

Frequently Asked Questions around the National Evaluation System

Question	Response
Understanding of evaluation	
How do you differentiate between <i>monitoring</i> and <i>evaluation</i> ?	There is no hard line between monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring is the on-going tracking of progress against plans and initiating corrective action. Monitoring asks whether the things we planned are being done right. Evaluation asks deeper questions, such as why and how, e.g. are we doing the right things? Are we effective and efficient? How can we improve? It involves analysis of evidence, assessment of issues and recommendations. Both can stimulate learning.
Who is the target audience for this policy?	The policy targets the following people/institutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political principals, managers and staff in government who should be placing the need to incorporate rigorous evaluations at the heart of their work; • Evaluators whether in government, universities or other service providers; Training institutions, which need to develop a wide cadre of potential evaluators with the required skills and competences.
How does this policy framework relate to other legislative/policy mandates particularly the Policy Framework on the Government-Wide Monitoring System (GWMES)?	The Government-Wide M&E System (GWMES) is still the overarching policy framework. The National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) is one of the three frameworks envisioned in the GWMES. The other two are the <i>Framework for Programme Performance Information</i> published by National Treasury and the <i>South African Statistics Quality Framework</i> published by Statistics SA. Work is starting on updating the GWMES, partly to respond to the presence of the NEPF.
Are you also planning to develop a monitoring framework as well?	DPME is considering developing a more detailed national monitoring policy framework, following a revision to the GWMES Policy Framework.
The evaluation cycle	
When are evaluations undertaken?	Evaluations should be considered at <u>all stages</u> of the project cycle: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic evaluation undertaken prior to design or planning of the evaluation to ascertain the current situation and to inform programme design; • Design evaluation to check how robust the intervention design is; • Implementation evaluations looking at how an intervention is being implemented;

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact evaluations after some time to look at the impacts of the intervention. <p>Major interventions should anticipate having to do all of these.</p>
Why is it a 3 year plan?	Evaluations need to be planned with the intervention life cycle in mind and so must be anticipated. Some evaluations particularly impact evaluations require careful thinking in the design of the rollout of the intervention (ideally you want to compare some people who have received the intervention with similar people who haven't) and may well require baselines conducted 3 or 4 years prior to the actual impact evaluation. Hence it is important not to look at one year but over a period, in this case 3 years.
Proposing and selection of evaluations	
Why should departments submit evaluations for the National Evaluation Plan?	<p>Key benefits are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The evaluation will be part of the national agenda and the department will have political backing since it will have been approved by Cabinet. This could facilitate unblocking of problems and so the utilisation of results; DPME can co-fund the evaluation (an average of R500 000 is budgeted by DPME), or help in looking for funding; DPME will provide technical support to the Department and provide good practice guidelines, standards and training which build on international good practice.
Will the public be given an opportunity to propose evaluations to be included in the National Evaluation Plan?	Not directly at the moment – however issues that are of public concern is a major criteria in the selection of evaluations for the NEP.
Who proposes evaluations?	<p>The main sources of proposals for evaluation will be the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Departments; Political principals; Centre of government departments (e.g. National Treasury/DPME/DPSA). However even in these cases the department should be consulted and where possible be the custodian of the evaluation).
How many evaluations will be in	8 in 2012/13, 15 per year thereafter. Clearly departments may well undertake other evaluations that are not

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the National Evaluation Plan?	part of the plan.
Does the Framework cover evaluations commissioned/ sponsored by the private sector, donors or civil society?	Yes, as long as it is clear that the Department is the custodian of the evaluation and will implement the improvement plan. Section 7.5 of the NEPF stipulates that the Policy Framework should also be used by donors.
It seems this policy is predicated on in-house internal departmental evaluations?	Section 5, Table 4 of the policy framework provides for both internal and external initiation and conducting of evaluation. However all evaluations under the NEP will be undertaken jointly by a department and DPME. In very rare cases where departments have significant internal capacity, they may conduct the evaluations internally. The other measures to ensure validity such as Steering Committees, peer reviewers etc will still be used.
What about cross-cutting interventions implemented across departments?	Cross-cutting evaluations are also possible. For example in 2013/14 one of the evaluations is of Government's Coordination Systems, particularly clusters/MinMECs and Implementation Forums.
What is the process of approval of an evaluation?	In March every year, DPME issues a call for evaluations to be part of the National Evaluation Plan for a year ahead. Departments are required to submit concept notes by June to motivate for proposed evaluations. DPME gives feedback to Departments to strengthen the concept notes. The concept notes are then reviewed by the cross-government Evaluation Technical Working Group (ETWG) and recommendations made for evaluations to be included in the Plan. Some centrally proposed evaluations may be added to these. DPME then compiles the National Evaluation Plan (NEP). The draft NEP goes through the Governance and Administration (G&A) Cluster system to the Cabinet G&A Sub-Committee and finally to Cabinet for approval in November for the following financial year.
Funding of evaluations	
Will departments have to set aside budgets for evaluation?	Apart from the DPME part-funding, there is no separate budget for evaluations. Departments need to incorporate the budget for evaluation when they develop their annual budget and Medium Term Expenditure Framework.
Will DPME fund the evaluations?	DPME will co-fund evaluations where needed, and budgets R500 000 on average per evaluation. In some cases where departments have sufficient budgets DPME may not need to fund, in some cases DPME may fund completely (particularly for cross-cutting evaluations) and in cases where evaluations are too costly, DPME may assist in seeking donor support.
In terms of time frame. Will the DPME commit to the duration of the evaluation or will it commit	If DPME endorses an evaluation, it will commit to the whole evaluation and its time span, which may be over more than one financial year. It may also co-fund the evaluation.

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only for that financial year?	
What will inform the budget for the evaluation?	The cost of the evaluation depends in particular on how much field work needs to be undertaken, which depends on how much data is already available. DPME has some guidance on costing evaluations, which clarifies what will inform the budget for evaluation. In addition guidelines are being developed for each type of evaluation which also provide guidance on costing.
What if funding is available before the government's financial year starts?	Once the evaluation is approved by Cabinet (usually in November of the year preceding the year of the plan) processes can start, starting with finalization of the Terms of Reference. From a budget point of view, DPME may not have funds until the April of the year the Plan operates from. However development of terms of reference and procurement processes can be completed prior to the financial year starting, and the evaluation initiated.
What will be the status of donor-funded evaluations – will they be considered for inclusion in the National Evaluation Plan?	Yes, they will be considered, but the department should remain the custodian of the evaluation.
Role of stakeholders	
What is the role of departments in evaluations?	Departments propose evaluations, chair steering committees, co-fund evaluations and have the responsibility to ensure that evaluation results inform decision and policy-making. For a particular evaluation there may be more than one department involved but one department should take the lead.
What will DPME's technical involvement be in the evaluation process?	DPME is a member of the evaluation steering committee and provides the secretariat. DPME works with the departments involved in the evaluation providing technical support in conceptualizing the evaluation, development of Terms of Reference, commenting on various key outputs, provision of guidelines, training, and access to an Evaluation Panel.
Who will be the principal evaluator?	Most evaluations in the National Evaluation Plan are undertaken by independent evaluators, drawn from an evaluation panel established by DPME, or departments' own panels. There are 42 organisations on the DPME panel.
What does the Steering Committee do and who sits on it?	The Steering Committee brings together the key stakeholders in the evaluation and is the decision-making body in relation to the evaluation. The stakeholders include key departments involved in the evaluation and DPME. A senior manager within the custodian department (preferably the relevant programme manager) chairs the Steering Committee. DPME provides the secretariat of the Steering Committee for each evaluation. A

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	Treasury representative is usually invited to provide advice on financial and planning issues. At times sectoral experts are invited to be part of the Steering Committee.
Are you going to partner with civil society?	Relevant civil society groups could be involved in evaluations in various ways, e.g. to supply monitoring data and to comment on the evaluation report, and in some cases could be members of Steering Committees. Clients of government interventions must also be consulted adequately in all evaluations.
Focus of evaluations	
Are we focusing on outcomes or departments?	The focus is on government's main priorities – the 12 priority outcomes and the National Development Plan. Therefore the focus is on interventions – policies, plans, programmes, projects, rather than organizations. Obviously departments are custodians of these interventions.
Will there be evaluations of areas outside the outcomes?	Yes, some evaluations could happen outside where they are seen to be a high priority.
Why is organisational assessment not included in the framework?	The Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) is implementing the Management Performance Assessment Tool (MPAT) to assess organisational (departmental) performance. It was therefore not necessary at this stage to include organisational assessment in the policy framework since MPAT already provides guidance in this regard. Later more detailed organizational evaluations may be included.
Do evaluations also cover state owned enterprises?	The National Evaluation Plan focuses on evaluation of government interventions, and the call for proposals is only issued to departments. It does not focus on organizations per se, nor programmes of state-owned enterprises (SOE). However, departments can propose an evaluation of a programme which happens to be implemented by an SOE.
Will evaluations happen in the 3 spheres of government?	The National Evaluation Policy Framework provides for National, Provincial and Departmental Evaluation Plans. The first provincial plans have been developed in the Western Cape and Gauteng, and DPME will be working with the other provinces to develop provincial evaluation plans. A format for departmental plans has been drafted. The system is also applicable to local government but this is not the initial focus.
Are you going to consider evaluations commissioned by municipalities or provinces?	Provinces will develop their own provincial evaluation plans, and the larger municipalities may also commission evaluations.

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Implementing evaluations	
Who will conduct evaluations - is it DPME or Departments?	Evaluations will usually be contracted out to service providers but will be managed jointly by DPME and the relevant departments. DPME will provide support on technical aspects of evaluations.
Ensuring evaluations are utilised	
How do we handle the risk of departments trying to avoid difficult findings?	The evaluations in the National Evaluation Plan are selected by Cabinet, are undertaken in collaboration with the DPME, and reports will be made publically available on DPME and departmental websites. It will therefore be difficult for departments to avoid "difficult" findings. In addition, they have an opportunity to provide a management response on the "difficult" findings (see <i>Guideline on Management Response</i>).
What sort of improvement plan is envisaged and will it vary depending on the evaluation?	A generic format has been developed for Improvement Plans which will be customized (see the <i>Guideline on Developing Improvement Plans</i>). The Improvement Plans will be developed by the partner departments with DPME support and will then be monitored.
Have you put mechanisms in place to track the implementation of recommendations?	Departments will have to monitor implementation of the improvement plan and report to DPME/Offices of the Premier on progress on implementing the plan. DPME will report to Cabinet and Offices of the Premier to EXCO on the progress with evaluations in the national/provincial plan, including of follow-up.
The understanding is that utilization of evaluation is to improve performance. How are you able to ensure that performance improves on the ground and in low levels so to speak?	We are at the early stages but this is precisely the reason why the Framework was developed, to address the need for evaluation, and the way the system has been developed is to ensure evaluation results are used. Results need to be taken seriously by management to ensure real improvement. The issue of improvement will be addressed by putting in place an improvement plan, which will be monitored.
How will the link between M&E and budgeting be strengthened?	Departments must consider the results of evaluations in the budget and decision-making processes. Treasury will be invited to be part of the steering committee to ensure that the link between evaluation, planning and budgeting is strengthened.
Assuring quality	

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Will evaluation just be ticking off boxes?	No, evaluations will involve the systematic collection and objective analysis of evidence on interventions to assess issues such as relevance, performance (effectiveness and efficiency), value for money, impact and sustainability, and recommend ways forward. Relevant methodologies and evaluative questions will be applied to different types of evaluations. Triangulation will be encouraged to validate evaluation findings.
What will you do to ensure that evaluations are credible?	According to Section 5 of the NEPF evaluations are credible when they pass the tests of research validation appropriate to the situation. In addition the guidelines for the national evaluation system aim to ensure that an adequate minimum standard is applied. A peer review process is used to ensure that evaluations are externally credible. Other validation processes include presenting the draft evaluation report to a workshop of stakeholders.
What happens about peer reviews?	All evaluations should be peer reviewed. An agreement will be made with the department as to relevant peer reviewers, probably two, one more on content and one on the evaluation methodology. They will be involved early on to check the methodology and then to review the products.
How do we build the skills of departments to manage and use evaluations?	<p>A major effort is being made to build skills. Processes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidelines to provide detailed guidance on various aspects of the evaluation system; • A suite of 4 evaluation courses is being developed and the evaluation staff and programme managers from interventions selected for evaluation will be invited to attend these. 200 officials will be trained in the 2012/13 financial year and 300 per year subsequently; • DPME has put in place a programme of learning events to capacitate officials with M&E skills; • DPME will be represented in steering groups and will provide technical support; • Service providers will be expected to involve departmental officials during the evaluation processes in order to provide skills transfer.
How do we build the skills of potential evaluators and widen the range of people that can use these evaluations?	DPME is conducting training needs analysis and an audit of training courses provided on M&E nationally to identify the gaps. Relevant courses tailor-made for potential evaluators will be designed and implemented in conjunction with PALAMA, as well as offered at SAMEA events. Evaluators will be asked to include interns in their evaluations.
What about evaluations conducted outside the National Evaluation Plan	
Will there be consistency in evaluations conducted outside the national evaluation plan and	At this stage evaluations outside the National Evaluation Plan do not have to follow the approach in the Policy Framework and Guidelines. However as these are built on international good practice and are being refined continually, departments should consider using these systems. At some point these will become obligatory.

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inside?	
What if departments already have an evaluation framework?	Evaluations in the National Evaluation Plan have to follow the National Evaluation System developed to support the NEPF. Departmental evaluations do not have to follow these systems yet. However it is therefore expected that departments will in time adapt their frameworks to ensure that they are consistent with the National Evaluation Policy Framework and System.
Access to evaluations	
What will be done to ensure that evaluation results are in the public domain?	Section 6.5 of the Policy Framework states that the department must ensure that the full evaluation reports are posted on their websites as well as the management response. The range of users will be widened by adopting effective disseminating strategies, posting them on websites and sending them to partners. Cabinet has also decided that all evaluations conducted by government should be provided to DPME and be in the public domain, unless there are security concerns.
Will there be a central repository of evaluation?	All evaluation reports will be posted onto the DPME website, both evaluations under the National Evaluation Plan, and other evaluations conducted by government. Departments are expected to post evaluation reports onto their websites and DPME will also post them on the DPME website, with effect from the 2012/13 financial year. Individual departments are expected to create repositories/warehouses of data generated during evaluations. It is possible that the data may also be made available in the future.
Will departments be given latitude not to publish sensitive findings and recommendations for security purposes?	The presumption is that reports will be made public and only evaluations of a very sensitive nature will not be made public.
What if departments disagree with evaluation results?	The Policy Framework provides for a management response by departments, which includes areas of disagreement. This response will be posted onto the website together with the report. See the <i>Guideline on Management Response</i> .
Is there any strategy for communicating evaluation results?	<p>DPME has developed a guideline on <i>How to develop a Communication Strategy for Evaluation Results</i> which is available on the DPME website. However, the Policy Framework specifies the following things which should be taken into consideration in the strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As well as the full evaluation report evaluators are asked to provide a 1/3/25 report - a one page policy summary of key policy messages, a 3-4 page executive summary, and a 25 page summary report;

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Posting evaluation reports onto websites;• Sending a copy to partners in the evaluation in question;• Developing relevant communication material for specific stakeholders and sharing findings with them including the media.