

EVALUATION IN A NUTSHELL

(Updated April 2009)

This document is a short guide intended for colleagues who will be involved in an evaluation. It explains:

- 1. What evaluation is**
- 2. What its benefits are**
- 3. How to proceed**



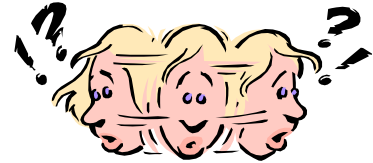
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❖ WHAT IS EVALUATION?

Evaluation is a process by which we obtain knowledge about our activities:

- How well are we doing?
- Should we keep doing the same things?
- How can we do better?
- Did we reach our objectives?
- Was it useful?



We evaluate in order to learn, not in order to spot mistakes in somebody else's work.

❖ WHAT IS NOT EVALUATION?

The term “evaluation”, as used in this document, does not refer to:

- Audit, which often focuses mainly on compliance with existing rules (performance audit, however, has many similarities with evaluation).
- Monitoring, which is related to collecting, recording and analysing measurable data over a period of time.
- Scientific studies produced with the purpose of gaining and expanding human knowledge in general.
- Assessing substances, for example, to find out whether they are dangerous to human health.
- Assessing and selecting offers for grants or contracts.
- CDRs and self-assessments.

❖ IS IMPACT ASSESSMENT RELATED TO EVALUATION?

Certainly. Impact assessment is an evaluation of problems and needs that citizens have, and the different options there are to improve a situation. Its purpose is to help choose the optimal option taking into account all assessed impacts. It is a tool used in the Commission to prepare important proposals for future actions.

❖ WHAT ARE THE KEY QUESTIONS OF AN EVALUATION?

As a general rule, evaluation focuses on some or all of the following:

- **Relevance** - To what extent do our objectives respond to the needs, problems and issues identified in target groups?
- **Effectiveness** - What results have we had? Have we reached our objectives?
- **Efficiency** - Have we obtained results at a reasonable cost?
- **Utility** - Do the impacts of our work correspond to the needs we had identified and to the problems we had intended to solve?
- **Sustainability** - Do effects last after our work has finished?

❖ WHY IS EVALUATION USEFUL?

Because, through answering the essential questions mentioned above, it generates knowledge that will help us to:

- ensure that our programmes are relevant to the needs of citizens;
- look at all the possible ways of doing things and choose the most suitable;
- improve the way we manage and deliver our policies;
- do more with the same resources, or do the same with less resources;
- find out what achievements we have really made so far, and how they compare to the objectives we had set.

**In a nutshell, evaluation helps us to take better,
more informed decisions and to develop
better programmes and policies**

❖ WHO TAKES THE DECISION TO EVALUATE?

Sometimes there is no choice. Evaluation is legally compulsory in a number of cases:

- It is demanded in the legal base of some actions, programmes, etc.
- The Financial Regulation says we have to evaluate all programmes and activities spending 5 million euros or more.
- According to one of the Commission's evaluation standards, we must periodically evaluate all activities addressed to external parties.
- The Commission requires an impact assessment for all its Work Programme items.

In many cases, however, policy managers choose to evaluate because of the many benefits they can obtain from doing so (see "Why is evaluation useful?").

❖ WHEN TO USE EXTERNAL EVALUATORS?



- The legal base specifies that the activity needs an external evaluation.
- There is reason to believe that an internal evaluation would not meet the principles of objectivity and independence.
- The evaluation needs tools and resources that are not available in-house.

❖ WHEN TO DO INTERNAL EVALUATION?



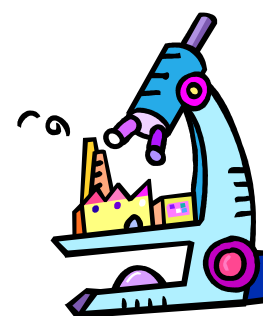
- Additional valuable knowledge can be gained by doing the evaluation in-house that would not be obtained if it was commissioned to external evaluators ("learning by doing").
- The information that will be used during the evaluation is confidential and therefore cannot be disclosed to external parties.
- The evaluation results are so urgent we cannot wait for external evaluators to do the job (which would take at least several months).
- We do not have enough money to pay for external evaluators.

Sometimes a combined internal-external evaluation can be done by outsourcing some more complicated parts of the work, such as certain data collection and analysis. SANCO's evaluation framework contract (see below) enables you to do this.

❖ WHAT DO WE EVALUATE?

We can evaluate anything we are going to do, are doing or have done. Specifically, we evaluate our :

- **Policies** (such as the Animal Health Policy)
- **Actions** (such as the European Consumer Diary project)
- **Programmes** (such as the Public Health programme)
- **Organizations** (such as the Executive Agency)
- **Legislation** (such as the directives on marketing seed and plant propagating material)
- **Etc.**



❖ WHEN DO WE EVALUATE?

We can evaluate our activity:

- At the time of designing it, to understand the citizens' needs, define our objectives, plan our activities and get our priorities right. This is called impact assessment, or ex ante evaluation.
- While it is happening, to see if we are achieving the objectives that have been set and make the necessary changes. This is called intermediate or interim evaluation.
- After we have finished it, to learn lessons that will help us in our future work. This is called final or ex post evaluation.

❖ HOW DO I DO IT?

If you are reading this document, it is probably because you will be participating in an evaluation. Congratulations!

The first thing you need to know is that you are not alone in this. **Unit 01** is here to help you. You can **contact**:

Name	Office Address	Telephone	e-mail address
Despoina Leivadinou	B232 07/118	20490	despoina.leivadinou@ec.europa.eu
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Christophe Bertrand Head of Unit	B232 07/127	99524	christophe.bertrand@ec.europa.eu

So get in touch with them and benefit from their assistance from the very beginning!

❖ HOW DOES AN EVALUATION WORK?

Your typical evaluation will go through the following phases:

1. *Decide to evaluate*

The decision to evaluate, including whether to go for an external or an internal evaluation, is taken at management level. If you think that a certain action, project, etc. would benefit from an evaluation, you should discuss it with your hierarchy and inform Unit 01.



2. *Set up an evaluation team*

In order to benefit from the experience of others –and so that others also benefit from the evaluation exercise, it is useful to set up a team of people to carry out the evaluation or, in the case of external evaluations, start and monitor the process. To be useful, this team (steering group) should be made up of:



- people who will use the results and observations of the evaluation
- people who know about the activity/action/etc. being evaluated (you, for example)
- people who know about evaluation methods (an evaluation person from SANCO's Unit 01 and/or from another DG)
- other people concerned by the evaluation (representatives from other Units, Directorates or DGs, experts, etc.).

3. Define the scope and prepare the evaluation

You and the rest of the team:

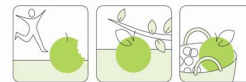
- define the scope of the evaluation applying the principle of proportionality, that is, the more important the activity to evaluate, the budget involved and the decisions to be taken, the more in-depth you will want to go;
- draft the questions that the evaluators will have to answer in order to obtain the information you need;
- identify which people will need the results of the evaluation in their work and decide the best way to communicate these;
- gather relevant documents and information already available that will help the evaluators do their job (see box "What does an evaluator do?", below);
- distribute the work among yourselves if the decision is to go for internal evaluation; or
- if it is going to be an external evaluation, appoint an evaluator through one of the available procedures, such as SANCO's evaluation framework contract, a very practical tool that Unit 01 will help you to use.



WHAT DOES AN EVALUATOR DO?

In order to answer the questions he/she is asked, an evaluator:

- **Collects information;**
- **Analyses it;**
- **Makes conclusions;**
- **Provides recommendations; and**
- **Puts all this in a report.**



In each of these stages, the evaluator will consistently use evaluation tools, which help to ensure that the evaluation and its results have the required quality to be useful. Some examples of “evaluation tools” are surveys, case studies and expert panels.

4. Do the evaluation

If you have decided on an internal evaluation, you and your team will carry out the evaluation tasks yourselves –see box “**What does an evaluator do?**”.

If you have decided on an external evaluation, then your role will be that of managing and monitoring the evaluation process. To that purpose, you and the rest of the team will:

- first assess the evaluators’ proposal and see to it that it covers your needs, then
- hold a kick-off meeting in which you discuss the evaluation with the evaluators to make sure they understand what you want them to do (and as many contacts as are necessary for the evaluators’ full understanding of the issue being evaluated), and then
- make sure the evaluation is going according to required quality standards (reliability, objectivity, timeliness, etc.). You do this by giving your input throughout the process, mainly through your comments on the draft reports the evaluators make available during the course of the evaluation, and particularly on the draft final report, in which they present their conclusions and recommendations.

TIPS ON HOW TO COMMENT EVALUATION REPORTS

DO:

- Check whether the accepted methodology has been followed;
- Provide missing facts;
- Correct mistakes;
- Give your comments through the evaluation manager.

DON'T:

- Interfere with the evaluators’ judgement;
- Aim at obtaining more favourable conclusions or more likeable recommendations;
- Use track changes;

5. Dissemination and Action Plan

This is an essential phase as your evaluation will obviously be practical only to the extent that the information it has produced is used. To that purpose, you and your colleagues will:

- communicate the evaluation results to the people identified in the preparation phase as the users of the evaluation, and
- prepare an action plan stating what you intend to do on the basis of the recommendations made and the knowledge gained, and then
- publish both the final evaluation report and your action plan in SANCO Europa, except for any parts that may be considered confidential.

Unit 01 will send the complete report or the executive summary to the Commissioner, the Director-General, SANCO's Audit Committee, and DG BUDGET. They will also post the report in IntraSANCO.

6. Follow-up

In its biannual follow-up process, **Unit 01** will follow the progress of the actions proposed in response to the evaluation recommendations, and will try to find general ways in which these recommendations can be of further use to SANCO.

❖ HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT EVALUATION?

If you want to learn more about evaluation in DG SANCO and how to do your evaluation, you can read **Evaluation: DG SANCO's Practical Guide** at: <http://intranet.sanco.cec.eu.int/intranet/we-do/assessment-tools/audit-evaluation/evaluation/managing-an-evaluation>

You will also find links to other evaluation documents and guides, as well as practical advice on evaluation on **SANCO's Evaluation Function website** at: <http://intranet.sanco.cec.eu.int/intranet/we-do/assessment-tools/audit-evaluation/evaluation>

You may also want to know that the Commission regularly holds evaluation training courses in 3 modules, both in English and in French, which you can easily request through Syslog:

- Module 1: Understanding the Challenges of Evaluation – Introductory Course*
- Module 2: Managing the Evaluation Process, and*
- Module 3: The Methods and Tools of the Evaluation.*

If you will be managing or monitoring an evaluation, it is recommended that you attend Modules 1 and 2.

