance? Would it be appropriate in any other circumstances? If so, what type of incentive would be recommended?
- Reliable national-level nutritional data exist; however, the data may not be representative of the communities where you work. The government collected the national-level data through school feeding programs, and the data cannot be disaggregated to represent the coverage area. The data represent children participating in school feeding, and you seek district baseline figures.
  Is it worthwhile to collect primary nutritional data in this case? Are there tradeoffs between methodology and resources in the project's M&E system?

General and public welfare responsibilities include not just immediate outcomes of the evaluation process and results, but long-term implications and effects as well.

- Stakeholders (including project staff) should review and comment on the M&E results and reports; however, M&E staff are ultimately responsible for ***deciding on the report contents*** and ensuring that the report (and any presentations) provides a full and balanced picture of the results, including the methodology, a limitation section, and any less favorable findings. A limitation section explains the extent to which the study findings can be generalized to a larger population and any shortcomings in the data quality.

- Follow a ***non-disclosure policy*** and share and use results only as initially agreed with stakeholders. If confidentiality has been protected and the findings are derived from the data, it is appropriate to share findings widely. Only if the donor places limitations, should research findings be withheld. It is advisable to agree upon a dissemination plan prior to conducting each activity to avoid confusion or conflict at a later date.
- Present M&E findings in a way that is ***highly accessible to all stakeholders*** yet still maintains participant confidentiality. Determine the appropriate means for disseminating results to each stakeholder. For example, consider a community's literacy level when planning the community dissemination meeting. M&E staff should be careful to maintain confidentiality when results are presented to communities. Community members are often acutely aware of the conditions of local households and may be able to tease out the responses of various community members with very little information provided.

Ethical Dilemmas

- Focus groups with orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and with children who are not orphans or not vulnerable are planned in an area where stigma towards HIV/AIDS exists but is declining. You are concerned that OVC would be stigmatized if they participate in an OVC focus group.
  What are creative ways to collect OVC information without risking stigmatization?
- You are preparing to present survey results to participating communities and are aware that there is a spectrum of literacy skills in each community. You are eager to engage community members in interpretation and reflection of results but are not sure that all community members will be able to participate in this process, given that the methods you have chosen require literacy skills for a minor component.
  How can these two aspects of community involvement be balanced?

Step 2 Review AEA's Guiding Principles for Evaluators

Discussions with stakeholders should cover the relevant ethical principles and the outcome of the reflection process. Solicit input from stakeholders prior to presenting ideas to gain fresh perspectives. With stakeholders, jointly develop a framework for solving ethical issues. Identify each stakeholder's role and appropriate means of communication to address the issues. Involving stakeholders in issues during the planning phase will increase their awareness of the ethical principles guiding the work and instill a sense of ownership in the quality of the results.

Control groups were long considered the gold standard for demonstrating programmatic impact. Including control groups in M&E involves collecting data from households and communities that received no services and comparing the data with that from project participants. However, using control groups requires significantly more data collection resources and raises ethical considerations, as follows:

1. In what circumstances should data be collected from individuals who receive no benefit from the current project and are unlikely to benefit from future projects (based on the M&E results)?

2. If the project intervention initially appears to be effective and successful in reaching its goals, should project services continue to be withheld from the control group and data collected to further prove project effectiveness? Would the answer differ if the project provides life-saving interventions?

Environmental stewardship is an emerging priority and a public welfare responsibility. Given the increased strain on natural resources, M&E activities should seek to increase the efficient use of resources and eliminate unneeded travel by car and by plane, and the unnecessary printing of paper, whenever possible. If these and other conservations methods are not commonplace in the office, start a dialogue with co-workers. Be a leader in this arena!

Guiding the Discussion on Ethical Issues

Strong working relationships with colleagues and involvement in communities of practices foster discussion about ethical issues and offer support during ethical challenges. If a strong work community does not yet exist, seek and invest in these relationships. Be ready to support colleagues, and you'll learn along the way!

Below are questions to guide the reflection process (Morris 2008). While these questions are geared toward the planning phase, there should be ongoing reflection of ethical issues. Consolidate and record your thoughts throughout the life of the project or M&E activity to identify lessons learned. Consult colleagues to discuss any concerns or issues arising after reflection and review. Consider the following:

1. How can I set an appropriate tone for this M&E event? To what degree are the stakeholders familiar with the AEA guiding principles? What are the potential problems I might encounter given the context, project, and stakeholders?
2. Are there any AEA guiding principles that are particularly relevant for this work? Are there case studies in the broader M&E literature that provide any insight into ethical challenges for this particular work?
3. If any ethical conflict arises, how will I ensure that necessary conversations occur within or between different groups of stakeholders? Can ethical conflicts be differentiated from conflicts related to value or culture?
4. Are there colleagues whom I can consult regarding any ethical concerns? Specifically, can I consult any colleagues that may hold opinions different from my own and not just colleagues who are likely to affirm my conclusions without challenge?
5. How will my values and personal ethical standards influence my work? How can I ensure that stakeholders feel comfortable to share will me any ethical concerns they may have?
6. Am I comfortable working through conflict situations? Will this work pose any potential situations that I feel I am not equipped to handle? If so, should I proceed with my current level of involvement in the work?

Informed Consent

Informed consent is the voluntary consent to participate in research and is required by each participant in any M&E activity (Williams and Senefeld 2007). Information, understanding, agreement to volunteer, and decision-making capacity are the four main elements of informed consent (Pedroni and Pimple 2001), as follows:

- *Information*: M&E staff should share information about possible risks and benefits of participation, use of results, confidentiality procedures, contact information for voicing concerns, and any other information relevant to the decision to participate with all potential respondents prior to requesting consent.
- *Understanding*: M&E staff must ensure that potential participants fully understand the information provided prior to requesting consent.
- *Agreement to volunteer:* Potential participants should, in no way, be coerced, persuaded or pressured to participate.
- *Decision-making capacity:* Informed consent requires that each participant has full decision-making capabilities and is able to weigh the risks and benefits of participation. Special consideration is required when seeking informed consent from vulnerable groups who may not have full decision-making capacity, including children, persons with mental disabilities, very poor individuals, and persons with limited access to services and resources. Consideration from an ethical review committee is required to determine whether and how informed consent can be obtained from these vulnerable groups.

The World Medical Association's Declaration of Helsinki 1964/2004 declares: "The right of research subjects to safeguard their integrity must always be respected. Every precaution should be taken to respect the privacy of the subject, the confidentiality of the patient's information and to minimize the impact of the study on the subject's physical and mental integrity and on the personality of the subject."

Step 3 Use Ethical Standards

- **In the planning phase,** it is important to identify potential ethical challenges and to develop a framework for resolving any conflicts. Although planning ahead will not ensure that ethical conflicts do not arise, it is likely to decrease the severity of any conflicts and expedite their solutions. To identify challenges and paths towards solutions, begin with individual reflection and critical thought about the ethical components of the upcoming work. Next, hold discussions with key stakeholders to engage them in the ethical elements identified, as well as any they see as relevant.
- **Individual reflection** requires that M&E staff set aside adequate time to consider the broader project context, including any potentially conflicting stakeholder interests and cultural norms.

The Program Evaluation Standards (The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation 1994) place evaluation standards according to: utility, feasibility, accuracy, and propriety categories.

The propriety standards related to an evaluation's ethical elements are summarized below:

- **Service orientation**: Evaluations should be designed to assist in addressing and serving the range of targeted participants.
- **Formal agreements**: Obligations of an evaluation (what is to be done, how, by whom, when) should be agreed to in writing, so that the parties are obligated to adhere to all conditions of the agreement or formally renegotiate.
- **Rights of human subjects**: Evaluations should be designed and conducted to respect rights and welfare of human subjects.
- **Human interactions:** Evaluators should respect human dignity and worth in their interactions with other persons associated with an evaluation, so that participants are not threatened or harmed.
- **Complete and fair assessment**: Evaluations should examine and address their weaknesses and build on strengths.
- **Disclosure of findings:** Ensure that the findings and limitations are accessible to the persons affected by the evaluation.
- **Conflict of interest:** Conflict of interest should be dealt with openly, so that it does not compromise the evaluation.
- **Fiscal responsibility**: The evaluator's allocations and expenditures should reflect sound accountability procedures and otherwise be prudent and ethically responsible, so that expenditures are accounted for and appropriate.

This edition of Short Cuts was produced in 2008. Please send your comments or feedback to: m&efeedback@crs.org.

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