

C-4: Contextual Factors affecting the choice of evaluation design, implementation, and use

Use this checklist to determine factors to consider related to the evaluation context and evaluation design considerations

Contextual factor	Dimensions	How this can affect the evaluation
1. Purpose of evaluation¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Formative, i.e. learning and improvement of planned intervention during process, in order to improve the process itself b. Summative, i.e. accountability and judgment of the overall merit, worth, value and significance of completed program. (Though this can feel like a post mortem, summative evaluation can inform major decisions about future programming.) a. Compliance with stated program plan b. Impact: existing or potential achievement of higher level outcomes, e.g. improved quality of life of intended beneficiaries c. Adapting an intervention to a new context d. Adapting an existing program to a major change e. To help make resource allocation decisions on competing or best alternatives f. To help identify emerging problems and build consensus on the causes of a problem and how to respond <p>To support public sector reform and innovation</p>	<p>Different purposes require different methodologies, different levels of methodological rigor and are commissioned at different stages of the project.</p>
2. Complexity of the evaluand²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Simple project</i>: few intervention components, defined time-line b. <i>Complicated program</i>: sector program with various components, often combining several individual projects c. <i>Complex interventions</i>: e.g. general budget support or multi-program interventions often involving 	<p>Most conventional impact evaluation methodologies were designed for use at the project level. They can be adapted, sometimes with difficulties to evaluate complicated programs but they can normally not be applied to evaluate complex interventions. The tools available for</p>

	several funding agencies and operating at the national or cross-country level	evaluating complex interventions are less developed and less precise.
3. The local and national context within which the evaluation will be implemented	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Economic context b. Political context c. Policy, legal and administrative context d. Organizations and agencies involved in the project e. Natural environment f. Characteristics and culture of the target population, politics, history, socio-economic context, values, relative peace or conflict, needs and interests of stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project outcomes and impacts will often be affected by these factors, and contextual analysis should be a part of the evaluation design. • Political and organizational factors can often influence the range of evaluation designs and may often bias or constrain the evaluation
3. Level	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. One or a few local communities b. Program or sector level (which could involve multiple countries) c. Multi-national/Regional (several countries) d. National (one country) e. Sub-national region (e.g. district or province) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The higher the level of the intervention the more complex, and often less precise, the evaluation design. • Multi-level evaluation designs will often be required for the higher levels.
4. Scale of the intervention	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Small (e.g. less than 5,000 individuals or households) b. Medium (e.g. up to 50,000 units) c. Large (e.g. over 50,000 units) 	See previous point
5. Size of the evaluation budget⁴	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Small (e.g. less than 5% of program budget) b. Moderate (e.g. up to 15% of program budget) c. Generous (e.g. over 15% -- for example, a major purpose is research, to test a new intervention) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When evaluation budgets are small this will often limit the sample size and the precision of the statistical estimates. Budget constraints also limit the time available for planning, instrument development and testing, data collection and analysis. • Budget can also affect the level of professional expertise

<p>6. When evaluation commissioned</p>	<p>a. Start of intervention (baseline/pre-test) b. Mid-term c. End of intervention (post-test) d. After intervention completed (ex-post)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The later the evaluation is commissioned the more limited the range of evaluation design options. • Even when it is planned to conduct a baseline study before project implementation begins, administrative delays in commissioning the evaluation and/or political pressures to start delivering services mean that project implementation will often have started before the baseline study is conducted • When an evaluation is not commissioned until towards the end of the project it is difficult to conduct process analysis and estimates of baseline have to be based on reconstructed data which is usually less reliable and often not available.
<p>7. Duration of the evaluation</p>	<p>a. Continues throughout intervention cycle b. Evaluation commissioned late in the intervention cycle but sufficient time is budgeted to conduct required data collection and analysis c. Great time pressure (the evaluation must be completed in weeks or a few months)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When evaluations are only conducted at one point in time (for example over a few weeks at the end of the project) the quality of the findings is more limited and useful than when the evaluation can continue over a longer period. • The analysis of the project implementation process, which often has a critical effect on outcomes, is often ignored in short-duration evaluations
<p>8. Client</p>	<p>a. Donor agency b. Planning ministry</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The client will have a major influence on the evaluation questions that are asked and

	<p>c. Implementing agency d. Civil society or other</p>	<p>often on the evaluation methodology and timing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So different evaluations of the same project can have a different focus depending on who commissions them • The client may also determine what questions are NOT asked or which groups are NOT consulted.
<p>9. Who conducts the evaluation</p>	<p>a. Internal evaluator (or evaluation team) b. Central government agencies (e.g. ministry of planning) c. External consultant(s) (individual or team) d. Donor agency (implements or designs the evaluation) e. NGO</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internally commissioned evaluations have a different focus and purpose than externally conducted evaluations • Different agencies may recommend or use different evaluation methodologies. • Many donor agencies promote particular evaluation methodologies (for example RCT, regression discontinuity or in other cases, for example a Ministry of Women's Affairs, qualitative methods)

Source: Adapted from Bamberger, Rugh and Mabry "RealWorld Evaluation" (2nd Edition). Scheduled for publication in 2011.

¹ Adapted from Patton (2010, as summarized in Exhibit 2.2, pp. 44-46 and Exhibit 10.1 pp. 308-313) and Morra and Rist 2009 (Box 1.1. p. 15) with additional categories added by the present authors to reflect other purposes of funding agencies and clients

³ The concept of "large" and "small" with respect to cost and scale are relative. What might be considered "small scale" or "low-cost" by a major donor might be considered very large by an NGO

⁴ Though we give relative budget percentages for illustrative purposes, obviously the actual amount available for evaluation makes a significant difference on the kind of evaluation that can be undertaken.

⁵ Adapted from Patton (2010:97ff)