

Design for appropriateness evaluations

Appropriateness evaluations are broadly about comparing needs on one hand with objectives and their strategies on the other to ensure the latter are relevant to the former. The aim of an appropriateness evaluation is to determine:

- whether the objectives or desired outcomes of a program are appropriate, given what is already known about the social, economic or environmental context or needs of the issue
- whether the program's strategies will assist in achieving the objective(s) or desired outcome(s).

Appropriateness evaluations should be undertaken during a program's initial design or where the original objectives of a long-term program have changed over time. They are most relevant for CMAs in:

- CAP development or review where resource or community needs must be reflected in CAP targets
- development or redevelopment of an investment strategy where a CMA wants the investment to reflect the intent of the CAP and its targets
- development of a project, program or activity which must contribute to CAP outcomes.

Appropriateness evaluations have already been undertaken by all CMAs during the development of their CAPs and establishment of targets, investment strategies and projects. The processes are generally employed by CMAs involved in assessing the current natural resource issues and management actions or strategies.

Example: An appropriateness evaluation by Lachlan CMA

The finalisation of the Lachlan CMA's CAP coincided with the development of the CMA's Monitoring Plan. Program logic was used on the draft CAP targets at workshops with other agency staff to develop the measures, etc. needed to monitor the draft targets. Analysis of the logic within the draft CAP led to some small but very important changes that were adopted to ensure that efficient implementation and evaluations of CMA activities could be achieved. These small changes ensured that CAP targets were monitored using appropriate measures.

Design considerations

The table below summarises the design considerations for an appropriateness evaluation. These considerations are applicable to both a project and program evaluation.

The evaluation questions are examples only as more specific questions are likely to be identified against an individual program or project.

Design considerations for appropriateness evaluations

Typical appropriateness questions	Examples of comparisons	Potential monitoring methods	CAP example
<p>Is there a need for the program?</p> <p>Do the desired outcomes address the needs?</p> <p>Are the desired outcomes consistent with catchment and government priorities?</p> <p>Are the proposed strategies going to deliver the desired outcomes?</p>	<p>Program targets or outcomes compared with needs</p> <p>Nature and/or extent of the need now compared with the need at the time the program was established/designed</p> <p>Desired outcomes compared with government policies and strategies</p> <p>Proposed strategy compared with identified need/issue and likely contributors to the need/issue</p> <p>Desired outcomes and strategies of program compared with outcomes and strategies of other like programs and their strategies</p> <p>Proposed strategies compared with the likely investment available for the program</p>	<p>Review of research literature and relevant catchment studies to better understand contributors to the issues, and relationship between issues and strategies, desired outcomes and strategies</p> <p>Review of strategies and desired outcomes against government policy and strategies</p> <p>Review of best practices of other programs or evaluations of other like programs</p> <p>Analysis of existing baseline data</p> <p>Analysis of logic and conceptual models</p> <p>Needs analysis using techniques such as focus groups</p> <p>Feasibility studies such as cost-benefit analyses</p>	<p>In developing the catchment and management targets for its CAP, a CMA brought ‘theme teams’ together to review collated information on catchment studies and baseline data. The teams added knowledge of relevant research and experience of other similar strategies.</p> <p>The theme teams developed a conceptual model that expressed the pressures on the resource and relationship between these pressures and current condition.</p> <p>Following this, the CMA facilitated a process of developing and analysing a results hierarchy to define its targets and likely strategies.</p> <p>The agency representatives were able to confirm that the desired outcomes and strategies proposed were consistent with current policy.</p> <p>The CMA refined its targets by undertaking feasibility studies based on their cost estimates for implementation with regard to total investment over the first half of the CAP.</p> <p>The CMA ensured that the methods, studies and references quoted during the process were well documented.</p>

Information management

Information management is a broad term which covers all the tools, systems and processes used to collect, record, store and access information. Information management considerations for evaluation design should be based on the information needs already identified.

Collection and management of information for appropriateness evaluation should consider the following issues:

- Existing expertise and knowledge of each theme will be recorded in a range of literature and this information should be recorded and referenced as it is identified so that it can be referred to later. In addition, the experience of staff from the CMA, academia and other agencies will be invaluable and may need to be accessed.
- Knowledge of past planning, such as needs analysis, CAP development and the investment strategy, will be recorded in CAP documentation or CAP development papers.
- New knowledge of resource conditions, processes, interactions and pressures or needs should be recorded in appropriate systems. This information may be derived through a continuous 'watching brief' of case studies, on-ground experiences, etc. In addition, a new needs analysis may be required where the appropriateness evaluation is being undertaken as part of redeveloping a long-term CAP. An information management system for this kind of information should be established so the information can be recorded as it becomes known.
- A CMA will need to record qualitative information or be able to easily search for relevant information. How to achieve this needs to be addressed.

Information storage and retrieval procedures for NRM agencies are specified in the *Draft Natural Resources Information Management Strategy* (NSW Government 2002; available at www.nrims.nsw.gov.au). Information management practices for natural resource management agencies in NSW must be consistent with NRIMS. The strategy identifies the coordination, communication, quality, data management and access requirements for natural resource information and is consistent with national standards and requirements. All CMAs will need to consider these requirements when they wish to serve information to an agency database.