

PROGRAM CYCLE

ADS 201 Additional Help

EVALUATION STATEMENT OF WORK (SOW) PEER REVIEW PROCESS

The Evaluation Statement of Work (SOW) peer review process **must** be completed after a SOW is drafted but before solicitation. This helps to ensure the quality of the Evaluation SOW.

Policy

Per [ADS 201.3.6.9](#), each Operating Unit's (OU's) Program Office is required to organize peer reviews of Evaluation SOWs. These reviews should include the relevant technical office and may include evaluation experts from regional and Washington units. This guidance document provides further details on the peer review process, but each Mission may have customized aspects of the peer review, as described in its Mission Order on Evaluation.

Why conduct a peer review?

There are numerous reasons to conduct a peer review beyond the USAID requirement. These include:

- Ensuring that the required elements of an Evaluation SOW are included ([see ADS 201mab](#)).
- Improving the overall quality of the Evaluation SOW before it directs the work of the evaluation team. The peer review process can involve experts in evaluation and the technical subject area of the evaluation to improve the quality of the SOW.
- Ensuring that relevant contextual elements related to the intervention to be evaluated are included in the SOW, such as site, location, demographic characteristics, political dimensions, etc.
- Ensuring buy-in from internal stakeholders regarding the key features of the evaluation (purpose, questions, methods, timing, etc.). This will increase the likelihood that the evaluation findings are used more broadly.

Program Cycle Additional Help documents provide non-mandatory guidance intended to clarify [ADS 201](#). Curated by the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL), these may include "how-to" guidelines, templates, and examples of best practice.

- Engaging local actors and, where possible, aligning evaluation questions and/or methods with local priorities, and gaining buy-in from external stakeholders regarding key evaluation features.

Before the peer review

The Evaluation SOW may be initiated and led by any office. The lead party should collaborate with technical teams, the Program Office, and their Contracting Officer (CO). The drafting team is also encouraged to reach out to the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) point of contact (POC) in the geographic or pillar Bureau or the Evaluation Team in PPL for early assistance in developing the SOW. These staff can assist in determining the types of methods that may be appropriate for specific evaluation questions. The formal peer review should not be the first time the Program Office and technical office discuss the evaluation, and it should also not be the last time discussing how the evaluation will be conducted. Further refinement of SOW elements should occur after the evaluator is selected, as the evaluation design is finalized. (Note: Consult the How-To Note on Evaluation Statements of Work for further details on drafting an Evaluation SOW.)

Per [ADS 201.3.6.4](#), an impact evaluation is an evaluation aimed at answering how much change in a development outcome is attributable to (i.e., caused by) the USAID intervention. Impact evaluations use models of cause and effect and require a credible and rigorously defined counterfactual to control for factors other than the intervention that may account for observed changes. This requires appropriate planning. OUs should reach out to the M&E officer in the geographic or pillar Bureau, or the Evaluation Team in PPL, with any questions.

The peer review

Once the evaluation SOW is drafted and ready to be shared beyond those most directly involved in the drafting, the Mission should organize the peer review. Mission staff should consult their own Mission Order on evaluation, if applicable, for peer review practices specific to their Mission. Key issues to consider when conducting a peer review include:

WHEN WILL THE PEER REVIEW TAKE PLACE?

In most cases, OUs should undertake a peer review after a full draft of the evaluation SOW is available but when there is still an opportunity to make substantial changes, if necessary.

HOW MANY AND WHICH INDIVIDUALS WILL BE INVOLVED IN THE PEER REVIEW?

The office that is managing the evaluation must lead the peer review of the SOW. The responsible lead office should ensure that the SOW meets the procedural standards

and requirements of [ADS 201](#) so that other peer reviewers can focus on substantive content.

The peer review should include at least two individuals in addition to the evaluation POC (or the designee). The office managing the evaluation should emphasize finding at least one peer reviewer with expertise in evaluation methods. The office leading the peer review may reach out to the Evaluation Team in PPL for assistance, if needed. Other reviewers may come from USAID/Washington regional and technical Bureaus, external subject matter and evaluation experts, and local partners. The responsible office should consult their Office of Acquisition and Assistance before sharing procurement sensitive materials outside USAID. Ideally, fewer than half of peer reviewers should come from the technical office that oversees the activity or project being evaluated to enable objectivity and independence in critiquing the design and methodology.

HOW MUCH TIME WILL BE PROVIDED FOR THE PEER REVIEW?

If applicable, Mission Orders on evaluation in each Mission should specify the length of time peer reviewers will have to review the SOW. If considering including USAID/Washington staff members in the peer review, the office managing the evaluation should contact the relevant USAID/Washington offices to determine their standards for how long they typically take to review an evaluation SOW will ensure that timelines reflect the needs of all reviewers.

HOW WILL COMMENTS BE RECEIVED FOR THE PEER REVIEW?

Missions may choose to have a peer review meeting where individuals can discuss their comments on the draft SOW, request written comments on the draft SOW, or both. Many Missions choose to ask peer reviewers to fill out standard review sheets or checklists (see Evaluation Toolkit: [Evaluation SOW Checklist and Review Template](#)).

Regardless of the method chosen, the Contract Officer's Representative/Agreement Officer's Representative (COR/AOR) for the evaluation should provide clear instructions to the peer reviewers regarding the means for providing comments on the draft evaluation report.

After the peer review

Typically, the staff who initiated the draft SOW should make any revisions to the evaluation SOW based on the peer review process in cooperation with the Program Office before final clearance by the Program Office. The leader of the peer review should follow up with the peer reviewers and provide the final evaluation SOW for their awareness.

For more information

For more information on the peer review process or on what to look for in an evaluation SOW, please refer to:

- [ADS 201mab Evaluation Statement of Work Requirements](#). This mandatory reference provides further guidance on writing a high-quality Evaluation SOW.
- [Webinar: Good Practices for Peer Reviews of Evaluation SOWs](#). This webinar featured PPL, regional, and technical Bureau representatives who have participated and led evaluation SOW peer reviews. They discussed good practices in conducting peer reviews and how to get the most out of the process, resulting in a strong SOW with buy-in from key stakeholders.
- [How-to Note: Evaluation Statements of Work](#). This Note addresses key issues for USAID staff who are developing a SOW for an externally contracted evaluation. It also serves as a guide for reviewing the quality of Evaluation SOWs for internal peer review processes.
- [Webinar: Developing Good Evaluation Questions](#). This webinar discusses how to develop evaluation questions that will help ensure high-quality performance evaluations from external evaluators. Critical tips will be presented, along with a variety of negative and positive examples from real USAID Evaluation SOWs.

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