



DPME Evaluation Guideline 2.2.6

How to develop an Improvement Plan to address evaluation recommendations

Developed: March 2013
Updated: June 2022

Addressed to	M&E Units or programme managers in all spheres of government and, State-Owned Entities who are undertaking evaluations
Purpose	The purpose is to give practical guidance on how to develop an Improvement Plan responding to recommendations in evaluation final reports
Reference documents	National Evaluation Policy Framework 2019 Guideline 2.2.5 How to develop a Management Response to an Evaluation Report
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1. Introduction

This guideline is designed to apply across government. We refer here to the role of 'evaluation custodian'. In evaluations under the National Evaluation Plan (NEP), the evaluation commissioner is the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME). In evaluations under Provincial Evaluation Plans this is the Office of the Premier. In departmental evaluations this is the M&E Unit. In municipalities and State-owned Entities (SOEs) this is likely also to be the M&E Unit.

The research part of an evaluation is considered complete once the Evaluation Steering Committee approves the final evaluation report as a technically valid report and without any factual errors. Evaluators may not come up with feasible recommendations and departments may not agree with all the recommendations. Therefore, state institutions are provided an opportunity to provide a Management Response indicating which recommendations they agree to, and for the ones they disagree with they are expected to indicate why. Guideline 2.2.5 outlines the process with the Management Response. However, If the reasons for disagreeing with recommendations are not convincing to government institutions¹, then the reasons for disagreement will be indicated in the final set of documents for the evaluation projects, including submission to Cabinet where it is required.

The main objective of the evaluation system is to improve performance, decision-making, as well as accountability. Once recommendations have been agreed upon, state institution are expected to draw up an Improvement Plan outlining how the recommendations will be addressed indicating who will be responsible as well as time frames. The Improvement Plan System is designed to ensure that evidence from evaluations is utilised in improving plans, programmes, policies, systems and inform budgets and also properly documents.

¹This includes all three spheres of government and State-Owned Entities.

2. Purpose of the Improvement Plan

The purpose of the Improvement Plan is to:

- 2.1 Ensure utilisation of evaluation findings and consequently strengthening of the programme/project/policy/plan in question;

- 2.2 Track/monitor the implementation of recommendations; and

- 2.3 Keep stakeholders abreast of the necessary actions that will be taken to improve the delivery of a programme, project or policy. These could be changes to the policy or programme, amendments to implementation strategies or changes to internal budget allocations.

3. Process for developing the Improvement Plan

- 3.1 The evaluation report is approved as technically acceptable and factually correct by the Evaluation Steering Committee (note there may be disagreements on some of the findings or recommendations if it is an independent report).

- 3.2 The evaluation report is presented to DPME EXCO and EXCO/recommended structure of the custodian department.

- 3.3 The DG/Head of the commissioning department/unit (for NEP evaluations it will be DPME) then writes to the custodian state institutions involved (or affected by the recommendations) sharing the evaluation report and a Management Response template summarising the recommendations, asking the departments concerned to indicate their response to the recommendations.

- 3.4 Departments/units involved are given 30 days to provide a Management Response.

- 3.5 As soon as the Evaluation Report is approved by the Steering Committee, or Management Response submitted, work can start on the Improvement Plan.

- 3.6 The Evaluation Steering Committee (comprising of key stakeholders involved in the evaluand) organises an appropriate process for developing the Improvement Plan. A workshop with stakeholders may well be the best modality (see box). A detailed stakeholder/user analysis must be done to ensure their involvement and participation throughout the improvement plan process. Here the synthesis document is tabled, and then groups work on developing how each improvement objective will be addressed. An example of part of an Improvement Plan is shown in Annexure B.

- 3.7 If there are many recommendations, these are grouped (as per example in Annexure A) and Improvement Objectives defined. The Improvement Objectives draw from the recommendations but also from some of the findings. Ideally this should be done prior to the workshop.

- 3.8 If the evaluation is in the NEP/PEP it is submitted through relevant cluster to Cabinet/ Provincial EXCO for noting. An evaluation in the DEP is presented to executive/top management of a department.

- 3.9 In preparation for the noting of the report by Cabinet/Provincial EXCO, Bi-lateral engagements are held between DPME and the respective Custodian departments. The aim of the engagements is to provide the custodian department with an opportunity to provide any progress update that might be registered in implementing recommendations.

- 3.10 Dissemination of evaluation results is done in accordance with the DPME Evaluation Guidelines 2.2.8 (Communication of Evaluation Results), and includes putting the evaluation report on the website of the relevant state institution with the Management Response and sharing the report with relevant Parliamentary Portfolio Committees, among others.

Organising a workshop to prepare the Improvement Plan:

1. It may well be appropriate to run a workshop including key stakeholders to develop the Improvement Plan. This should include representatives of implementation structures, e.g. district office or a relevant provincial office, or a good frontline manager (such as an agricultural extension officer), who can help advise on practical implementation modalities.
2. If external stakeholders are key to implementation, include representatives of these. Appropriate methods of identifying and integrating inputs of beneficiaries of the intervention/ programme/ project/policy/plan must be implemented.
3. In the case of Early Childhood Development evaluation, this was a 2-day workshop; groups focused on different recommendations and came up with how these would be addressed. Annex C has an example of the Improvement Plan workshop programme as an example, as well as an example of the group task for groups working on each of the improvement objectives and defining how these will be achieved.

3.11 The Improvement Plan is then tabled at the senior management forum of the state institutions for approval, or for sign-off by the accounting officers of government institutions². The approved plan is submitted to DPME/OTP/M&E units in Municipalities. With regard to evaluations in the departmental plan, the Improvement Plan is submitted to the office of the relevant accounting officer(s). This should be no more than 4 months after the date the evaluation steering committee approves the final report (this is the target given to Cabinet/Provincial EXCO).

3.12 The relevant programme manager or their supervisor should be responsible for developing and implementing the Improvement Plan, as well as reporting on progress in implementing the Improvement Plan.

3.13 The Improvement Plan is then tabled at the relevant cluster as well as Implementation Forums, MinMECs, etc as appropriate.

3.14 The department produces six monthly reports on the improvement plan for at least two years, which are submitted to DPME/OTP/M&E units in Municipalities. The six months is counted from four months after the report is approved by the steering committee, i.e. the first report is due 10 months after the report is approved. The use of the evaluation results goes beyond the submission of progress reports, stakeholder engagement meetings must be held to obtain updated information on the use of a particular evaluation results.

3.15 Minutes and recordings of the stakeholder engagements must be appropriately stored, considering data governance issues, so as to be used in monitoring progress on the use of evaluation results.

3.16 Ongoing actions must be incorporated into relevant plans (APPs, operational plans, project plan), quarterly reports, annual reports, and performance agreements of relevant departments and programme managers, so they become part of the normal monitoring process.

3.17 Possible implementation and monitoring of the IP can track progress and changes needed, e.g. on a 1-2 yearly basis.

3.18 After 30 days a presentation is made to the relevant cluster on the findings as well as the Management Response, and a cabinet memo is prepared outlining the main findings of the Evaluation which is tabled at Cabinet and Executive Committees.

² This includes Director Generals, Municipal managers, Chief Executive Officers.

4. Format of the Improvement Plan and Reporting Template

The Template in **Annexure B** covers the following sections:

- 4.1 General Information:** The first section of the plan covers details of the evaluation, custodian government institutions the contact person, position and the reporting period.

- 4.2 Improvement objective** – developed from the synthesis mentioned above.

- 4.3 Outputs** - what are the key building blocks/products that should be achieved if we want to achievement the Improvement Objective?

- 4.4 Priority** – How would you rate the priority of this aspect (Low/Medium/High?). If there are many recommendations as in the ECD example you will need to prioritise according to the level of urgency and importance.

- 4.5 Activities** – what activities will need to be undertaken to achieve each output?

- 4.6 By who?** – who needs to be involved in this activity. The person responsible or institution accountable should be in bold.

- 4.7 By when** – when should this activity be undertaken by?

- 4.8 Target** – what is the target in relation to the output?

- 4.9 Embedded where** – particularly for outputs which carry over to the next financial year, the outputs will need to be embedded in plans – e.g. in the department’s APP or SDIP, otherwise the Improvement Plan will remain an orphan outside the system and is unlikely to be implemented.

- 4.10 Current situation/progress** – in the initial drafting of the Improvement Plan, this should indicate what has already been undertaken in relation to this output and activity. In subsequent reports it should indicate progress and any difficulties that the department encounters in implementing the recommendations. The department must state the lessons learnt (what worked and what did not work) from the evaluation. Further, provide information on how the evaluation recommendations have been embedded in the strategic and operational plans/policies, and the result/outcome of this.

Action Points:

1. It is critical that stakeholders including DPME/OTP/M&E units in municipalities should be involved in developing the Improvement Action Plan, addressing the areas identified to be strengthened.

2. It is important to ensure that there is consensus amongst stakeholders on prioritisation of findings and recommendations.

3. The plan must be approved by the accounting officers of government institutions of the commissioning state institutions. Approval of the Plan indicates commitment by both parties to its implementation.

4. The plan must include a summary of recommendations extracted from the final report in order to provide clarity and coherence in the plan.

5. Monitoring and evaluating implementation of the Improvement Plan

The Template in **Annexure B** covers the following sections:

5.1 Departments send reports to;

- National Departments to DPME;
- Provincial Departments to Offices of the Premier (OTP)
- Municipalities to CoGTA;
- SOEs / SOCs to their responsible Departments

5.2 These reports must be sent on a six-monthly basis outlining progress of the implementation plan; over the period of two years (Annexure C: Improvement Plan Reporting Template).

5.3 DPME and Offices of the Premier will provide bi-annual updates on progress on implementing evaluation recommendations to Cabinet and Provincial EXCOs accordingly.

6. Integrating the Improvement Plan with other processes

Strategies for improvement should be incorporated into the Annual Performance Plan, quarterly reports, annual reports, and performance agreements and Service Delivery Improvement Plan. Evaluation findings should also be used to inform budgeting and policy-making.



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Annex A: Synthesis of recommendations and development of improvement objectives (example from ECD)

A. Legislation and policy

Recommendation 1	<p>A country strategy for ECD should be developed from which each department (DBE, DSD, DoH, DWCPD, DPW, DCOG, and if relevant other departments) should develop an implementation programme for their component.</p> <p>The national strategy should include a common definition of ECD; agreed provisioning based on age, stage of development, socio-economic circumstance and needs (including delivery services to reach poor and vulnerable children, and promoting universal access); multidisciplinary and inter-sectoral teams with funding streams & mechanisms in line with outcomes and results; specific institutional arrangements of interdepartmental and inter-sectoral cooperation with clear protocols; mechanisms for information sharing</p> <p>A Task Team should be established to produce the Strategy – with clear roles and responsibilities of key players and government departments. The country strategy should be submitted to Cabinet for approval</p>
Recommendation 2	
Improvement Objective 1	<p>A country strategy for ECD is developed to submit to Cabinet and the Children's Act is revised. The strategy should include a common definition of ECD; agreed provisioning based on age, stage of development, socio-economic circumstance and needs (including delivery services to reach poor and vulnerable children, and promoting universal access); multidisciplinary and inter-sectoral teams with funding streams & mechanisms in line with outcomes and results; specific institutional arrangements of interdepartmental and inter-sectoral cooperation with clear protocols; mechanisms for information sharing.</p>

B. Coordination and Integration

Recommendation 7	<p>An effective coordinating mechanism must be established - an agency, board or commission - with high-level influence, an explicit mandate, and the necessary resources including expertise, to drive the ECD agenda forward in all 3 spheres (including local government) and deliver results.</p> <p>A feasibility study needs to be conducted considering the options, pros and cons of the best mechanism for inter-sectoral coordination, how it could be established, how it could be funded, and what its terms of reference would be.</p> <p>In the meantime the 4 key ministers of DBE, DSD, DWCPD and DoH are asked to reinforce the current interdepartmental mechanism and to report on to Cabinet on how this will be achieved.</p> <p>An integrated M&E system for the ECD sector should be developed as part of the overall national ECD strategy and its implementation with a National Information System hosted by the lead department.</p> <p>This should include an Essential Data Set for ECD to address the challenge of inter-sectoral and separate practices of data collection across various departments</p> <p>A challenge for M&E is that the questions on preschool participation in the General Household Survey are too general to provide information for policy development and amendment. Similarly, the questions on disabilities among preschool children are inappropriate. A technical group should work on measurement of these two important aspects of ECD and work with Statistics South Africa and others to improve the measurement of child care, preschool experience and disabilities.</p>
Recommendation 8	
Recommendation 24	
Recommendation 25	
Recommendation 26	
Improvement Objective 2	<p>A feasibility study is conducted considering different options for inter-sectoral management and coordination, and recommending the best mechanism, how it could be established, how it could be funded, what its terms of reference would be, and how cross-sectoral M&E will be conducted. In the interim DBE, DSD, DWCPD and DoH should propose to cabinet how to strengthen the current interdepartmental mechanism.</p>

Annex B: Improvement Plan and Quarterly Reporting Template

Title of Evaluation		Date of Publication of Evaluation Report	
Name of lead Department		Date of Approval of Improvement Plan	
Contact Person		Position	
Telephone		Email	

Date of report				
Quarter: mark with an X	1	2	3	4

Improvement Plan for ECD Diagnostic Review/ECD Conference/NIPECD Review

A. Legislation and policy

Improvement Objective 1	A country strategy for ECD is developed to submit to Cabinet and the Children's Act is revised. The strategy should include a common definition of ECD; agreed provisioning based on age, stage of development, socio-economic circumstance and needs (including delivery services to reach poor and vulnerable children, and promoting universal access); multidisciplinary and inter-sectoral teams with funding streams & mechanisms in line with outcomes and results; specific institutional arrangements of interdepartmental and inter-sectoral cooperation with clear protocols; mechanisms for information sharing.
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Outputs to achieve the objective	Priority L/M/H	Activity to achieve output	Person/ institution responsible	By when? (Deadline)	Target	Embedded where	Budget available	Current situation/ Progress Report
1. An ECD policy framework developed	H	1.1.1 Establish inter-departmental task team as successor to evaluation steering committee, chaired by DSD.	DGs of DBE, DSD, DoH and DWCPD and DPME, led by DSD	30 November 2013	Inter-departmental mechanism for coordination of ECD operational by 30 November 2013	APP of DBE, DSD, DoH, WCPD, DPME	n/a	NIDECD committee exists Inter-departmental steering committee for the ECD Diagnostic review.
		1.1.2 Develop project plan for ECD policy development namely White Paper for ECD	DSD, DBE DOH DW-CPD	28 February 2013	White Paper on ECD published including norms and standards for differentiated services, provisioning and funding	APP of DBE, DSD, DoH, WCPD, DPME	n/a	Segregated policies targeting young children such as White Paper of Social Welfare, Education, Maternal and Child Health policies White paper 5 for ECD NIPECD Guidelines for ECD Draft Policy Framework for ECD(NIPECD)

Outputs to achieve the objective	Priority L/M/H	Activity to achieve output	Person/ institution responsible	By when? (Deadline)	Target	Em-bedded where	Bud-get avail-able	Current situa-tion/ Progress Report
1. An ECD policy framework developed	H	1.1.3 Finalize the Cabinet Memo on the project plan for the White paper on ECD	DSD	May 2013	White Paper on ECD published including norms and standards for differentiated services, provisioning and funding	APP of DBE, DSD, DoH, WCPD, DPME	n/a	Segregated policies targeting young children such as White Paper of Social Welfare, Education, Maternal and Child Health policies White paper 5 for ECD NIPECD Guidelines for ECD Draft Policy Framework for ECD(NIPECD)
		1.1.4 Develop the Draft White Paper on ECD	DSD, DBE DOH DW-CPD			APP of DBE, DSD, DoH, WCPD, DPME	n/a	
		1.1.5 Consult with stakeholders	DSD DBE DOH DW-CPD	JULY 2013-DEC 2013		APP of DBE, DSD, DoH, WCPD, DPME	Use current budget	
		1.1.6 Produce and submit White Paper to Cabinet	DSD, DBE DOH DW-CPD	November 2014		APP of DBE, DSD, DoH	n/a	
2. Norms and standards for differentiated services, provisioning and funding for ECD reviewed and new norms and standards developed.	M	1.2.1 Review all norms and standards for ECD and Grade R	DSD, DBE, DOH Municipalities DPW DCOG	July 2013	Norms and Standards developed for differentiated services provisioning and funding for ECD	APP DSD DBE DOH DW-CPD	Include in current unit budget	Guidelines on ECD , NELDS, regulations to Children's Act, Funding norms for Grade R, Health provisioning and Funding Norms and Standards Norms and standards for Children's Act,
		1.2.2 Develop norms and standards for differentiated services models (household, community and centre based), provisioning and funding, for ECD(zero to school going age group)	DSD DBE DOH	November 2013	Norms and Standards developed for differentiated services provisioning and funding for ECD	APP DSD DOH DBE	Identify budget	Guidelines on ECD, NELDS, Regulations to Children's Act, Funding norms for Grade R, Health provisioning and Funding Norms and Standards Norms and standards for Children's Act,

Outputs to achieve the objective	Priority L/M/H	Activity to achieve output	Person/institution responsible	By when? (Deadline)	Target	Embedded where	Budget available	Current situation/Progress Report
3. Amendment of Children's Act on ECD	H	1.3.1 Phase 1 - Review of Children's Act (2005)	DSD, DBE, DoH and DWCPD	November 2014	Children's Act amended by November 2014	APP DSD	Include in budget for 2013/14	Children's Act (2005)
		1.3.2 Phase 2 Development of a separate Act on ECD.	DSD, DBE, DoH and DWCPD	November 2015	Act on ECD passed by November 2015	APP DSD, DBE DoH DWCPD	Include in budget for 2014/15	

Annex C: Example of workshop outline for developing an Improvement Plan

Workshop to develop Improvement Plan for the xxxx, date

Background

The last stage of an evaluation under the National Evaluation System is developing an improvement plan, whereby the agreed findings and recommendations are translated into actions. In this case this will be developed from the [evaluation report and other referenced document].

The Management Response has now been received from DBE, DSD and DWCPD. This workshop will now develop the improvement plan that will outline how the recommendations of the evaluation are to be implemented.

Objective

By the end of the workshop we have developed an improvement plan for the xxxx, in the process testing out the format for developing an improvement plan.

Participants

The xxxx Steering Committee members plus other resource people (e.g. xxxx provincial counterparts, agencies, key NGOs, etc.) to enable several groups to work on different recommendations. The DPME official will facilitate the workshop.

Time	Session	Objective	Responsible
Day 1			
9.00	Opening, objectives, introductions		Facilitator
9.10	Outline programme and flow	Participants understand the flow of the day	Facilitator
9.15	Update on what work has been done so far on the Improvement Plan Test grouping of recommendations	Participants understand what has happened with the recommendations	Custodian Department
	Outline of relevant policy objectives	Participants sensitised about the policy objectives and contextual factors on the subject matter	Relevant DPME Outcome Facilitator
10.00	Agree concept for the implementation objectives (not detailed wording) and the main outputs	Participants have agreed the overall objectives and generated ideas for the outputs	DPME Project Manager
10.30	Break		
12.00	Introduction to work in groups	Groups allocated into core areas and understand what they have to do	DPME Project Manager

Time	Session	Objective	Responsible
12.05	Break into groups dealing with the core areas: Legislation and policy Coordination and integration Programmes and services Human resources and capacity building Financing and funding	Groups have produced the Improvement Plan	
13.00	Break		
13.45	Groups Continue		
15.40	Update on where groups are at and issues emerging which may need discussion in plenary	Any issues which need resolution in plenary have been identified	Facilitator
16.25	Closing for the day 1		Facilitator
	Day 2		
8.30	Introduction to the day	Participants understand the flow of the day	Facilitator
8.40	Reflections on yesterday	Participants have reflected on how they are feeling about the plan	DPME Project Manager
9.00	Discussion of issues which need resolving in plenary	Issues requiring addressing in plenary are resolved	Custodian Department; Inputs in the plenary by organisation represented
10.00	Groups continue	Groups have completed their section of the Improvement Plan, considering inputs from plenary	
11.00	Break		
11.15	Feedback from groups validating/ adding to what each has produced (5 minutes per recommendation)	The contributions to the plan have been validated	Facilitator
13.00	Break		
13.45	Continue		Facilitator
15.00	Tea		
15.15	Discussion on managing the Improvement Plan: What structure Any dedicated team Phasing Budget Timeframes Reporting mechanisms	How the Improvement Plan will be managed has been agreed	DPME Project Manager
	Closing commentary (5 minutes each)	Closing comments by Outcome Facilitator and Custodian Department	Relevant DPME Outcome Facilitator ; Custodian Department
16.00	Way forward	The next steps to submit to approve the Improvement Plan and taking it forward have been identified	DPME Project Manager
16.30	Closing		Facilitator

Group Task – Drafting the Improvement Plan

1. Background

Groups are allocated into the following:

- Legislation and policy
- Coordination and integration
- Programmes and services
- Human resources and capacity building
- Financing and funding

2. Purpose

The purpose of the task is for groups to have produced the Improvement Plan for the specific improvement objectives they are allocated to deal with.

3. Tasks

- 3.1** Facilitator has been allocated.
- 3.2** Group selects rapporteur to write on flip chart and secretary to capture on computer
- 3.3** Group runs through the task and ensures all understand it
- 3.4** Then read recommendations and improvement objectives allocated and make sure all understand these (10 mins)
- 3.5** For the first objective, check the wording of the improvement objective and make changes as needed (10 mins)
- 3.6** Then check the outputs suggested in plenary and adjust as needed (check with Facilitator when this has been done, so we are sure outputs are OK before proceeding)
- 3.7** Then work on completing the table for each output – the activities needed, whom, when, etc.
- 3.8** While you are doing this flag any issues which need to be discussed in plenary for discussion in the afternoon
- 3.9** If you have an issue where you need to confer with someone in another group, do so
- 3.10** Repeat for the next improvement objective
- 3.11** By 15.30 check the issues you have raised to be mentioned as needing to be resolved in plenary

You have about 4 hours in total, 3 hours on Day 1, 1 hour on Day 2.

4. Resources

- Blank format for the Improvement Plan
- Copy of the xxxx Evaluation Report
- Document summarising the recommendations and improvement objectives