



DPME Evaluation Guideline 2.2.4

Guideline for Inception Phase of Evaluations

Created: October 2012
Revised: March 2021

Addressed to	All Government institutions who are undertaking internal and external evaluations (programme managers and M&E staff) and evaluation service providers.
Purpose	The purpose of this Guideline is to give practical guidance on the inception phase of evaluation projects and how to develop and process inception reports.
Policy reference	This guideline should be read in conjunction with the National Evaluation Policy Framework 2019 and the Evaluation Project Plan Template (available on the DPME website).
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1. Background

The objective of the inception phase is to achieve mutual understanding of the key aspects of the evaluation project, namely the scope, timeframes, approach and methodology, project organisation, deliverables, quality, etc. An Inception Report is an output of the inception phase, and captures what is agreed as the interpretation or revisions to the Terms of Reference and the Proposal so as to ensure the requirements of the assignment can be addressed.

Inception phase applies to both the externally conducted evaluations and the internally conducted evaluations.

On external evaluations, the phase starts immediately when the service provider has been notified that the contract has been awarded to them, and an initial briefing is organised. In internal evaluations, it starts once the Terms of Reference have been finalised by the Unit responsible for the intervention.

The phase should be short, often just a week, and provides for consultation with evaluation stakeholders to ensure a better understanding of their interests, the limitations as well as possibilities, and to get sufficient information to be able to update the proposal/Terms of Reference. The phase closes with a short inception report and a revised proposal/Terms of Reference, which should be formally adopted by the evaluation Steering Committee. The revised proposal will then be annexed to the service level agreement/contract.

2. Activities involved in the inception phase

The minimum activity involved will be a briefing session with the main stakeholders (e.g. lead department and DPME) if undertaken internally it will be the lead unit and the evaluation unit to discuss the proposal and revisions expected. This would be followed by a short report summarising the changes and a revised proposal.

In some cases, more extensive consultation may be needed, e.g. a workshop with stakeholders to get a better understanding of the issues.

3. The inception report

An inception report is a core part of the commissioning process. It allows for the possibility of using the learnings from initial consultations to update the approach and methodology for assignments. Once direct interaction with stakeholders has taken place, the inception report can reflect the agreed scope of work and methodology. It is then factored into the evaluation project plan. In the case of evaluations, the inception report and updated proposal must be approved by the evaluation Steering Committees. They will normally not revise the budget available, but can modify how the budget is allocated.

The inception report does not need to be long and may be only 3-4 pages. It should indicate the process undertaken before and during the inception including steps followed in the planning phase, people met, and introduce the revisions made in the proposal/terms of references. A suggested structure is as follows:

Box 1: Potential structure of an inception report

- 1 Brief background on why a particular evaluation is required
- 2 Planning processes followed before and during the inception phase (especially when the evaluation is commissioned and managed internally)
- 3 Changes to the understanding of the intervention and the TORs
- 4 Changes in the approach, design and methodology for the evaluation
- 5 The approach taken for changes to the Activity-based evaluation plan (the revised plan will be in the revised proposal)
- 6 The approach taken for changes to the budget (the revised budget will be in the revised proposal)
- 7 Changes to the team (team members, roles and level of effort)
- 8 Clarifications on how capacity development elements will be addressed (building capacity of partner departments and PDI/young evaluators)
- 9 Changes proposed to the quality assurance plan (the revised plan will be in the revised proposal)

Attachments

Revised proposal

4. Acceptance/Non-acceptance of the inception report

The inception report will be formally adopted by the Steering Committee, after which the initial tranche of funding can be paid (if commissioned). Should there be no agreement between the service provider and commissioner/Steering Committee on the changes needed then the payment for the inception phase will not be made, and the contract will then be terminated as per relevant clause of the Service Level Agreement (SLA).

In a situation where the evaluation is undertaken internally (internal model) as outlined in the Foundation Guideline for Rapid Evaluations) the above is not applicable. In case of an internal evaluation, adoption of inception report means the evaluation needs to proceed to the next phase. Should there be no agreement, further consultation need to be done up until the Steering committee adopts it.



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