
Evaluation Workbook III.

Evaluation plan: Design the evaluation

Key points

Evaluation should be designed with a clear understanding of why the evaluation is being undertaken and how it will inform decision-making:

- Be clear about the context for the evaluation, including:
 - the reason the evaluation was initiated
 - the initiative's history of evaluation
 - what monitoring data and other literature already provide information on the initiative
 - evaluation stakeholders.
- Design the evaluation in response to a clear evaluation purpose and key questions.
- Ensure evaluation designs and methods are as rigorous as possible, aim to produce valid and reliable findings, and reach sound conclusions. Ensure that the selected methods can be applied within the available time and resources.

Introduction

Evaluation should be designed with the aim to inform decision-making and to build understanding of how the initiative works in practice.

Ensure that the evaluation design process involves the right people and addresses cultural and ethical considerations (see *Workbook IV. Evaluation plan: Manage the evaluation*).

Ensure that evaluation plan includes planning to report and use evaluation findings (see *Workbook VI. Report and use evaluation findings* and *Workbook VII. Example evaluation report template*).

Establish the context for the evaluation

Designing an evaluation should begin with a clear understanding of why the evaluation is being undertaken, what evaluation has already been undertaken, what is already known about the initiative, and who will receive and use the evaluation findings.

Reason for evaluation

Evaluation should always be undertaken to inform decision-making. Be clear regarding why evaluation is being implemented at this stage of initiative delivery and what decisions it will inform. For example, a process evaluation may be undertaken as it is a suitable time to assess and re-align initiative delivery, or an outcome evaluation may be undertaken as outcomes are due to be realised and the evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the initiative in achieving its intended outcomes.

History of evaluation

It is important to identify if the initiative has previously been evaluated or subject to another form of effectiveness assessment, the evaluation findings and the agency responses. Relevant information may include:

- when the initiative was last evaluated
- the activities reviewed
- the type of evaluation, and evaluation methods used
- stakeholder engagement undertaken within the evaluation
- the key findings and recommendations
- the agency response to findings and recommendations
- any changes to the initiative since last evaluation.

What is known

Monitoring data

A key input into the evaluation will be information gathered as part of initiative monitoring (see *Workbook II. Monitoring and evaluation framework*). Review the data to check for any issues with initiative implementation and performance, and any important data and information gaps that should be addressed in the evaluation.

Literature review

Evaluation should be based on an awareness of what other analyses have been undertaken on the initiative or similar initiatives. Undertake a literature review (or update any such literature review undertaken at initiative design) to consider questions such as:

- What is generally known about the initiative's implementation or impacts (in addition to information collected or reviews conducted internally)?
- What is known about such initiatives implemented in different places, or regarding initiatives that are similar in design?
- What evaluation methods have been used for similar initiatives? What are lessons learned from other evaluations undertaken for similar initiatives (for example, about evaluation questions, evaluation design, data collection, and performance standards)?
- What is known about situations with similar characteristics but without similar interventions?
- What are the wider trends or patterns that may have had an impact on initiative implementation and outcomes and benefits?
- How can evaluation of the initiative build on the existing evidence base and contribute to further understanding of 'what works' in the New South Wales context?

Sources for the literature review may include evaluation reports, journal articles, conference presentations, or books (noting that peer reviewed work is considered to provide stronger evidence).

Evaluation stakeholders

The overall aim of evaluation is to inform decision-making. Identify who will receive and use evaluation findings, and who will make decisions about an initiative's future.

Be aware of the external stakeholders who will have an interest in how the evaluation was conducted and its findings. This will include customers or clients who are intended to benefit from the initiative, and other people and communities who may be impacted by the initiative.

Ensure that relevant stakeholders and appropriate experts are involved in designing the evaluation (see *Workbook IV. Evaluation plan: Manage the evaluation*).

Design the evaluation

An evaluation design will include a clear evaluation purpose and scope, a small number of key evaluation questions, and evaluation design and method(s) appropriate to address these. Be clear about the range of activities and the timeframes relevant to implementing the evaluation.

Determine evaluation purpose and scope

The starting point for designing an evaluation is to establish the purpose of the evaluation.

Clearly articulate the evaluation purpose (this should be developed considering, but will be distinct from, the initiative's objectives).

The evaluation project should focus on key issues and have a clearly defined scope. A process evaluation may focus on key activities, or particular regions and sites. An outcome evaluation may focus on short, medium or long-term outcomes (as relevant to the timing of the investigation) or the contribution of a mature initiative to achieving State Outcomes. The cost-benefit analysis (CBA) may focus on the most significant benefit categories.

Focus the evaluation purpose and scope through asking questions such as:

- Why does the evaluation matter?
- Who do the findings matter to, and why?
- How and when will the findings be used?

Finalise the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs)

An evaluation **should focus on a set of key questions** that address the evaluation purpose and that will provide the information required for decision-making.

As relevant to the stage of initiative implementation and the type(s) of evaluation being undertaken, KEQs can be expected to address:

- if the initiative has been implemented as intended, and whether intended outputs have been or are expected to be delivered (process evaluation)
- the extent to which the initiative has achieved intended outcomes (outcome evaluation)
- the net social benefit of the initiative and whether the initiative has delivered value for money (CBA or other economic evaluation).

Use a small number of KEQs — **roughly three to seven** questions depending upon the scope of the evaluation. The KEQs are higher level questions that the evaluation will be designed to address (rather than the more detailed questions that may be asked in interviews or questionnaires). More specific sub-questions can sit underneath these.

When developing KEQs, refer to the initial key questions drafted under a Monitoring and Evaluation framework. Use the initiative logic model (this may need to be updated) to consider the activities and impacts, and the causal links, assumptions and risks, that should be investigated in the evaluation.

When refining questions before starting an evaluation, consider the current information needs of decision-makers and managers, and current stakeholder concerns. The evaluation may also need to address additional questions in accordance with NSW Government priorities. Be aware of any formal or more general evaluation questions that should be addressed as part of partnership agreements, such as Commonwealth-State funding agreements, or delivery partnerships across agencies.

It is useful to:

- Use open questions when seeking detailed information - for example, to what extent? to what degree? who has this happened for?

- Ask questions that address a singular concern (that is, avoid double-barrelled questions).
- Test the validity and scope of evaluation questions, considering:
 - Can the questions be addressed by the evaluation?
 - When the questions are answered, have we met the full purpose of the evaluation?
 - Can these questions be effectively addressed within available timeframes and resources?

The *Evaluation TPG, Appendix D. Types of evaluation and example questions* present example questions related to different types of evaluation. These lists are not exhaustive or prescriptive. Evaluation questions should be tailored to the initiative and evaluation purpose.

Select evaluation design and methods

Design the evaluation to address the evaluation purpose and questions.

There are different evaluation designs and methods that can be used to address evaluation questions under different types of evaluation (see *Evaluation TPG, Appendix D. Types of evaluation and example questions* and *Technical note: Outcome Evaluation Design*). Different evaluation designs can be combined to strengthen evaluation evidence (see *Technical note: Evidence in evaluation*). Consult people with evaluation expertise when selecting evaluation design and methods.

The evaluation design will establish what data will be used in the evaluation, and how it will be collected. A rigorous and systematic evaluation will bring together evidence from different data sources to answer the evaluation questions. The evaluation can use existing data sources, as well as data collected through primary research. Additional data collection may involve quantitative or qualitative methods (see *Technical note: Evidence in evaluation*).

Match the evaluation design to the scale of the initiative and the significance of the evaluation. Ensure that the evaluation will be as rigorous and as systematic as possible, while ensuring that selected methods can be applied within the available time and resources and will meet standards of cultural appropriateness and ethical conduct (see *Workbook IV. Evaluation plan: Manage the evaluation*).

Templates

Table 1 provides an example template that can be used to design an evaluation.

Table 1: Example template to design an evaluation

Categories	Considerations	Questions to ask
Establish the context for the evaluation	Reason for the evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is the evaluation being undertaken (at this stage of the initiative)? • What decisions will the evaluation inform?
	History of the evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When was the initiative last evaluated? • What activities were reviewed? • What type of evaluation was undertaken, and what evaluation methods were used? • Which stakeholders were engaged? • What were the key findings and recommendations? • Are there changes to the initiative since the last evaluation?
	What is known	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What monitoring data is available? • What is learned from literature review?
	Evaluation stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will receive and use the evaluation? • Who will have an interest in the evaluation conduct and findings?
Design the evaluation	Determine evaluation purpose and scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the purpose of the evaluation? • Why does the evaluation matter? • To whom do the findings matter and why? • How and when will the findings be used?
	Finalise the key evaluation questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key questions that the evaluation will address? • What were the initial key questions drafted under the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework? • What additional concerns may need to be addressed?
	Select evaluation design and methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What evaluation designs and methods can be used to address the evaluation purpose and key questions?