



Guidelines for Good Practice in Evaluation

Preface

You will find in these guidelines the embodiment of much discussion, debate and practice in the field of evaluation. The guidelines attempt to capture, in an easily assimilated way, a diverse range of principles and frameworks for action that have been useful for evaluations in a variety of contexts. Organised in different sections, the guidelines provide a reference point from different perspectives for a range of stakeholders involved in the evaluation process. In this way practice is encapsulated from the point of view of evaluators themselves, commissioners, participants (particularly those from whom views, ideas or experience are sought) and those engaged in self-evaluation in organisations. They are intended for use in evaluations taking place in any domain or discipline.

Writing guidelines to inform practice has real challenges in that it is easy to slide into a set of disembodied, somewhat rationalistic standards, which bear little resemblance to the ebb and flow of interactions as the social process of evaluation unfolds. Yet it is difficult to adopt a conversational tone that at the same time allows for quick reference and easy access. These guidelines are written in a matter-of-fact style that eschews jargon, the obscure and the insular. They are intended for use by the novice and the experienced alike. While inevitably they may be a little truncated, each statement is designed to offer a starting point for consideration by the stakeholders in an evaluation and to act as a reference for statements of evaluation ethics, intentions and generic practice. The guidelines are not definitive and will continuously evolve; they therefore should be received as work-in-progress.

The guidelines aim at neutrality in the sense that they provide frameworks for action that does not exemplify any particular evaluation approach. This aim is complex, ambitious and important. There is no evaluation stance for which these guidelines are inappropriate or inapplicable. Many of the statements have at their heart the need to be open and transparent about the expectations and requirements of all the stakeholders *whoever* they may be. As such the language used has striven to avoid hidden or tacit assumptions about the efficacy, dominance or normality of any single approach to evaluation.

The guidelines are prescriptive only in the sense that they rehearse what those engaged in the practical business of evaluation, from whatever perspective, have found to be both an honourable and effective way of interacting. We believe the guidance will come alive through use in the discussions and negotiations between people involved in evaluations. As such we hope the statements will promote conversation about evaluation in general but also support ways of negotiating some of the critical aspects of the evaluation process from commissioning to dissemination of evaluation findings

Introduction

These guidelines have been developed to support the work of evaluators, commissioners of evaluation, evaluation participants and those involved in self-evaluation. The guidelines are divided into four sections, each of which applies to one of four key interest groups. Whilst there is some crossover of good practice issues, they are addressed individually to ensure clarity and appropriateness to each one.

Guidelines for evaluators

Evaluators need to:

- *be explicit* about the purpose, methods, intended outputs and outcomes of the evaluation; be mindful of unanticipated effects and be responsive to shifts in purpose.
- *alert commissioners* to possible adjustments to the evaluation approach and practice; be open to dialogue throughout the process informing them of progress and developments.
- *consider* whether it is helpful to build into the contract forms of external support or arbitration (should the need arise).
- *have preliminary discussion/s with commissioners* prior to agreeing a contract.
- *adhere to the terms agreed in the contract* and consult with commissioners if there are significant changes required to the design or delivery of the evaluation.
- *demonstrate the quality of the evaluation* to other parties through progress reports e.g. on development and financial accountability and adhere to quality assurance procedures as agreed in the contract.
- *be aware of and make every attempt to minimise any potential harmful effects* of the evaluation prejudicing the status, position or careers of participants

Evaluators also need to:

- *demonstrate* that the evaluation design and conduct are transparent and fit for purpose.
- *demonstrate comprehensive and appropriate use of all the evidence* and that evaluation conclusions can be traced to this evidence.
- *work within the Data Protection Act* and have procedures which ensure the secure storage of data.
- *acknowledge intellectual property* and the work of others.
- *have contractual agreement over copyright* of evaluation methodology, findings, documents and publication.
- *write and communicate evaluation findings* in accessible language.
- *agree with commissioners from the outset about the nature of dissemination* in order to maximise the utility of the evaluation.

In practice evaluators need to:

- *demonstrate a commitment to the integrity of the process* of evaluation and its purpose to increase learning in the public domain.
- *be realistic about what is feasible* to achieve and their capacity to deliver within the time-scale and budget agreed.
- *know when to refuse or terminate* an evaluation contract because it is undoable, self-serving, or threatens to undermine the integrity of the process.
- *be prepared to argue the case* for the public right to know in evaluation in specified contexts.
- *treat all parties equally* in the process of the evaluation and the dissemination of findings.

Guidelines for commissioners

To ensure good practice in evaluation, it would be helpful if Commissioners:

- *acknowledge the benefits* of external, independent evaluation.
- *operate fair tendering situations* in which competitors ideas are not exploited or intellectual property misused as a result of commissioning.
- *hold preliminary consultations* with all parties to the evaluation to support a relevant, realistic and viable specification.
- *specify the purpose and audience(s)* for the evaluation with appropriate background material to encourage relevant tenders.
- *operate a tendering procedure that is open* and fair ensuring that appropriately qualified assessors are involved, making explicit criteria upon which a tender decision will be made.
- *clarify the constraints that commissioners operate under*, e.g. timescales, budgets, deadlines, and accountability.
- *adhere to the terms agreed in the contract* and consult with evaluators and other interest groups if significant changes are required to the design or delivery of the evaluation.
- *specify the legal terms and responsibilities* of the evaluation in the contract.
- *match the aims and potential outcome of the evaluation* to the knowledge and expertise of the potential evaluator(s).
- *provide access to documentation* and data required for evaluation purposes.

- *establish clear principles for the reporting and dissemination* of evaluation reports funded by public monies, consistent with acknowledged procedures which ensure quality evaluation and reporting.
- *have realistic expectations on what an evaluation might provide* including sufficient time for evaluators to respond to an initial invitation to tender and produce a proposal.
- *include experienced evaluators* (who are not potential applicants for funding) in initial drafts of evaluation specifications, including feasible budget and realistic timescales.
- *have trust in evaluators* and mutual respect between participants, commissioners and evaluator(s).
- *take advice of evaluators on research methodologies* for collecting and analysing data.
- *communicate openly and have respect for people involved in the evaluation* and keep the evaluation team informed of changes in circumstances affecting the evaluation.
- *recognise where evaluators need to keep their sources of information anonymous.*
- *preserve the integrity of the findings*, e.g. by not quoting or publicising such findings out of context.

Guidelines for evaluation participants

All participants in an evaluation shall:

- *receive a proper explanation of the purpose* and methods of the evaluation and should have opportunity to comment on how they are represented in the evaluation.
- *receive an explanation of the evaluation agreement* forming part of the negotiation of the evaluation teams access to a programme.
- *have access to the evaluation team* as agreed in the for purposes of feedback, reporting and ongoing support for the duration of the evaluation.
- *have proper opportunity to be assured that the data they offer* is consonant with the Data Protection Act and that any data made public is on the grounds of fairness, accuracy and relevance.
- *be assured that in the event of a dispute or difficulties* between evaluation participants and evaluators, they would have access to independent arbitration.
- *be assured that evaluators have taken all reasonable measures to ensure that the reports are negotiated.* Final reports should normally be lodged in the public domain and made available to all participants. Reasons for exemptions need to be recorded.
- *have the right to be informed about the explicit use of* interview transcripts or video of teaching events and are asked to offer their informed consent.

Guidelines for self-evaluation

Participants in an institutional self-evaluation need to:

- *make the aims, objectives and purposes of the evaluation clear* to all members of the institution.

- *ensure* that the process is built into the structure and function of the institution.
- *have* a clear set of procedures for the sharing of data within and beyond the institution.
- *take steps to ensure* that all members of the institution believe the evaluation is worth doing.
- *acknowledge* that the sharing of knowledge and experience within the institution may be more threatening than to those outside and take steps to lessen this threat.
- *treat all colleagues equally* in the process of the evaluation and dissemination of findings.
- *ensure that all involved in the evaluation (whether as a data givers, collectors or users) are engaged* at some level from the start so they know what is happening and why.
- *adopt* methodologies that are economical and feasible to use in the time-scales and operations of the institution.

- *have the backing and support* of the head of the institution, including financial support, where appropriate for meetings, networking, dissemination and publication.
- *assure* members of the institution that the findings from the evaluation are fed back into development as well as providing a measure of accountability.
- *indicate* that the process is methodologically sound from which valid implications can be drawn for the precise purpose agreed.
- *ensure the agreement and understanding* of all members of the institution before starting the evaluation.
- *demonstrate consistency and predictability* of behaviour in the conduct and negotiation of the evaluation.
- *recognise and agree* when it is important to make data public and when, for the development of the institution, it is prudent to retain some data in confidence.
- *communicate openly and honestly* with colleagues, consistent with maintaining fair and equitable ethical procedures.
- *seek advice and /or consider* adopting a critical friend to conduct a process audit of the methodological rigor and fairness with which the evaluation is conducted.
- *communicate to colleagues in accessible language* and engage them in discussion on the utility of the evidence and findings.