

UK

Evaluation

Society

**Guidelines for
Good Practice
in Evaluation**



Preface

This document presents Guidelines generated by the UK Evaluation Society on the commitments and actions required from different groups involved in evaluation to ensure high quality evaluation. They are grounded in the experience of conducting evaluations and are underpinned by the relational and consequence theories of ethics and democratic principles and values.

The first edition of the document was published in 2003. These revised Guidelines have been developed through a consultative process with members of the UK Evaluation Society assisted by a small working group. In this revision, more attention has been given to equity and diversity issues and to the evolution of new approaches to evaluation.

They do not, however, take full account of the growing use of social media data in evaluation given the fluidity of the regulatory framework within which such data are still being generated. Guidance on the potential challenges of using social media in research and evaluation is offered in references at the end.

The Guidelines are:

- written for evaluation practitioners, commissioners, participants (those who have provided data and/or been involved in the conduct of the evaluation) and institutions conducting self-evaluation with the aim of supporting each of the four groups and encouraging dialogue between them to achieve good practice in evaluation. Underpinning this aim is the assumption that evaluation is a social, political, ethical practice and that responsibility for quality evaluation lies with all those involved in the commissioning and conduct of evaluation.
- organised in sections addressing the four groups to highlight the distinctive role and responsibilities each has for ensuring relevant, credible and useful evaluation. They also act as a checklist for planning an evaluation and/or resolving problematic issues encountered in the field.

- designed to span the entire spectrum of the evaluation process with the statements in each section falling into the three areas of principles, planning and conduct, and reporting, communicating and use.
- intended for use by the novice and the experienced alike, with each statement offering a starting place for deliberation and a reference point for evaluation intentions, ethics and practice. The points raised in each section are not ranked as their importance will depend upon the specific evaluation context. At their heart is the need to be open and transparent about the expectations and requirements of all stakeholders in the evaluation.
- available for members and non-members in keeping with the Society's commitment to open access. They are accessible online and can be printed.

These Guidelines:

- do not replace but complement organisational standards of governance.
- do not constitute a specific ethics code as ethics inform all its statements. Note that ethics codes for evaluation and sets of principles and codes generated by other organisations are listed at the end of this document.
- are separate but complementary to the Evaluation Capabilities Framework of the Society published in 2012 . Both documents represent steps to promote a culture of professionalization and good practice in evaluation.
- are not definitive and will continue to evolve; thus they should be considered as work-in-progress.

We hope you will use them in the commissioning, conduct and reporting of evaluation as well as in evaluation training and professional development.

The Society welcomes comments on the use of the Guidelines in practice. Please email any such comments to

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On behalf of the UK Evaluation Society

UK Evaluation Society Guidelines for

Good Practice in Evaluation

The Guidelines are normative, practical statements to facilitate sound evaluation practice in the field. They are informed by the principles set out below.

Principles

- **Clarity:** Evaluations should be designed, conducted and reported with a clear purpose that is transparent to all who are part of the evaluation.

- **Integrity:** The practice of evaluation should demonstrate responsibility to participants according to agreed ethical principles and assure the veracity and validity of the findings.

- **Independence:** Evaluations should be independent of vested interests and power differences.

- **Accessibility:** Findings of evaluations should be available in the public domain and communicable to agreed audiences.

- **Trust:** No evaluation can effectively proceed without trust which needs to be developed and nurtured through agreed ethical procedures for conduct and reporting that are fair and just to all.

- **Equity:** The conduct of evaluation should respect the perspectives and human dignity of all participants and stakeholders, irrespective of their position in professional contexts or social structures.

- **Transparency:** The principles underlying an evaluation, its approach, ethical practices, limitations and uses should be made explicit to all stakeholders .

- **Diversity:** Evaluation should respect cultural, gender and age differences and strive to include all relevant standpoints including those of the traditionally disenfranchised, marginalized or hard to reach.

Guidelines for Evaluators

Evaluators need to acknowledge the *principles* in evaluation by:

- adopting a code of ethics that is inclusive of all legitimate interests in the evaluation and treats all stakeholders equally and fairly in the evaluation process, reporting and use
 - demonstrating commitment to the integrity of the process of evaluation and its purpose to increase learning in the public domain
 - making every attempt to minimise harmful effects that may prejudice the status, position, careers or lives of participants
 - ensuring the design of the evaluation has paid due attention to equity and diversity
 - making sure the evaluation team has the capacity and appropriate skills and experience necessary to deliver high quality evaluation
 - being mindful that evaluation often has unanticipated effects and consequences
 - ensuring the evaluation design and conduct are transparent and fit for purpose and the methodology and procedures are accessible to all relevant stakeholders
- stipulating that the evaluation is independent of the vested interests of all stakeholders, commissioners and participants, while responsive to issues each might raise relevant to the evaluation
 - being prepared to argue the case for the public 'right to know' in evaluation
 - knowing when to refuse or terminate an evaluation contract because it is undoable, self-serving, or threatens to undermine the independence and integrity of the process and outcomes
 - negotiating contractual agreement over copyright of evaluation methodology, findings, report and publication.

In the planning and conduct of evaluation evaluators need to demonstrate that they:

- are realistic about what is a feasible, robust methodology to adopt within the time-scale and budget agreed
- conduct detailed planning at the outset of the evaluation
- remain open to revisiting the approach and methodology if changes in policy or field circumstances necessitate

- work within the UK Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the EU General Data protection regulation 2018 (GDPR) to ensure the secure processing and storage of data
- acknowledge the intellectual property and work of others
- build outcomes of preliminary discussions with commissioners into the contract yet remain responsive to shifts in purpose and funding
- agree with commissioners a process for managing complaints raised by participants/stakeholders while maintaining confidentiality
- maintain dialogue with commissioners informing them of progress and any changes required to the design and delivery of the evaluation
- follow quality assurance procedures as agreed in the evaluation contract
- consider the usefulness of building external support into the contract (e.g. advisory group or consultant) and/or conditions for quality assurance or arbitration if conflicts cannot be resolved
- include different stakeholder perspectives which, though equally relevant, may be in conflict
- make efforts to ensure the perspectives of those less frequently heard are included by making all methods as accessible as possible.

In reporting, communicating and use, evaluators need to show that they have:

- agreed a communications policy with commissioners in advance which indicates how the findings will be communicated and the resources required
- assured public access of the evaluation and made every attempt to clear potentially difficult data for public release with those concerned in the context in which it is to be reported
- ensured that evaluation conclusions/implications can be traced to the evidence
- written and communicated evaluation findings in ways that are useful to all stakeholders by using accessible language, graphics and/or with visual presentations
- paid due attention to privacy concerns while at the same time making evaluation knowledge public.

Guidelines for Commissioners

To ensure the principles are embedded in the evaluation, it would be helpful if commissioners:

- are aware of the principles and guidelines that should govern ethical evaluation
- ensure that these are adhered to in appropriate evaluation questions, methodology and budgeting
- maintain adherence to these principles in the contract and see that they are followed in the conduct and reporting of the evaluation
- have realistic expectations of what an evaluation can and cannot provide and agree these with evaluators
- hold preliminary consultations with all parties to the evaluation to develop a relevant, realistic and viable specification
- design tenders that address cultural responsiveness, equity and diversity
- operate a tendering procedure that is open and fair and make explicit the criteria upon which a tender decision will be made
- ensure that the tendering process does not exploit competitors' ideas or their intellectual property rights
- take into account the advice of evaluators on appropriate fit-for-purpose methods for collecting and analysing data and reaching evaluative judgements
- acknowledge the benefits of external, independent evaluation and ensure that evaluators are free to undertake their work as agreed in the contract without any constraints
- are open to receiving findings that are unexpected
- recognize that negative findings provide opportunities for learning and potential future policy or programme development
- recognize and accept where evaluators need to keep their sources of information anonymous.

During the planning and conduct of evaluation, commissioners should:

- be well versed in the contextual and sometimes conflicting realities of the policies and programmes in action before commissioning an evaluation
- have an awareness of 'new' methodologies and approaches that have arisen during the past decade and the increasing complexity of the contexts in which evaluations have to be conducted

- include experienced evaluators (who are not potential applicants for funding) in initial drafts of evaluation specifications, to inform feasible budgeting and realistic timescales
- specify the context, purpose and audience(s) for the evaluation to encourage relevant tenders
- develop clear and realistic Terms of Reference for the evaluation tender
- include stakeholders in the identification of the core focus and questions an evaluation tender seeks to answer
- ensure sufficient time for evaluators to respond to an initial invitation to tender and produce a proposal
- be open to the inclusion of new methods beyond those specified in the brief where these will better realize the aims of the evaluation
- clarify the constraints they operate under e.g. timescales, budgets, and deadlines
- provide access to all relevant documentation and data required for the purpose of the evaluation
- adhere to the contract and consult with evaluators and other interest groups if significant changes are required to the design of the evaluation
- communicate openly and keep the evaluation team informed of changes in circumstances or policy affecting the delivery of the evaluation.

In practice, in reporting, communicating and use, commissioners need to consider:

- establishing clear principles for the reporting and communication of evaluations, the resources required and whose role this is, i.e. the commissioners or evaluators
- discussing with evaluators, early in the evaluation process, how they wish to receive the findings of the evaluation
- establishing with evaluators the specific criteria for quality work and reporting
- being open to alternative ways of reporting and dissemination that will ensure wide impact and take-up of findings
- respecting the independence of the evaluation by ensuring that it is widely available to all stakeholders and the public
- upholding the independence of the planning and conduct of the evaluation, e.g. not censoring any content of the evaluation or prohibiting its public access
- providing timely and realistic responses to evaluation findings and acting upon them
- preserving the integrity of the findings, e.g. by not quoting or publicizing findings out of context.

Guidelines for Institutional Self-evaluation

To ensure the principles are adhered to in institutional self-evaluation, participants need to:

- treat all colleagues equally in the process of the evaluation and communication of findings
 - ensure the agreement and understanding of all members of the institution before starting the evaluation
 - establish methods training for the team conducting the evaluation and ethics training for all staff
 - make the purposes, aims, and objectives of the evaluation clear to all members of the institution
 - ensure that the process is built into the structure and function of the institution
 - make sure all perspectives are included in data collection and analysis
 - demonstrate consistency and predictability of behaviour in the conduct and negotiation of the evaluation
 - have the backing and support of the head of the institution, including financial support, where needed, for meetings, networking, communication and publication
- check that all staff know how the process of evaluation will be conducted and how the findings will be used
 - involve and co-develop the evaluation with participants throughout the process
 - seek out procedures other organizations may have used to guarantee the quality of the self-evaluation, and/or generate any which may be specific to the institution.

During the planning and conduct of institutional self-evaluation, participants need to:

- institute a professional development programme within the institution to help staff develop/build on their capabilities for evaluation
- take steps to ensure that all members of the institution believe the evaluation is worth doing and that, with a clear set of procedures, it has both an internal and external accountability function
- ensure that all involved in the evaluation (whether as a data givers, collectors or users) are engaged at some level from the start so they know what is happening and why

- adopt methods that are feasible to use in the time-scales and operations of the institution
- indicate that the process is methodologically sound and one from which valid implications can be drawn
- seek advice and/or consider adopting a critical friend to conduct a process audit of the methodological rigour and fairness with which the evaluation is conducted
- consider any risks that the institution may encounter in the conduct and reporting of the evaluation.

In practice, in reporting, communicating and use, participants in an institutional self-evaluation need to:

- assure members of the institution that the findings from the evaluation are fed back into development as well as providing a measure of accountability
- have a clear set of procedures for the appropriate sharing of data within and beyond the institution
- assure members that data collected for self-evaluation will not be used for any other purpose without their consent
- acknowledge and take steps to reduce any anxiety about the sharing of knowledge within the institution as this is often more threatening than sharing knowledge with those outside the institution
- recognise and agree when it is important to make data public and when, to encourage development within the institution, it may be necessary to only share the process, not detailed substantive issues
- communicate honestly with colleagues, consistent with maintaining fair and equitable ethical procedures
- communicate in accessible language and engage colleagues in discussion on the usefulness of the evidence and findings.

Guidelines for

Evaluation Participants

(who have given data and/or are involved in the conduct of the evaluation)

All participants in an evaluation need to know that the principles will be adhered to by:

- receiving full information of what participation in the evaluation will mean for them and the relevant data protection processes and rules that will guide the evaluation before seeking consent
- being assured that data will not be gathered or used without fully informed consent and that this may need to be revisited through the evaluation e.g rolling or process consent
- being fully informed about the purpose of the evaluation and the procedures for collection and use of data (including explicit use of interview transcripts, observations and image based data),
- establishing clear procedures for the access to and release of data (anonymizing identifiable individuals where necessary, but where this is not possible, clearing data with them before public release)
- informing them that the processing of data they offer complies with the GDPR and DPA (2018) and that any data made public is on the grounds of fairness, accuracy and relevance
- having the opportunity to comment on how they are represented in the evaluation to see that this is fair and accurate
- being assured that in the event of a dispute or difficulties between evaluation participants and evaluators, they will have access to independent arbitration
- knowing that evaluators have taken all reasonable measures to check that the data are valid
- ensuring that any reporting that poses a risk for participants has been discussed and they have had an opportunity to give or withhold consent.

During the planning and conduct of evaluation, participants will have the opportunity to:

- be engaged in the process of designing, collecting and analysing data if appropriate, as in participatory evaluation, and with methods accessible to them
- discuss the basis of and reason for their participation and ask what feedback they will receive
- discuss with evaluators innovative ways of gathering and reporting data about them
- receive training in methods where they are involved in data collection, analysis and reporting
- be assured that every effort will be made to represent all their perspectives in the evaluation
- renew informed consent once more understanding of what the evaluation involves becomes apparent
- have access to the evaluation team for purposes of feedback, reporting and ongoing support for the duration of the evaluation.

In practice, in relation to reporting, communicating and use, participants will:

- have opportunities to comment on the fairness and accuracy with which data they provided has been reported
- be consulted about the form of reporting and its consistency with their data
- know that evaluators will be open to receiving ideas from them about how best to report and communicate findings, including, for example, through social media
- be assured that any data they have asked to be kept confidential has been honoured providing this was not already public knowledge
- be informed that final reports will normally be in the public domain and available to all participants. If there are sound reasons for any exemption from this policy, this and the reasons for it will be recorded.

References to other documents on ethics and evaluation

Academy for Social Sciences: Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research
www.acss.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/pb3_genericethicsprinciples.pdf

American Evaluation Association: (AEA) Guiding Principles for Evaluators
www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=51

Australasian Evaluation Association (AES): Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations
www.aes.asn.au/resources/ethical-Guidelines-2.html

Australasian Evaluation Association (AES): Code of ethics
www.aes.asn.au/images/stories/files/membership/AES_Code_of_Ethics_web.pdf

Department for International Development (DFID), (2011).DFID ethics principles for research and evaluation. Retrieved from website:
www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/evaluation/dfid-ethics-pr...

International Development Association (IDEAS): Code of Ethics
ideas-global.org/ideas-code-of-ethics/

The British Psychological Society: Ethics Committee Supplementary Guidance on the use of Social Media
www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-code-ethics-and-conduct

Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines
the-sra.org.uk/research-ethics/ethics-Guidelines

United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), (2008). UNEG ethical guidelines for evaluation. Retrieved from website:
www.unevaluation.org/documentdownload?doc_id=102&file_id=548

The Guidelines can be
downloaded on the
UK Evaluation Society's
website

www.evaluation.org.uk



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