

Department of State Program and Project Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy



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PURPOSE

The Department of State is committed to using design, monitoring, evaluation, and data analysis best practices to achieve the most effective U.S. foreign policy outcomes and greater accountability to our primary stakeholders, the American people. This policy identifies best practices and establishes requirements to enable the Department to more fully characterize and account for the various ways bureaus and independent offices utilize their resources to achieve bureau, office, and Department-level goals and objectives. The purpose of the policy is to establish a clear line of sight from what the Department wants to achieve as documented in its strategic plans, to how the Department intends to achieve it through key programs and projects, to data on whether these efforts are working as intended based on monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities. This policy applies to new and ongoing bureau and independent office efforts across diplomatic engagement and foreign assistance. Bureaus and independent offices should maintain documentation pertaining to the completion of 18 FAM 300 requirements, as they are subject to audit by the OIG or GAO.

AUTHORITIES

The authorities relevant to the Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy are found in:

- The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961
- Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016
- Program Management Improvement Accountability Act of 2016
- Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act of 2010
- E-Government Act of 2002
- Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996

DEFINITIONS

Baseline: Data that are collected before or at the start of a program, project, or process and provide a basis for planning and/or assessing subsequent progress and impact.

Evaluation: The systematic collection and analysis of information about the characteristics and outcomes of programs, projects, or processes as a basis for making judgments, improving effectiveness and informing decisions about current and future programs, projects, and processes. Evaluation is

distinct from assessment, which may be designed to examine country or sector context to inform program or project design.

Goal: The highest-order outcome or end state to which a program, project, process, or policy is intended to contribute.

Impact: A result or effect that is caused by or attributable to a program, project, process, or policy. Impact is often used to refer to higher-level effects that occur in the medium- or long-term, and can be intended or unintended and positive or negative.

Logic Model: A rigorous methodology used for program or project design that focuses on the causal linkages between project inputs, activities, outputs, short-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes. It is a visual representation that shows the sequence of related events connecting a planned program's or project's objectives with its desired outcomes.

Monitoring: An ongoing system of gathering information and tracking performance to assess progress against established goals and objectives.

Objective: A statement of the condition or state one expects to achieve toward accomplishing a program, process, or project goal.

Performance Indicator: A particular characteristic or dimension used to measure intended changes. Performance indicators are used to observe progress and to measure actual results compared to expected results.

Performance Management: The systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and using performance monitoring data and evaluations to track progress, influence decision-making, and improve results.

Pilot: Any new, untested approach that is implemented to learn of its potential feasibility and efficacy/effectiveness because it is anticipated to be replicated or expanded in scale or scope.

Process: A systematic series of actions or steps taken to achieve a particular end.

Program: A set of activities, processes, or projects aimed at achieving a goal or objective that is typically implemented by several parties over a specified period of time and may cut across sectors, themes, and/or geographic areas.

Program design: The process of analyzing the context, identifying the root causes of issues to be addressed, and constructing logic and a theory of how and why a proposed program, project, or process will work.

Project: A set of activities intended to achieve a defined product, service, or result with specified resources within a set schedule. Multiple projects often make up the portfolio of a program and support achieving a goal or objective.

Situational Analysis: A review of the current state or conditions that could affect the design, implementation, or outcome of a program, project, or process.

IDENTIFYING AND DEFINING PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS WITHIN A BUREAU OR INDEPENDENT OFFICE

- a. To implement 18 FAM 300, bureaus and independent offices must first identify the major programs and/or projects they undertake to achieve the broader outcomes specified in the objectives or sub-objectives of their strategic plan. How a bureau or independent office identifies or characterizes its major programs or projects may be informed by factors such as the characteristics of the accounts managed, organizational structure, the countries in which the bureau or independent office executes activities, portfolio definitions within a particular bureau or independent office, or other factors.
- b. Bureaus and independent offices must consult with the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources (F) or the Bureau of Budget and Planning (BP) when identifying their major programs or projects.

PROGRAM/PROJECT DESIGN

- a. The core of program/project design is constructing the logic of how and why a program or project is intended to work. The process involves determining the program/project alignment to higher-level strategies, conducting situational analyses, identifying the root causes of the issues or problems to be addressed, establishing goals and objectives, and creating a program logic model or project charter and schedule. Bureaus should maintain documentation of program and project design.
- b. Bureaus and independent offices must complete the following in the design phase:
 - 1) **Alignment to Higher-Level Strategies:** When initiating a program or project, assess how it can best align with and advance existing strategies or other high-level directives. In addition to relevant national- and agency-level guidance or strategies, these include relevant Joint Regional Strategy (JRS), Functional Bureau Strategy (FBS), Integrated Country Strategy (ICS), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
 - 2) **Situational Analysis:** Conduct a review of the current state or conditions surrounding the program or project idea that could affect its design, implementation, or outcome. This analysis should include an external assessment of political/legal, security, cultural, economic, environmental, infrastructure, institutional, and other relevant conditions or factors in order to understand and define baseline and context.
 - 3) **Goals and Objectives:** Programs and projects must have clearly stated goals and objectives that reflect an understanding of the problem, need, or issue to be addressed.

- 4) Logic Model: The logic model (or equivalent) articulates how and why the program or project is expected to contribute to achieving the program/project goals and objectives. The logic model documents expected linkages between program/project inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, and sets the foundation against which progress can be monitored and evaluated.
 - 5) Project Charter: Projects must have either a logic model or a project charter that defines the project goal(s), justification, scope, stakeholders, and key deliverables.
 - 6) Project Schedule: Projects must have a milestone schedule or Gantt chart with appropriate amount of detail for the complexity of the project.
- c. The guidance for 18 FAM 300, the Department's [Program Design and Performance Management Toolkit](#), and the TeamWork@State website provide guidelines, examples, and templates for these steps.

MONITORING

- a. Monitoring data indicate what is happening and help determine if implementation is on track or if any timely corrections or adjustments may be needed to improve efficiency or effectiveness. Monitoring data can also indicate when an evaluation is needed to understand how or why certain results are being observed, and can provide useful inputs into planning or conducting an evaluation.
- b. All bureaus and independent offices must develop a monitoring plan for their programs or projects, and incorporate its use into program and project management. Monitoring plans involve regular, ongoing data collection against key performance indicators or milestones to gauge the direct and near-term effects of activities and whether desired results are occurring as expected during implementation.
- c. All bureaus and independent offices are also required to establish a methodology for collecting baseline data, and implement it to document baselines. Baseline data collection methodology should take into account the operating environment and other relevant contextual factors gleaned from a situational analysis, including what approaches will be taken to summarize the baseline in scenarios where it is not possible to capture data prior to the onset of the program or project. Bureaus and independent offices should maintain performance monitoring plan documentation and all data that the bureau or independent office collects in support of the performance monitoring plan.
- d. Building on the logic model or project charter, bureaus and independent offices must:
 - 1) Develop performance indicators to monitor progress and to measure actual results compared to expected results.
 - 2) Establish a methodology for collecting baseline data. Baseline data should usually be collected before or at the start of a program or project to provide a basis for planning and monitoring subsequent progress.
 - 3) Set targets for each performance indicator to indicate the expected change over the course of each period of performance.

- 4) Develop a monitoring plan that documents all of the indicators and baselines, milestones, and targets for each indicator. The monitoring plan should also include data collection frequency for each indicator. Data for each performance indicator should be collected at the frequency feasible and necessary to effectively manage and monitor progress and results, conduct internal learning, and meet external reporting or communication requirements.
- e. The guidance for 18 FAM 300 as well as the Department's [Program Design and Performance Management Toolkit](#) provides guidelines, examples, and templates for these steps.

EVALUATION

- a. Bureaus and independent offices should conduct evaluations to examine the performance and outcomes of their programs, projects, and processes at a rate commensurate with the scale of their work, scope of their portfolio, and the size of their budget.
- b. At a minimum, all bureaus and independent offices are required to complete at least one evaluation per fiscal year. Also, those who receive and directly manage foreign assistance program funds must conduct evaluations of their large programs once in each program's lifetime, or once every five years for ongoing programs, projects, or processes. "Large" is defined as meeting or exceeding the median cost of programs, projects, or processes for that bureau or independent office. Additionally, pilots should be evaluated before replicating or expanding.
- c. Bureaus and independent offices conducting extensive, multi-year evaluations should consult with F and/or BP on meeting the threshold requirements of one per year if an evaluation is occurring over multiple years. Bureaus and independent offices should consult the policy guidance for more specific criteria and guidelines.
- d. Bureaus and independent offices may conduct internal, external, and collaborative evaluations. They may conduct evaluations with their own staff without contracting to outside firms or organizations if:
 - 1) The bureau or office has trained evaluation staff with the requisite knowledge and experience commensurate with the complexity of the evaluation proposed; and
 - 2) The evaluation staff is not accountable to the managers of the program to be evaluated.
- e. GAO and OIG reports are not considered bureau evaluations for the purposes of this policy, but bureaus and independent offices are encouraged to use such reports to inform the planning of evaluations, as applicable.

Bureau Evaluation Coordinators

Each bureau or independent office must identify a point of contact with decision-making authority to serve as the Bureau Evaluation Coordinator to ensure that the evaluation function is fully operational and integrated into the planning and decision-making process. He or she will serve as the main point of contact in the bureau on evaluation and will coordinate monitoring and evaluation activities and interact with BP and F on the bureau's compliance with this policy.

Bureau Evaluation Plans

All bureaus and independent offices are required to develop and submit a Bureau Evaluation Plan (BEP). Bureaus and independent offices should consult the guidance for specific timelines on when the BEP is due, what system it should be submitted in, and what information the BEP should include.

Considerations for Evaluation

- a. A primary consideration in selecting a program, project, management operation, process, or service for evaluation should be the information needs of the commissioning bureau or independent office, which should prioritize those needs and then decide what should be evaluated. When planning for evaluation, keep in mind the following:
 - 1) **Usefulness:** The information, ideas, and recommendations generated by evaluations should serve the needs of the Department in general, and the commissioning units in particular. Evaluations should help the Department improve its management practices and procedures as well as its ongoing activities by critically examining their functioning and the factors that affect them. Evaluation findings should also be considered when formulating new policies and priorities.
 - 2) **Methodological Rigor:** Evaluations should be “evidence based,” meaning they should be based on verifiable data and information that have been gathered using the standards of professional evaluation organizations. The data can be both qualitative and quantitative.
 - 3) **Independence and Integrity:** Bureaus should ensure that evaluators and other implementing partners are free from any pressure or bureaucratic interference. Independence does not, however, imply isolation from managers. Active engagement of bureau staff and managers, as well as implementing partners, is necessary to conduct monitoring and evaluation, but Department personnel should not improperly interfere with the outcomes.
- b. In addition, bureaus and independent offices should examine whether the proposed evaluation is technically feasible, i.e., relevant data can be gathered, fieldwork can be undertaken when necessary, and experts are available to conduct it. Moreover, the bureau or independent office must consider the availability of funds. Evaluations can be expensive, especially those requiring extensive fieldwork overseas. Therefore, if adequate funds are not available, evaluations that require considerable funding should be postponed for the next fiscal year. Finally, bureaus and offices should take into account political sensitivities and constraints. The consent and support of senior officials are necessary in order to undertake evaluations involving highly politically sensitive issues. Bureaus and offices should ensure senior-level awareness and clearance of such evaluation activities.
- c. For specific guidance on when to evaluate a program, please consult the policy guidance.

Types of Evaluations

Bureaus and independent offices are free to conduct all kinds of evaluations depending upon their needs, resources, and preferences. However, the most common types of evaluations that they conduct, or are likely to conduct, include performance evaluations, process evaluations, and outcome/impact evaluations. Descriptions of these and other evaluation types may be found in the guidance.

Collaborating with Other Bureaus, Offices, Agencies and Organizations on Evaluations

- a. The evaluation policy recognizes that bureaus and independent offices do not always directly implement programs. In many cases, they provide funds to other agencies, operating units, or international organizations to carry out a program. In such cases, there are two options:
 - 1) Ensure the implementing organization carries out evaluations consistent with the policy and disseminates a final evaluation report; or
 - 2) Conduct collaborative evaluations with the implementing partners or organizations.
- b. In general, bureaus and independent offices are encouraged to undertake collaborative evaluations with other entities, including other bureaus or offices, U.S. government agencies, universities and colleges, non-governmental organizations, and bilateral or multilateral partners. A collaborative evaluation is one conducted jointly by more than one bureau, office, agency, or international partner for which a written agreement defining the roles and responsibilities for the collaboration is in place. Collaborative evaluations facilitate mutual learning among participating organizations as well as reduce the costs to the bureau or office as they are shared among the participating organizations. Under the State Department evaluation policy, collaborative evaluations count as one full evaluation toward the policy's evaluation requirement for each bureau or independent office that is party to the agreement.

Evaluation Use

- a. Bureaus and independent offices must consider evaluation findings to make decisions about policies, strategies, priorities, and delivery of services, as well as for planning and budget formulation processes. For example, evaluation findings should be used to course-correct in interim years of a bureau's multi-year strategic plan, or to shape that plan initially.
- b. When planning an evaluation, bureaus and independent offices must develop evaluation dissemination plans that delineate all stakeholders and ensure potential users of the evaluation will receive copies or have ready access to them. Once the evaluation is completed, bureaus and independent offices should respond to evaluation recommendations with a written summary to bureau or independent office leadership. This will allow management to discuss the recommendations and outline whether they concur, create a plan for implementation, and designate a point of contact and timeframe for implementing each recommendation. Bureaus and independent offices must monitor their progress on follow-up to the recommendations through a document such as a recommendation tracker. The tracking document should be used until recommendations are implemented. See the guidance for further details.

Dissemination Requirements for Evaluations

- a. All bureaus and independent offices must maintain copies of final evaluation reports for appropriate dissemination in accordance with policy requirements and the dissemination plan for the evaluation and for ongoing learning.

- b. Unless reports, statements of work, and summaries of evaluation results are classified, they will be posted internally, where they will be accessible to all State bureaus and independent offices for discussion and learning.
- c. Evaluations that are unclassified, but warrant administrative control and protection from public or other unauthorized disclosure, should be marked Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) in accordance with 12 FAM 541. Classified evaluations must be marked with appropriate classification markings.
- d. Foreign assistance-funded evaluation reports will be posted publicly within 90 days of publication unless they are sensitive, in which case a publishable summary will be posted. Classified evaluation reports are exempt from publication.
- e. Consult the guidance for additional information and report templates.

DATA ANALYSIS AND LEARNING

- a. All bureaus and independent offices – in consultation with posts when applicable – should analyze monitoring and evaluation data to gain valuable insight into ongoing progress and projected future results that could affect implementation. Before analyzing monitoring data, bureaus and independent offices should check it for accuracy and quality, and make adjustments or caveats to their use of the data as necessary. Data Quality Assessments (DQAs) should be used to confirm the data reported meets the Department data quality standards. The [Program Design and Performance Management Toolkit](#) provides guidelines, examples, and templates for these steps.
- b. Learning takes place when a team engages in thoughtful discussion of information with a focus on understanding how and why various aspects of a program, project, or process are progressing in order to look for opportunities to make positive changes, and not as an opportunity to place blame or impose penalties. Bureaus and independent offices should regularly discuss available data to determine whether the right data are being collected to inform decisions, or if ongoing monitoring and/or evaluation plans should be modified to collect information more useful to decision makers.

IMPLEMENTATION

Budgeting For Program Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation Activities

While acknowledging that the Department may face funding constraints, managers should recognize the importance of design, monitoring, and evaluation and identify resources for it. The Department’s grant and contract regulations allow performance monitoring and evaluation as program or project costs. The guidance for 18 FAM 300 provides methodologies for determining program funds to be set aside for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) during budget formulation. Appendix D of the [Program Design and Performance Management Toolkit](#) describes different data collection methods and their relative expense.

Transfer of Foreign Assistance Funds

- a. When a Department of State bureau or independent office transfers foreign assistance funds to other federal agencies or institutions, the State bureau or independent office is responsible for ensuring the appropriate procedures are in place at the receiving institution for managing, monitoring, and evaluating the outcome(s) pertaining to the use of those funds commensurate with 18 FAM 301.1-2, 18 FAM 301.1-3, and 18 FAM 301.1-4, and for establishing what information the receiving institution must supply to the State Department to ensure sound management of the resources. At a minimum, the State Department bureau must obtain from the receiving institution records of how the funds were used, sufficient monitoring data associated with the funds to determine if adequate progress and results are being achieved, and any evaluation findings related to the outcomes achieved with the funds.
- b. When foreign assistance funds are transferred to a Department of State bureau or independent office from another federal agency or institution, the State bureau or independent office must ensure the appropriate procedures for managing the funds in a way commensurate with 18 FAM 301.1-2, 18 FAM 301.1-3, and 18 FAM 301.1-4 are established and executed.

Programs or Projects Fully Designed and Managed at Post

When the responsibility for establishing the goals, objectives, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programs or projects is held solely at post, the responsibility for executing the requirements of 18 FAM 300 rests with post staff, in consultation with the appropriate functional or regional bureau.