Internal Oversight Service
Evaluation Section

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Guidelines for Developing Terms of References

for Internal and External Evaluations

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These guidelines aim to assist programme sectors and field offices in the preparation of Terms of References (ToRs) for external and internal evaluations. They set out in detail the information that Terms of References should contain.

Introduction

An evaluation cannot be effectively carried out without a sound Terms of Reference that clearly sets out expectations and what is to be delivered. The ToR for an evaluation provides the purpose, process and product of the evaluation. It clearly sets out the context for the evaluation, the purpose of the evaluation, the evaluation scope, the evaluation criteria, key evaluation questions, an indicative timeframe and deliverables.

The concerned sector[1] is responsible for drafting the ToR. The process for developing the ToR should be a participatory one that involves the key stakeholders and users of the evaluation. The Internal Oversight Service (IOS) provides advice and feedback on the ToR to ensure it meets these guidelines. IOS must approve the Terms of References for strategically significant evaluations.

The following material indicates what each ToR should contain.

1   Title

❑   State the title of what is being evaluated.

2   Background information

❑   Briefly describe the history and current status of the programme[2], including objectives, expected outcomes, expected results, major activities, duration, budget and legislative authority and mandate. It should answer why, when and how the programme was established.

❑   Describe how the programme fits into strategic frameworks: the C/5 and C/4, the Millennium Development Goals, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), Common Country Assessment (CCA), UNESCO cluster or regional strategies and to what extent it relates to UNESCO priorities or areas envisaged for specific targeted intervention[3].

❑   Describe how the programme is linked to the work of other programme implementing partners such as National Commissions and local UN agencies.

❑   Append the desk study, removing any confidential information, and refer the reader to it for further programmatic information.

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[1] This may also be field office, category I institute or centre. For simplicity, this document refers solely to sector.
[2] An activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area or institution can be evaluated. For simplicity, this document refers solely to programme.
[3] In the UNESCO 34 C/4 Medium Term Strategy 2008-2013 priority is accorded to 'Africa ' and 'gender equality', whereas specific targeted intervention is envisaged for 'Youth', the least developed countries (LDCs), and 'Small Island developing states (SIDS).

3   Purpose of the evaluation

❑   Who initiated the evaluation? The evaluation might have been foreseen in the C/5 or may have been requested by the Executive Board, the Director-General or the donor.

❑   Why is the evaluation being undertaken now? Is it a mid-term or ex-post evaluation?

❑   What are the objectives of the evaluation?

❑   How will the evaluation process and/or results be used?

❑   Who are the key users and target audiences? Is the evaluation targeting a specific information or decision-making need (conference, planning activity, Executive Board)?

4   Evaluation scope

❑   Specify the timeframe to be covered by the evaluation, the geographical coverage, the thematic coverage and/or project coverage.

❑   List the major questions the evaluation should answer – they should relate to the purpose and be precisely stated to guide the evaluator in collecting information and data. The questions should be organised around the chosen evaluation criteria, which usually are efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, impact and sustainability. Where applicable, evaluation questions should be formulated with a gender perspective and the evaluation shall present findings accordingly.

❑   Standard questions for efficiency include:

- What measures have been taken during planning and implementation to ensure that resources are efficiently used?
- Have the outputs been delivered in a timely manner?
- Could the activities and outputs been delivered with fewer resources without reducing their quality and quantity?
- Could more activities and outputs have been delivered with the same resources?
- Have UNESCO's organizational structure, managerial support and coordination mechanisms effectively supported their delivery?

❑   Standard questions for effectiveness include:

- What has been the progress made towards achievement of the expected outcomes and expected results?
- What are the reasons for the achievement or non-achievement?
- To what extent have beneficiaries been satisfied with the results?
- To which of the five functions (laboratory of ideas, standard-setter, clearing house, capacity-builder in Member States, catalyst for international cooperation) has the programme been contributing?
- Is the programme cost-effective, i.e. could the outcomes and expected results have been achieved at lower cost through adopting a different approach and/or using alternative delivery mechanisms?
- Does UNESCO have a comparative advantage in designing and implementing this programme?
- Does the programme have effective monitoring mechanisms in place?

❑ Standard questions for relevance include:

- Are the programme objectives addressing identified needs of the target group(s)?
- Do the activities address the problems identified?
- Is the programme consistent with the C/5 and C/4, the Millennium Development Goals and other international development goals?

❑ Standard questions for impact include:

- What are the intended and unintended, positive and negative, long term effects of the programme?
- To what extent can the changes that have occurred as a result of the programme be identified and measured?
- To what extent can the identified changes be attributed to the programme?

❑ Standard questions for sustainability include:

- What is the likelihood that the benefits from the programme will be maintained for a reasonably long period of time if the programme were to cease?
- Is the programme supported by local institutions and well integrated with local social and cultural conditions?
- Are requirements of local ownership satisfied?
- Are relevant host-country institutions characterised by good governance?
- Do partners have the financial capacity to maintain the benefits from the programme?

5 Deliverables

❑ Specify Deliverable 1: An inception report which contains the results chain of the programme (drawn from the desk study), an evaluation plan and a list of reviewed documents. The evaluation plan should contain the proposed data collection methods and data sources to be used for answering each evaluation question. The plan should also contain a timeline of key dates.

❑ Specify Deliverable 2: Draft evaluation report which should be delivered with adequate time to allow stakeholder discussion of the findings and formulation of recommendations.

❑ Specify Deliverable 3: Final evaluation report which should be structured as follows:

- Executive Summary (maximum four pages)
- Programme description
- Evaluation purpose
- Evaluation methodology
- Findings
- Lessons learnt
- Recommendations
- Annexes (including interview list, data collection instruments, key documents consulted, Terms of Reference).

❑ State the language which the deliverables are to be written in. This will usually be English and/or French.

6   Schedule

❑   Draw up an indicative timeframe indicating when the deliverables are due and to whom. Include any key meetings such as presentation of emerging findings to stakeholders.

7   Logistics

❑   Identify the logistical support needed such as materials and office space.

❑   Specify the responsibilities of the evaluator, donor, the sector and IOS. The evaluator will commonly be responsible for logistics: office space, administrative and secretarial support, telecommunications, printing of documentation, etc. The evaluator is also responsible for the dissemination of all methodological tools such as surveys, but the UNESCO sector will facilitate this process to the extent possible by providing contact information such as email addresses. The donor might be requested to provide planning documents, mission reports or other relevant documents.

8   Evaluation team

❑   Specify the size of the team required. Estimate the number of person-days.

❑   Identify the composition and competencies required. The team should always demonstrate (a) extensive knowledge of, and experience in applying, qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods; (b) a strong record in designing and leading evaluations; and (c) data analysis skills. Detailed knowledge of the role of the UN and its programming is desirable. Additional qualifications and skill areas that might be specified include:

- Technical competence in sector or issue to be evaluated
- Language proficiency
- In-country or regional experience
- In cases where gender analysis is required specific expertise in gender equality and mainstreaming issues would be an asset.

❑   State that large evaluation teams should be multicultural with appropriate gender balance and geographic representation.

❑   State that the evaluators are required to submit two or three examples of evaluation reports recently completed when responding to the Terms of Reference. If possible, one or more of the reports should be relevant, or similar to, the subject of evaluation.