

Evaluation Standards

The *evaluation standards* of the Polish Evaluation Society were developed together with representatives of the various communities involved in evaluation – public administration, non-governmental organizations, private firms, academic institutions and independent consultants. Work on developing the standards was made possible by European Union financing from the 2005 Transitions Facility Programme “Strengthening evaluation capacity in the public sector”. The project, “Creating evaluation standards together in Poland” was implemented by the Polish Evaluation Society from January to November 2008.

These standards are based on the practical experiences of commissioning and evaluating publicly-financed projects, but are also applicable to evaluations performed by the public sector, non-governmental organizations as well as internal evaluations. They refer to the process of self-evaluation to a lesser degree.

We anticipate that work on these standards will be ongoing, so that they continue to respond to the developing evaluation culture in Poland and the emerging needs and challenges faced by persons within the evaluation community.

We welcome comments to the standards, as well as proposals for additional issues that they should address. This can be done by contacting us at pte@pte.org.pl or by participating in the discussion forum on standards at www.pte.org.pl.

*The Polish Evaluation Society
Warsaw, July 27, 2008*

Glossary of terms used in the **Evaluation Standards**:

Evaluator – an institution, firm or person conducting an evaluation, which includes at least one of the following tasks: preparing an evaluation concept, developing research methodology, preparing research tools, data collection, analyzing data and elaborating results, formulating conclusions and recommendations.

Commissioner – an institution, firm or person commissioning and/or ordering an evaluation, the initiator of an evaluation process and proprietor of evaluation results. The commissioner can also be the addressee of recommendations resulting from an evaluation.

Stakeholders – institutions, firms or persons directly or indirectly engaged in the evaluation process, especially those who: determine the need for an evaluation;

are responsible for developing the evaluation project and having the evaluation implemented; are responsible for the practical use of evaluation results; are directly or indirectly included in the evaluation; have an interest in the evaluation results.

External evaluation – an evaluation performed by an entity that is independent of and external to the COMMISSIONER and the evaluated activity.

Internal evaluation – an evaluation performed by an entity that is part of the COMMISSIONER'S organizational structure, but independent of the evaluated activity.

Self-evaluation – an evaluation performed by persons within the organizational structure of the evaluated activity.

Preamble

The aim of evaluation is to improve the quality of activities (including public policies) by increasing their adequacy, effectiveness, utility, efficiency and sustainability.

The **Evaluation Standards** were developed with the aim of supporting persons engaged in the evaluation process in ensuring the highest quality of evaluation performance.

The **Evaluation Standards** should serve as a reference in preparing, commissioning and performing evaluations, as well as in utilizing their results. The task of the **Standards** is to show how persons engaged in evaluation can ensure a process of the highest quality.

The purpose of having all persons and institutions of the evaluation community use the Polish Evaluation Society's **Evaluation Standards** as a reference is to unify understanding of the basic ethical principles in the evaluation process and to express mutual agreement on respecting them.

The **Evaluation Standards** have a general character and regard evaluation as an aid in decision-making and management in a democratic society.

Section I: General Principles

The evaluator and commissioner should ensure the high quality of an evaluation at every stage of the process. To meet this aim, they should possess the appropriate potential and competence – knowledge, skills and professional experience.

The fundamental values required in the evaluation process are: independence, reliability, honesty, objectivity and a democratic and ethical character of the evaluation.

The evaluator and commissioner should ensure an independent and impartial implementation of the evaluation process, free of any type of influence on the course of formulating conclusions and recommendations.

The evaluator should maintain a neutral world view during the evaluation process, refraining from the disclosure of his/her own opinions of a political, religious, racial, etc. nature.

The equality of all persons involved in evaluation research should be ensured, as well as respect for differences related to culture, ethnicity, world view, religion, political beliefs, race, disability, age, sex and sexual orientation.

Section II: Planning the evaluation

1. The evaluation is performed for legitimate reasons

Evaluations should be commissioned only if they are essential for the management of a given undertaking and/or have high value for practice and the attainment of knowledge.

The decision to commission an evaluation should be undertaken responsibly and, in the case of activities financed by public sources, in compliance with the public good and with the appropriate management of funds earmarked for public aims.

In order to plan the best possible evaluation, the needs of major stakeholders should be identified and included in the planning process to the extent that this is possible.

2. The evaluation has precisely defined aims, subject and scope

A successful evaluation must have precisely defined and logically consistent aims, subject, key questions for investigation, and criteria to be applied for evaluating activities.

The evaluation design should have clearly defined objectives, all being expressly articulated. The commissioner should not have any undisclosed aims, especially such that could result in the manipulation of persons/institutions engaged in the evaluation process or broader social groups. The focus of an evaluation should not be dictated by pressing political needs of a partisan nature.

To ensure a clear understanding of the evaluation's objectives by all engaged entities, the use of evaluation results should be identified.

References should be made to other related research and evaluations that have been or are being concurrently performed.

Criteria for assessing the quality of an evaluation report should be formulated during the evaluation's planning stage.

3. The methodology for performing an evaluation is realistically defined

The research methodology should be adequate for the aims, subject and scope of the evaluation. For this reason, a rational and precise estimate of the resources required to perform the evaluation in a manner consistent with its requirements is essential.

Key resources to be considered include: time, human resources, organizational capacity, technical resources and financial means.

Resources earmarked for an evaluation should be sufficient for the scope of the planned evaluation research. An evaluation should not be undertaken if it is lacking the required resources.

In planning the research methodology, it is especially important to identify available data and sources of information, and to determine which data will be made available to the evaluator. The readiness of the research subjects – individuals and organizations – to participate in the evaluation should also be ensured.

The requirements of the research methodology should be clearly defined. The indicated framework of the evaluation and its methodological concept should enable the evaluator to contribute to its

design. The commissioner should present the criteria used in assessing the evaluator's proposed research methodology and/or present a proposed minimum of methods to be used in performing the evaluation.

To ensure research of high quality, the commissioner needs to identify the key risks that may surface during the evaluation and impact its performance. The evaluator should inform the commissioner about problems, both those foreseen during the planning stage, as well as those encountered while performing the evaluation.

4. Clear criteria are described for choosing an evaluator

In cases of public tenders, the commissioner should not prepare an evaluation for a specific contractor. The commissioner should provide a fair chance for a variety of contractors to have the opportunity to conduct the evaluation.

Preparing the tender and selecting the contractor should be done in a transparent and open manner, understandable to all interested parties.

Competitiveness and transparency should be maintained in choosing an evaluation contractor. The criteria for choosing a contractor should be formulated clearly and precisely. The main criteria for choosing a contractor should be the quality of the offer. The tender process should result in choosing the most beneficial offer. Cost should not be the deciding criteria.

The commissioner should inform potential evaluation contractors of the financial resources allotted for the evaluation.

5. The independence of an evaluation

In agreeing to perform an evaluation, the evaluator should be independent of the evaluated activity and commissioner. Should a conflict of interest arise, the evaluator should resign from performing the evaluation and/or openly disclose this information.

The maximum degree of independence should be ensured for persons directly preparing, commissioning and accepting an evaluation from the departments within the same institution implementing the evaluated activity. Such an evaluation unit within an organization should be directly responsible to the management board of the institution.

The principle of independence should be respected in cases of internal evaluations.

6. Compliance with ethical principles

The manner of commissioning evaluations should ensure reliability and compliance with the ethical principles of conducting research.

The planned research should ensure the ability to comply with the terms of the contract.

The evaluation tender should be formulated in such a way as to enable the evaluator to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of research subjects. The commissioner should not expect to receive source materials, which could compromise anonymity.

Evaluations should not be commissioned from public funds to increase or decrease the power of specific individuals or institutions in the political arena.

Section III: Performing the evaluation

7. Ensuring an evaluation of high quality

The commissioner and evaluator should have the appropriate competence and organizational capacity to enable the effective and efficient management of the evaluation process.

The knowledge, skills and experience of the evaluator and commissioner should assure the performance of an evaluation according to its agreed scope of work, time schedule and budget.

The evaluator should conduct research, collect and analyze data and reach conclusions with due care and accuracy.

8. Relevance and reliability in evaluation research

Every evaluation requires the development of an evaluation plan with a description of the methodology to be used.

Evaluation is based on scientific research methods. An evaluation may include the use of various methodological approaches. The choice of methods should relate to the objectives and scope of the evaluation, as well as to the data that is accessible.

The function of the research process is to collect data that is relevant (appropriately chosen), reliable, adequate and credible (veracious, evidence-based).

The evaluator should make efficient use of the methodological framework, time and budget of an evaluation.

The evaluator should present research results reliably and scrupulously regardless of the level of complexity.

Research tools developed for an evaluation should adequately fulfill the research objectives and accepted methodology.

9. Participation and good cooperation during the evaluation process

Communication in the evaluation process should be based on continuous dialogue between the evaluator and commissioner.

The relationship between the commissioner and evaluator should have the characteristics of a partnership based on mutual respect. Both parties should work together closely. The commissioner should assist the evaluator in every possible manner.

The evaluator and commissioner should maintain constant contact through individuals appointed for this purpose. They should openly inform each other about how the evaluation is proceeding. In cases where conflict may arise, the parties should attempt to resolve it amicably. If this is not possible, they may resort to arbitration. The arbitrator(s) should be chosen mutually by the evaluator and commissioner. An arbitrator can be selected during the contractual stage.

The evaluator and commissioner should be open to change and react flexibly to emerging opportunities, problems and significant threats to the evaluation process and result.

The evaluation should be performed in a facilitative manner, adequate to the objectives and scope of the research and inclusive of the most important stakeholders.

10. Complying with the terms of the contract

The contract regulating the mutual work of the commissioner and evaluator should protect the interests of each party equally and strive to ensure an evaluation of the highest quality.

The contract clauses should be clearly and precisely formulated and understandable to both parties. The contract should define the rights, obligations and responsibilities of both parties. Both parties should conscientiously and loyally comply with the conditions of the contract. However, they should be able to request its modification or renegotiation in justifiable circumstances.

In addition to clauses regulated by existing laws, the contract should define the following issues:

- the possibility of modifying the research design should unforeseen circumstances arise, to the extent that this furthers the achievement of the evaluation's objectives,
- the manner of resolving eventual conflicts and/or identification of an arbitrator,
- copyrights, including the protection of the evaluator's copyrights and ensuring the copyright protections of the persons developing the research tools used in the evaluation,
- guarantee the impartiality of experts in matters pertaining to the evaluation's factual content,
- precisely define the manner and schedule of delivering the products anticipated by the contract,
- allow the submission of explanations by the contractor when problems occur in keeping to the time schedule or executing the terms of the contract,
- protect the interests of persons affected by the evaluation and ensure the effective anonymity of personal and institutional data,
- precisely define which data provided to the evaluator by the commissioner are confidential.

11. Ensuring the high quality of relations between the evaluator and study subjects

The evaluator should:

- respect all persons and entities involved in the evaluation, especially with regard to the principles of confidentiality and anonymity,
 - maintain a neutral and objective demeanor with the study subjects,
 - understand the situational context of the study subjects and work with them sensitively and with empathy,
 - provide all study subjects with the conditions and opportunity to fully express themselves as needed by the evaluation.
-

Section IV: Communicating and utilizing evaluation results

12. The evaluation report has a transparent structure and uses clear language

The format of the report and manner of presenting data should be guided by the specific needs of the commissioner and the evaluation's aims.

The report should have a clear structure, that is, it should include at minimum the following elements: evaluation aims, methodology, description of the research process, analysis of results, conclusions and recommendations, table of contents and a summary.

The language of the report should be clear and understandable to the recipients. The evaluator and commissioner should reach agreement on how the key concepts in the report are understood.

13. The reliability of the evaluation report

The evaluation report should provide a reliable and exhaustive response to the issues under study as set forth in the commission.

The report's theses should be based on the empirical data collected.

The commissioner should not interfere with the results of the evaluation research. The approval of the evaluator is required for any changes to the report.

14. Precisely formulated conclusions and recommendations

The evaluation report should present conclusions and recommendations in a separate section. However, this does not preclude the evaluator from also presenting specific conclusions and recommendations in the body of the report as the logical outcome of summarizing particular stages of the research.

Conclusions in the report should be drawn from the data collected during the evaluation and the evaluator's reliable and independent analysis.

Conclusions should directly relate to the key issues diagnosed during the evaluation: both those directly related to the research questions, as well as those that were additionally identified while conducting research. Recommendations should relate to both the positive and the negative key conclusions of the research.

Conclusions and recommendations should not be general, abstract theses, but should reference a specific reality and be operationalized. Essential traits of conclusions and recommendations include: discernment, specificity, clarity and precision of formulation.

15. Conclusions and recommendations are consulted

A discussion should be held with stakeholders about the relevance of conclusions and recommendations after their initial formulation. Stakeholders should have the right to provide feedback about the conclusions and recommendations of an evaluation.

After presenting the initial version of the evaluation report, the discussion between the evaluator and stakeholders should serve to fine tune the recommendations and delete those that are obviously inapt and/or unfeasible in their implementation.

Implementable recommendations include both those that are operational (able to be carried out over a short period of time; for example, those not requiring legislative changes), as well as those that are strategic (requiring a longer time to carry out).

If needed, differences of opinion should be summarized in a report and attached as a product of the consultation process.

16. Utilizing recommendations

Evaluation results should be used in decision-making processes.

The evaluation process should include the development of clear implementation procedures for the recommendations, including the aims and methods of their adoption. To the extent possible, this process should indicate to whom the recommendations are addressed and provide an initial time schedule for implementation. Specific and clearly defined tasks should strengthen the chances of having the recommendations implemented.

Organizing a meeting with the addressees of recommendations is justified, to demonstrate the benefits of their implementation, promote better understanding of the proposed modifications, strengthen the chances of their acceptance, and motivate stakeholders to work for the changes.

Implementing recommendations requires systematic monitoring to ensure that they are properly adopted, or to eventually amend the manner of their adoption, should problems arise in the process. This task is the responsibility of the commissioner, as monitoring the implementation of recommendations is not part of the evaluation process.



This publication was produced with the assistance of the European Union's 2005 Transitions Facility Programme Strengthening evaluation capacity in the public sector, budget line item TF2005/017-488.01.02.06. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the Polish Evaluation Society and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.



Fundacja
FUNDUSZ WSPÓŁPRACY