

# Evaluation Design Building Blocks

## 1 Build on Evaluation plan

Structure your evaluation using the Evaluation Plan as a foundation in terms of scheduled resources, management, array of methods, quality assurance and so on. Identify which elements should be present for future synthesis across evaluations. Use built-in flexibility to make the evaluation more relevant and useful in context.

## 2 Map uses and users

Take into account the priorities set in programming documents. Look forward to 2021-2027 priorities. What is not known? What uncertainties could affect policies to come? Engage with colleagues in MA: what would they like to know? when? to do what? Create buy-in by looking at potential uses outside structural funds too: how could your colleagues in other Departments (or other MAs!) or policy makers use the evaluation? Possible uses include improving design of future programmes, implementation arrangements, but also more thought-provoking uses (what distance have we travelled until now? what can we learn about the problems we want to address and the deployed solutions?). Are recommendations required to answer these possible uses?

## 3 Prioritise

Define the scale and scope of what you will evaluate to match interest of policy makers and potential uses. Evaluating everything with the same level of detail may be impractical and even irrelevant, even in the (optional) All-Encompassing Ex Post Evaluation. Define a "unit of analysis" that is defensible. The OP/MA limits (or current programming period) should not come in the way: set meaningful

boundaries. Within this perimeter, think in terms of proportionality (to the budget, policy salience of measures, raised expectations, knowledge gains...) and practicality (information available, etc.). Prioritising means knowing (at least partially) what is the portfolio of projects and their implementation status (achieved yet? since when?) and their ToC, at least at a basic level, to make the right choices.

## 4 Ask meaningful questions

Consider the expectations of users and translate them into questions. Use the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU value-added criteria, as well as others (e.g. inclusiveness, non-discrimination and visibility) to help you asking questions that matter and provide evaluative judgement. Start with high-level evaluation questions in evaluation plans and consider what questions could be asked under that umbrella. Be ready to discuss the questions in the Evaluation's Inception Steering Committee, with the members and the service provider. This will avoid any ambiguity and limited changes in questioning may trigger additional uses and gain some buy-in for the evaluation.

## 5 Elaborate a Theory of Change

Use existing information to develop a basic Theory of Change. Make the links between programme interventions and intended (or unintended) effects explicit. Assess rapidly whether the current portfolio could plausibly have these effects. To do so, review and build on existing ToCs from previous studies or evaluations commissioned by other MAs. See if the ToC has consequences on prioritisation or evaluation questions. Consider how additional work on the ToC (deepening definition of problem to be solved, assumptions related to solutions including mechanisms associated with success or failure...) could be useful for the next programming period.

## 6 Secure data

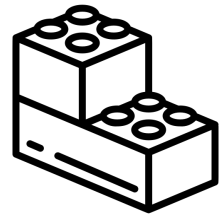
Verify that needed information is available to the evaluation. This includes access to programme data and other internal data sets that may be useful to describe the intervention and context of intervention. In particular, obtaining data on end beneficiaries (not direct recipients of funding) could be difficult. Prior cleaning means a more efficient use of the evaluation's budget. Secure needed external information (e.g. collected by the National Statistical Office) in advance when needed. Confidentiality arrangements may also be identified and negotiated before the evaluation starts.

## 7 Choose approach and methods

Contemplate the pros and cons of available methods that could be used to answer the evaluation questions. Some methods and approaches rely on specific datasets, which may not be available. In that case, what is the array of approaches that could be used? Decide whether preparatory studies (e.g. an evaluability assessment, or database cleaning) are needed, and if methods are to be pre-specified (even in general terms) or if this is left to the service provider. Consider the capacity of service providers to deliver the needed approaches. Verify whether foreseen time and budget are consistent with the methodological consequences.

## 8 Involve stakeholders

Explore different opportunities for involving stakeholders in the process, using existing dialogue/co-operation arrangements when they exist. Think about how the Steering Committee for the evaluation could be composed to involve policy partners, knowledgeable actors. Consider possibilities to entrust the SC with fine-tuning the evaluation design and engaging with the results and lessons learned. Plan for additional communication on the results.



# Evaluation Planning Building Blocks

## 1 Baseline Review & scoping

*This would involve:* reviewing the agreed programme – OPs and measures – in relation to EU, national, sectoral and territorial strategies/objectives and needs analyses previously conducted; and conducting an evidence review based on previous evaluations, other studies, published literature etc. so as to ensure existing knowledge is fully incorporated

*Outputs:* Baseline document that makes clear the scope of potential evaluations including concentrations and clusters in relation to programme and stakeholder objectives

## 2 Capability review

*This would involve:* reviewing the capabilities and preconditions that need to be in place to plan, commission and manage an evaluation portfolio including for example:

- Quality Assurance systems;
- Evaluation capacities both within MA evaluation functions and on the supply side;
- The state of data systems and their areas of weakness;
- Links with external experts including with specialists, consulting firms and relevant university units;
- Existing consultation and dialogue arrangements with stakeholders/partners and beneficiaries;
- And mechanisms for MA coordination

*Outputs:* identification of ‘pinch’ points and areas where remedial steps are needed

## 3 Map interdependencies

*This would involve:* identifying overlapping objectives and target groups; the prevalence of horizontal principles such as climate change mitigation, inclusiveness and non-discrimination and environmental sustainability; and points of overlap across national, territorial and administrative boundaries

*Outputs:* a first mapping of the scope for ‘joint’, ‘thematic’ evaluations

## 4 Prioritisation and budgeting

*This would involve:* Reviewing the outputs of the ‘Baseline Review’ and ‘Interdependency Mapping’ so as to identify candidate evaluations that should be assessed against criteria such as: centrality, risk, innovativeness etc.

*Outputs:* Identification of candidate evaluations ranked in terms of priority with indicative budgets attached to each priority area

## 5 Questions, criteria & methodology

*This would involve:*

- Identifying high level evaluation questions (HLQs) for each candidate evaluation (outputs of Building Block 4);
- Indication of the kinds of evidence needed to inform Better Regulation Criteria – i.e. Effectiveness, Efficiency, Relevance, Coherence and EU value added;
- An indication of the likely methodologies that would be needed to answer evaluation questions and generate required evidence.

*Outputs:* a ‘template’ that summarised HLQs, evidence requirements and outline methodologies for each candidate evaluation

## 6 Consultation and dialogue

*This would involve:* Preparing a ‘scoping document’ that indicated priority areas and main candidate evaluations to discuss with partners, stakeholders, users and beneficiaries; and with evaluation providers/companies in order to a) receive feedback from potential and actual ‘users’; b) identify delivery and implementation issues c) mobilise support for positive engagement in Programmes and their evaluation.

*Outputs:* A summary of stakeholder responses and review of issues identified by stakeholders, users and beneficiaries and preparation of a response document that highlights implications for candidate evaluations

## 7 Defining Interim Plan

*This would involve:* collating the outputs from all other ‘building blocks’ so as to prepare a provisional list and timetable for evaluations indicating priorities, themes, budgets and outline methodologies

*Outputs:* A provisional plan to meet requirements of CPR Article 44(5)) submitted to Monitoring Committee

## 8 Systems strengthening

*This would involve:* Collating outputs of ‘Capability Review’ (Building block 2) and ‘Consultation and Dialogue’ (Building block 6) to identify which areas need strengthening. This might include for example: improved Quality Assurance systems; priorities for data ‘cleaning’ and inter-operability of databases; establishment of network meetings with evaluation providers; a plan to build links with relevant domain experts and academics; and training/professional development requirements for staff of evaluation function.

*Outputs:* A prioritised list of system strengthening ‘actions’ with time-lines and budgets attached.