

Quality checklists for Impact evaluations

DRAWING UP TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR IMPACT EVALUATIONS

How should programme impacts and effects be identified?

- Conceptualising & identifying impacts is difficult; and sometimes data is unavailable. When to assess impacts and which impacts affect whom, are also design issues. Stakeholders' participation helps identify valid impacts.
- Proposers should indicate how they understand and will identify impacts – including impacts for different groups. Commissioners should indicate data availability problems.

Is there already substantial knowledge about how these kinds of programmes work, perhaps a credible Theory of Change?

- If much is already known there might both be risks of duplication and waste; and advantages building on existing knowledge
- Proposers should demonstrate familiarity with current state of evaluation/research knowledge and indicate how this will shape their use of Theories of Change

What kind of use for whom is envisaged – demonstrating past effectiveness; scaling-up and replication; improvement; learning for future policy and practice?

- Purposes of IE may differ. It is important to identify main purposes as this determines evaluation questions and choice of methods able to answer these questions.
- Proposers should be expected to discuss how overall purpose connects with evaluation questions – and show an awareness of design and method implications

Is the programme made up of a single intervention or several? What is the programme 'architecture'?

- Programme attributes constrain the choice of IE designs and methods. Multi-level or decentralised programmes offer opportunities for nested designs
- Proposers should be asked to demonstrate understandings of programme attributes and the implications for designs and combinations of designs.

How important is context and how far are different causal and contextual factors likely to influence impacts?

- Programmes that are open to multiple influences – complex, embedded rather than simple and self-contained -will need to focus on the contribution of programme interventions rather than attribution
- Proposers should be asked to discuss the programme context including the importance of multiple causal factors; and how this relates to a contribution or attribution focus
- Does the IE set out to measure how much of an impact a programme has had – and is this feasible?
- Sometimes it is possible to assess contribution but not extent (how much). Whether the programme has impacts for large numbers of households, or few will also determine the possibility of statistical designs and methods.
- If appropriate, proposers should be asked to discuss their approach to measurement and extent.

ASSESSING PROPOSALS

- Have impacts been identified and understood?
- Are stakeholders going to be involved in validating these impacts?
- Has existing knowledge about this kind of programme, including ToCs, been taken into account?
- Are programmes purposes understood and evaluation questions clearly stated?
- Has the proposal shown how IE design is able to link cause and effect and answer evaluation questions?
- Is the proposed design consistent with programme attributes and the simplicity or complexity of the programme?
- Is the timing of the IE consistent with the likely trajectory of intended change?
- If the programme is complex are the proposed methods able to disentangle more than one cause?
- Are proposals putting forward measurement of impacts consistent with the kind of programme data available and collectable; and the designs and methods to be used? Have protocols and methodological guidance, where these exist, been cited and used
- Are examples of work by members of the proposal team that uses similar methods and designs been provided.

QUALITY OF REPORTS AND FINDINGS

- Does the report make it clear how causal claims have been arrived at?
- How have different types of theory been used - testing programme assumptions or building on wider research? Has new theory been developed?
- Is the report clear about when and where impacts can be observed?
- Does the report convincingly identify contextual and causal factors and take them into account?
- Is the chosen design able to support explanatory analysis (answering how and why questions) if this was required?
- Is there a consistent link between evaluation questions asked, overall design, data collection and analytic methods used?
- Have alternative explanations that do not depend on programme effects been considered and systematically eliminated or accounted for?
- Have beneficiaries and other stakeholders been involved in scoping the evaluation and validating and interpreting results?
- Are the ways methods were applied and data collected clearly described and well documented?