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DEPARTMENT: PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Standards for evaluation in government

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Introduction

In 2012 the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency developed standards for government evaluations with support from GIZ. Inputs were also given from a range of other stakeholders including present and past SAMEA board members and the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) based at the Graduate School of Public and Development Management, University of the Witwatersrand. The standards intend to support the use of evaluations conducted through the national evaluation system through setting benchmarks of evaluation quality.

This document is based on the National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF), approved in November 2011. This document and the NEPF should be read together. In the NEPF four main purposes of evaluation are described:

- Improving policy or programme performance (evaluation for continuous improvement). This aims to provide feedback to programme managers.
- Evaluation for improving accountability e.g. where is public spending going? Is this spending making a difference?
- Improving decision-making e.g. should the intervention be continued? Should how it is implemented be changed? Should increased budget be allocated?
- Evaluation for generating knowledge (for learning): increasing knowledge about what works and what does not with regards to a public policy, programme, function or organisation.

The South African government's approach to putting into operation these four purposes intends to promote the use of evaluation. Likewise the standards contained in this document encourage the utilisation of findings and consider standards in relation to five stages of evaluation: (1) overarching considerations prior to the evaluation, (2) planning the evaluation, (3) the evaluation process, (4) the evaluation findings, and (5) the eventual use.

These South African government evaluation standards are based on a review of a range of international evaluation standards, their strengths, weaknesses, and appropriateness for South Africa. The OECD DAC standards were identified as the most appropriate starting point and they have also drawn from the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE) and the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL).

The standards are written in the present tense – with the standard being that the point in question is applied.

In 2013 DPME developed an evaluation quality assessment process (EQA) based on these standards. The quality assessment indicators used in this process are provided in the tables below, with weightings from 1 to 10. This version of the standards incorporates the lessons from applying the EQA in 2012/13 and 2013/14. The quality assessment tool can be downloaded from the DPME website.

All guidelines referenced here are available on the DPME website: www.thepresidency-dpme.gov.za

1 Overarching considerations

When carrying out an evaluation the following overarching considerations are taken into account throughout the process. In some cases there are specific indicators below in other cases there are indicators under specific standards.

1.1 Partnership approach

In order to increase ownership of the evaluation and maximise the likelihood of use, and build mutual accountability for results, a partnership approach to development evaluation is considered systematically early in the process. The concept of partnership connotes an inclusive process in the production of the evaluation. This will involve work on a range of evaluation issues (e.g. questions, issues statement, terms of reference) with different stakeholders of the particular intervention. These stakeholders may include government, civil society, and target group (and in some cases international development partners).

1.2 Free and open evaluation process

Where appropriate the evaluation process is transparent and independent from programme management and policy-making, to enhance credibility. In some cases (e.g. for implementation evaluations), these will be undertaken jointly between evaluator and department, to maximise ownership and the likelihood of use.

1.3 Evaluation ethics

Evaluations abide by relevant professional and ethical guidelines and codes of conduct for individual evaluators. Evaluation is undertaken with integrity and honesty. Programme managers, M&E advisors and evaluators respect human rights and differences in culture, customs, religious beliefs and practices of all stakeholders. Evaluators and M&E advisors are mindful of gender roles, ethnicity, ability, age, sexual orientation, language and other differences when designing and carrying out the evaluation.

In addition the evaluation takes account of the ethics in dealing with informants in the evaluation process, including issues of anonymity, and using an ethics board where needed.

1.4 Alignment to policy context and background literature

To help improve co-ordination of evaluation and implementation of evaluation results, the evaluation process must take into account the roles of different stakeholders, seeking to ensure those critical to the intervention are involved in the evaluation, e.g. on the evaluation steering committee, and that others are consulted during the evaluation. These different stakeholders also need to be involved in taking forward the improvement plan arising from the evaluation, as appropriate. This may include partners who are not immediate partners in the evaluation process, but who can affect the implementation or usage of results from the evaluation.

There should be evidence that a review of the relevant literature including policy, legislation and programme environments has been conducted and used in planning the evaluation.

1.5 Capacity development

The process of evaluation has positive effects on the evaluation capacity of the partners involved as well as developing the capacity of evaluators. An evaluation may, for instance, support capacity development by improving evaluation knowledge and skills, strengthening evaluation management, stimulating demand for and use of evaluation findings, and supporting an environment of accountability and learning. This capacity development should be through an explicit learning-by-doing process, as well as in the process adopted.

Indicator	Weighting
Where appropriate ¹ , an element of capacity building of partners responsible for the evaluand was incorporated into the evaluation process.	6
Where appropriate, the evaluation team incorporated an element of skills development amongst the evaluators (e.g. students, interns, recent graduates, etc.).	4

1.6 Quality control

Quality control is exercised throughout the evaluation process. Depending on the evaluation's scope and complexity, quality control is carried out through an internal and/or external process. Peer review is conducted of the methodology during the inception phase and during the evaluation. An evaluation quality assessment (EQA) will be conducted to reflect on the process as well as the product of the evaluation, and draw out lessons for future evaluations.

Indicator	Weighting
The methods employed in the process of the evaluation were consistent with those planned.	8
Forms of data gathering were appropriate given the scope of evaluation.	8
A pilot of data collection instrumentation occurred prior to undertaking data collection.	8
The data analysis approach and methods were appropriate and sufficient given the purpose of the evaluation.	8
Data collection was not compromised by field-work – level problems or unplanned diversions from original intentions.	4

1.7 Project management

The evaluation is conceived, planned, managed and conducted and results are made available to commissioners in a timely manner to achieve the objectives of the

¹ The qualifier is intended to allow for evaluations that are largely desktop exercises such as Evaluation Syntheses or evaluations that rely on secondary data only. We acknowledge that in some instances it may be inappropriate to build capacity on either the side of the evaluators or those responsible for the evaluand, albeit these cases are limited.

evaluation. The entire evaluation process is carried out efficiently, effectively, timeously and within resource allocation. Changes in conditions, circumstances, timeframe and budget are reported. Any changes are explained, discussed and agreed between the relevant parties and approved at an Evaluation Steering Committee meeting.

The entire evaluation process is within allotted time and budget.

2 Planning, Design and Inception

2.1 Clarity of purpose and scope in terms of reference (TOR)

Clear terms of reference are developed for the evaluation which specify what is required and appropriate for the policy, programme, or project being evaluated. The planning and design phase culminates in the drafting of a Terms of Reference (TOR), presenting the purpose, scope, and objectives of the evaluation; the methodology to be used; the resources and time allocated; reporting requirements; and any other expectations regarding the evaluation process and products. The document is agreed to by the Evaluation Steering Committee including the evaluation manager(s) and is refined during the inception phase. Guidance on the areas to be covered by the TOR are indicated in the *DPME Guideline 2.2.1*, “How to Develop Evaluation Terms of Reference for evaluation projects”.

Indicator	Weighting
The evaluation was guided by a well-structured and complete TOR or a well-structured and complete internal evaluation proposal.	10
The purpose of the evaluation stated in the TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal) was clear and explicit.	8
The evaluation questions in the TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal) were clearly stated and appropriate for addressing the evaluation purpose.	8
The approach and type of evaluation was suited to the purpose and scope of the evaluation TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal).	8
The TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal) identified the intended users of the evaluation and their information needs.	6
Key stakeholders were involved in the scoping of the TOR and choosing the purpose of the evaluation.	8
There was evidence that a review of the relevant policy and programme environments had been conducted and used in planning the evaluation.	4
There was evidence of a review of appropriate literature having been conducted and used in planning the evaluation ² .	6

2.2 Evaluability

The feasibility of an evaluation is assessed. Specifically, it should be determined whether or not the intervention is adequately defined and its results verifiable, and if evaluation is the best way to answer questions posed by policy makers or stakeholders.

Indicator	Weighting
There was explicit reference to the intervention logic or the theory of change of the evaluand in the planning of the evaluation	6

² This could be through a workshop with stakeholders tabling relevant research around the topic.

The planned methodology was appropriate to the questions being asked	8
Sampling was appropriate and adequate given focus and purpose of evaluation	8

2.3 Evaluation is adequately resourced

The resources provided for the evaluation are adequate, in terms of funds, staff and skills, to ensure that the objectives of the evaluation can be fulfilled effectively. Guidance is available on likely budget envelopes.

Indicator	Weighting
The evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of time allocated.	6
The evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of original budget.	8
The evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of staffing and skills sets.	6

2.4 Stakeholder involvement, governance and management structures

Relevant stakeholders are involved early on in the evaluation process and given the opportunity to contribute to evaluation design, including by identifying issues to be addressed and evaluation questions to be answered.

A formal evaluation steering committee is constituted which includes these key stakeholders, and which meets to approve the TOR, inception report, other key reports, and to develop the improvement plan. The Evaluation Steering Committee safeguards credibility, inclusiveness, and transparency of the evaluation.³ The relevant department commissions the evaluation, organises the evaluation process and is responsible for day-to-day administration. Depending on the evaluation, these functions may be combined in one department or involve several departments.

Indicator	Weighting
The TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal) identified the intended users of the evaluation and their information needs.	6
Key stakeholders were involved in the scoping of the TOR and choosing the purpose of the evaluation.	8
Where appropriate, the evaluation planned to incorporate an element of capacity building of partners/staff responsible for the evaluand.	2
Key stakeholders were consulted on the design and methodology of the evaluation.	8
There was a planned process for using the findings of the evaluation.	6

2.5 Selection of evaluation service provider

The supply chain process is used effectively and transparently for selecting the evaluation service provider. The mix of evaluative skills, thematic knowledge and a

³ A guide has been produced on Evaluation Steering Committees which is available on the DPME website.

suitable PDI/gender balance are considered in the selection of the service provider.⁴ Guidance on this is indicated in the *DPME Guideline 2.2.1*, “How to Develop Evaluation Terms of Reference for Evaluation Projects” – Section 8.4.2. Functional evaluation criteria, page 13/14.

2.6 Inception phase

The terms of reference (TORs) are refined during the inception phase, where the scope of work is elaborated, and the methodology detailed in the Evaluation Plan, which may be part of the inception report. This report is agreed by the Evaluation Steering Committee.

Indicator	Weighting
The inception phase was used to develop a common agreement on how the evaluation would be implemented.	6

⁴ This is included in the criteria for selection but not a standard per se.

3 Implementation

3.1 Evaluator independence

Where conducted externally, evaluators are independent from the development intervention, including its policy, operations and management functions, as well as the target group of the intervention. Possible conflicts of interest are addressed openly and honestly. The evaluation team is able to work freely and without interference. It is assured of co-operation and access to all relevant information.

In some cases evaluations will be conducted internally. In these cases peer review is particularly important to ensure that there has been adequate impartiality in the conduct of the evaluation and that it is credible.

Indicator	Weighting
Where external, the evaluation team was able to work freely without significant interference.	6
The evaluation team was impartial and there was no evidence of conflict of interest.	8
Peer review of the agreed evaluation design and methodology occurred prior to undertaking data collection.	4
Peer Review of the draft evaluation report occurred prior to finalisation of the evaluation report.	6

3.2 Key stakeholder involvement

The full range of stakeholders are consulted during the evaluation process and given the opportunity to contribute, including the clients of the programme or policy in question. The criteria for identifying and selecting stakeholders are specified in the evaluation report. Key standards were consulted through a formalised mechanism or institutional arrangement. Where appropriate, an element of capacity building of partners responsible for the evaluation was incorporated into the evaluation process.

Indicator	Weighting
Key stakeholders were consulted through a formalised mechanism or institutional arrangement.	6
Key stakeholders were significantly engaged as part of the methodology.	6
The methodology included engaging beneficiaries appropriately as a key source of data and information.	8
Recommendations are made in consultation with appropriate sector partners or experts.	6

3.3 Ethical considerations

The rights and welfare of participants in the evaluation are protected, and an ethical committee used to review procedures, if needed. Anonymity and confidentiality of individual informants is protected when requested or as needed.

Indicator	Weighting
Where data was gathered in contexts where ethical sensitivity is high, appropriate clearance was achieved through an ethics review board; e.g. in evaluation involving minors, institutions where access usually requires ethical or bureaucratic clearance, and situations where assurances of confidentiality was offered to participants.	8
The full report documents procedures intended to ensure confidentiality and to secure informed consent where necessary (in some cases this is not needed e.g. evaluation synthesis, in which case N/A should be recorded).	6
There are no risks to participants in disseminating the original report on a public website.	8
There are no unfair risks to institutions in disseminating the original report on a public website.	6

3.4 Implementation of evaluation within allotted time and budget

The evaluation is conducted and results are made available to commissioners in a timely manner to achieve the objectives of the evaluation. The evaluation is carried out efficiently and within budget. Changes in conditions, circumstances, timeframe and budget are reported. Any changes are explained, discussed and agreed between the relevant parties and approved by the Evaluation Steering Committee.

Indicator	Weighting
The evaluation was conducted without significant shifts to scheduled project milestones and timeframes.	2
The evaluation was completed within the agreed budget.	4

4 Reporting

4.1 Intermediate reports

Where appropriate, intermediate reports are provided including: final data collection instruments and other tools; analysis plan; other technical or process reports, e.g. fieldwork report. These are specified in the TORs. Descriptions of metadata⁵ are included in the final report. Financial expenditure on the evaluation is tacked in intermediate reports to the Evaluation Steering Committee.

4.2 Writing and presentation

Draft and final evaluation reports are produced which cover the full detail of the evaluation. Reports will be written documents. Final evaluation reports include a detailed report maximum 150 pages as well as a summary report in the 1/5/25 format described below. The full report will detail the questions, context, intervention logic, methodology, analysis, conclusions and recommendations, limitations and in an annex description of information sources, as described in subsequent standards. All forms of report will be accessible for the wider public. In addition if feasible, appropriate and useful, reports can also be presented in a variety of formats (e.g. video, presentations etc.). Quality of writing and presentation is adequate for publication.

Indicator	Weighting
Quality of writing and presentation is adequate for publication including: adequate layout and consistent formatting; complete sentences and no widespread grammatical or typographical errors; consistency of style and writing conventions (e.g. tense, perspective (first person, third person); levels of formality; references complete and consistent with cited references in reference list and vice versa; etc.	8
Appropriate conventions are used in presentation of data (e.g. use of appropriate statistical language; reporting of p-values where appropriate; not reporting statistically insignificant findings as significant; clarifying disaggregation categories in constructing percentages; not using quantitative language in reporting qualitative data; etc.	8
The use of figures and tables is such that it supports communication and comprehension of results; and data reported in figures and tables are readily discernible and useful to a reader familiar with data presentation conventions.	6

4.3 The 1/5/25 report format

The 1/5/25 page evaluation report should be readily understood by the intended audience(s) and the form of the report appropriate given the purpose(s) of the evaluation. It contains a 1 page policy summary, a 4-5 page executive summary and a 25 page main report. The executive summary provides an overview of the report, covering all the sections and highlighting the main findings, conclusions,

⁵ Metadata include data descriptions and how data are dealt with in the evaluation. This is described in Annex 1 of the *DPME Guideline* 2.2.1, "How to Develop Evaluation Terms of Reference for Evaluation Projects."

recommendations and any overall lessons. Key evidence is included in the 1/5/25 report so it is authoritative. Full references should be provided as an attachment to these reports.

Indicator	Weighting
Policy summary ⁶ and executive summary capture key components of the report appropriately.	4

4.4 Coverage of the report

Report is well-structured and presentation is clear and complete. The report explicitly covers the following:

4.4.1 Evaluation questions answered

The evaluation report answers all the questions detailed in the TOR, or the evaluation management plan of the evaluation. Where this is not possible, explanations are provided. The original questions, as well as any revisions to these questions, are documented in the report for readers to be able to assess whether the evaluation team has sufficiently addressed the questions, including those related to cross-cutting issues, and met the evaluation objectives.

Indicator	Weighting
There is a clear rationale for the evaluation questions	6
The scope or focus of the evaluation is apparent in the report.	8
Conclusions address the original evaluation purpose and questions	8

4.4.2 Context of the development intervention

The evaluation reports (full and 1/5/25) describe the context of the development intervention, including:

- policy context, related policies, objectives and strategies;
- development context, including socio-economic, political and cultural factors;
- institutional context and stakeholder involvement.

Indicator	Weighting
The context of the development intervention is explicit and presented as relevant to the evaluation.	4
Conclusions take into account relevant empirical and analytical work from related research studies and evaluations.	6
Recommendations are relevant to the current policy context.	8

4.4.3 Intervention logic

The evaluation reports describe and assess the intervention logic or theory, including underlying assumptions and factors affecting the success of the intervention and make suggestions for how these should be amended.

⁶ For historical evaluations there may be no policy summary in which case the executive summary will be used.

Indicator	Weighting
Conclusions are drawn with explicit reference to the intervention logic or theory of change.	6

4.4.4 Explanation of the methodology used

The full evaluation report describes the evaluation methodology and its application in an annex and the 1/5/25 report provides a short summary. This includes clearly explaining attribution and/or contribution to results. The report acknowledges any constraints encountered and how these may have potentially affected the evaluation, including its independence and impartiality. It details the techniques used for data collection and analysis. The choices are justified and limitations and shortcomings are explained.

Indicators	Weighting
A detailed methodology is outlined in the relevant section of the report (full report or 1/5/25) to the point that a reader can understand the data collection, analysis and interpretation approaches used.	8
The report suggests that the evaluation is free of significant methodological and analytical flaws.	8

4.4.5 Clarity of analysis of conclusions

The evaluation reports present findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons separately and with a clear logical distinction between them. Findings flow logically from the analysis of the data, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions. Conclusions are substantiated by findings and analysis. Recommendations and any lessons follow logically from the conclusions. Any assumptions underlying the analysis are made explicit.

Indicator	Weighting
Data analysis appears to have been well executed.	8
The evidence gathered is sufficiently and appropriately analysed to support the argument.	8
Key findings are presented in a clear way; they are made distinct from uncertain or speculative findings and unused data is not presented in the body of the report.	6
Findings are supported by available evidence.	8
Conclusions and recommendations are clear and succinctly articulated.	6
Conclusions are derived from evidence.	8

4.4.6 Acknowledgement of changes and limitations of the evaluation

Any limitations in process, methodology or data are reported and explained. The reports indicate any obstruction of a free and open evaluation process which may have influenced the findings. Any discrepancies between the planned and actual implementation and products of the evaluation are explained.

Indicator	Weighting
Acknowledgement of limitations of all aspects of the methodology and findings are clearly and succinctly articulated.	6
Relevant limitations of the evaluation are noted.	6

4.4.7 Validity and reliability of information sources

The full evaluation report describes in an annex the sources of information used (e.g. documents, respondents, administrative data, literature) in sufficient detail so that the adequacy of the information can be assessed. Both evaluation reports explain the selection of case studies or any samples. Limitations regarding the representativeness of the samples are identified.

The evaluation cross-validates the information sources and critically assesses the validity and reliability of the data.

Complete lists of interviewees and other information sources consulted are included in the full report, to the extent that this does not conflict with the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

4.4.8 Acknowledgement of disagreements within the evaluation team

Evaluation team members have the opportunity to dissociate themselves from particular judgments and recommendations on which they disagree. Any unresolved differences of opinion within the team are acknowledged in the report. The possibility of alternative interpretations of the findings is recognised.

Indicator	Weighting
There is appropriate recognition of the possibility of alternative interpretations.	6

4.5 Incorporation of stakeholders' comments

Relevant stakeholders are given the opportunity to comment on the draft report and to inform the recommendations. The final evaluation report reflects these comments and acknowledges any substantive disagreements. In disputes about facts that can be verified, the evaluators investigate and change the draft where necessary. In the case of opinion or interpretation, stakeholders' comments are reproduced verbatim, in an annex or footnote, to the extent that this does not conflict with the rights and welfare of participants.

Indicator	Weighting
Recommendations are shaped following discussions with relevant government officials and other relevant stakeholders.	6

5 Follow-up, use and learning

5.1 Timeliness, relevance and use of the evaluation

The evaluation is designed, conducted and reported to meet the needs of the intended users. Findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons are clear, relevant, targeted and actionable so that the evaluation can be used to achieve its intended learning and accountability objectives. The evaluation is delivered in time to ensure optimal use of the results.

Indicators	Weighting
The final evaluation report is user-friendly, written in accessible language and its content follows clear logic.	8
Recommendations are targeted at a specific audience sufficiently - are specific, feasible, affordable and acceptable.	6
The evaluation was completed within the planned timeframes.	6
The evaluation study is seen by stakeholders interviewed for the EQA as having added significant symbolic value to the policy or programme (e.g. raised its profile).	6
The evaluation study is of conceptual value in understanding what has happened and possibly in shaping policy and practice.	6

5.2 Systematic response to and follow-up on recommendations

A formal management response is requested for each evaluation. The improvement plan is tracked to ensure accountability for their implementation.

Indicator	Weighting
An improvement plan has been developed based on the findings and recommendations set out in the evaluation. ⁷	10
There is clear evidence of instrumental use - that the recommendations of the evaluation were implemented to a significant extent.	4
There is clear evidence that the evaluation has had a positive influence on the evaluand, its stakeholders and beneficiaries over the medium long term.	4

5.3 Dissemination of evaluation results

Systematic dissemination, storage and management of the evaluation reports is ensured to provide easy access to all development partners, to reach target audiences, additional interested parties, and to maximise the learning benefits of the evaluation.

Indicators	Weighting
Results of the evaluation have been presented to relevant stakeholders	6
The full and 1/5/25 reports are publicly available (website or otherwise published document), except where there were legitimate security concerns.	4

⁷ The improvement plan should be developed within 4 months of the final evaluation report being approved by the evaluation steering committee.

5.4 Reflection on the evaluation process and product

A reflective process is undertaken with the Evaluation Steering Committee to reflect on what worked well and what could have been strengthened in the evaluation. These are used to inform the wider national evaluation system and how it can be strengthened.

Indicators	Weighting
A project closure meeting that reflected on the challenges and strengths of the evaluation process occurred.	4
A reflective process has been undertaken by the evaluation steering committee (if no steering committee exists then by the evaluation management team or the involved department officials) to reflect on what could be done to strengthen future evaluations.	2