

# 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

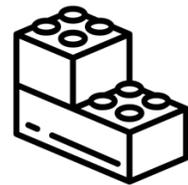
Contemplate the pros and cons of available methods that could be used to answer the evaluation questions. Some methods and approaches rely on specific datasets, which may not be available. In that case, what is the array of approaches that could be used? Decide whether preparatory studies (e.g. an evaluability 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.

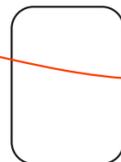
**What to do if...** Nobody seems to be interested in the evaluation? There is an intense political pressure around the topic being evaluated

**What to do if...** The actions being funded are not well known? There are too many different types of funded projects or interventions / targeted publics under a Structural / Thematic Objective? Structural funds are used in support of a larger policy?



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**What to do if...** No projects have been funded yet or effects did not have time to time to unfold? Provisions of the Evaluation Plan are not relevant anymore



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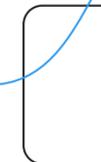
**2** Map uses and users

**3** Prioritise

**What to do if...** Objectives are unclear? Overambitious? Expected effects are contradicting or not articulated with each other?

**4** Ask meaningful questions

**5** Elaborate a Theory of Change



**6** Secure data

**7** Choose approach and methods

**8** Involve stakeholders

**What to do if...** The authority funds other interventions more likely to contribute to expected impacts? Stakeholders want to ask too many questions? Stakeholders do not agree about what constitutes success?

**What to do if...** No monitoring data is available? Data is not gathered in a database? Beneficiaries/operators did not provide data related to end beneficiaries

**What to do if...** Expected changes are difficult to measure? It is difficult to determine in advance which methods would be best to evaluate? There is a risk of political interference with the choice of cases to be investigated?

**What to do if...** The authority is not used to associate external stakeholders? Targeted publics of the intervention are not well represented? Stakeholders are reluctant to participate in the evaluation?