Checklist for whole evaluation cycle

This checklist outlines all of the steps in establishing and carrying out an evaluation. However every evaluation will be established on a case-by-case basis and the final approach adopted will depend on a number of factors including:

- evaluation questions posed
- drivers for the evaluation
- relevance of the project or program to be evaluated
- stage of the project or program cycle at which the evaluation is being undertaken
- constraints associated with resources, time, quality and availability of information to inform the evaluation.

Evaluation step	Description
Evaluation context	
Terms of reference	• Reach consensus on the objectives and scope of the evaluation, especially where there are several different 'clients'. • The terms of reference should be approved/endorsed to ensure common agreement on the issues to be addressed. • Approval or endorsement will be dependent on the management structure for the evaluation (e.g. steering committee or program team representatives, etc.). • Where an evaluation is to be outsourced, formal endorsement of the evaluation objectives, scope and governance will inform any requests to tender and associated business cases. • The terms of reference need to consider evaluation objectives, purpose, scope, governance, approach and issues around internal versus external evaluator. • The terms of reference should not be an overly detailed document. • The terms of reference may broadly address risks and communication strategy, time frame and costs, but these are likely to be dealt with in more detail in the monitoring and evaluation plan. • The terms of reference may be re-negotiated after the context and type of evaluation have been defined.
Understand the evaluation context	• What are the drivers for the evaluation? • Consider key stakeholders – who will use the information and why (e.g. accountability, high-level decision making, program improvement)? • Review existing documentation that supports the project or program.
Capacity building and training	• Consider if any and what sort of capacity building and training is required for all partners involved in the evaluation. This may be as simple as raising awareness of the work to be done. • Ensure that training suits the various stages of the evaluation that partners may be involved in.

Define the type of evaluation	• Consider whether the evaluation should be one or a combination of evaluation types and at what stage within the life cycle of the program it needs to be undertaken. • Use this information to focus effort on the relevant levels of the program logic table.
Develop logical framework	• Consider current understanding or knowledge of the issue by (briefly) considering existing evidence, e.g. literature. • Where an issue is complex or difficult to communicate, develop a conceptual model. • Develop a results hierarchy to identify each outcome/output level and the relationships between them. • Complete a program logic table to identify and record important aspects of the evaluation, including externalities, performance measures, etc. • Define specific evaluation questions using the program logic table.
Evaluation design	
Evaluation design	• How will the information be analysed against the evaluation questions? • What are the design considerations (cost, equality, technical validity, ethics)?
Identify performance measures required	• Define information needs, both qualitative and quantitative. • Identify and assess performance measures. • What relevant and useful information is already being collected? • How will information gaps be addressed? • Consider methods, timing, budget implications, use of qualitative and quantitative data.
Define data management requirements	• How will the information be managed? Will it need to be collected and stored over time? • Are there data custodian issues? How will data be shared, stored and analysed? • Is there a need to meet data standards? • Do we need to negotiate resources for data collection and storage?
Design evaluation plan	• Ensure the evaluation proposed is in proportion to the size and significance of the project or program to be evaluated (i.e. the benefits of the evaluation will outweigh the costs). • Consolidate all the above information into a project plan, including issues associated with resources, a timetable with milestones and deliverables and defined roles/responsibilities. • Consider the risks to the evaluation process and how they can best be managed. The risk management also needs to be documented as part of the plan. • Communicate the plan, especially to those who may be affected.

Ensure monitoring is implemented	• Implement new monitoring to support performance information as required. • New programs may include case studies, qualitative surveys, etc. • Ensure partners for data collection are maintaining existing programs. • If the program is long-term, it may have a mid-term evaluation step where additional or redundant data is identified, e.g. the need to look more closely at some externalities.
Manage data	• Ensure data is managed appropriately as it is collected and meets relevant standards and format. • Consider how best to manage qualitative data.
Developing and sharing information	
Collate data and analyse against evaluation questions	• Produce appropriate information products for evaluation. • Apply evaluation design (possibly with the assistance of an evaluation panel) to test hypotheses or address evaluation questions. • Identify the need for any further data/information (qualitative and/or quantitative).
Establish an evaluation panel (if required) and assess evidence	• Complex programs may need a multi-disciplinary approach to evaluating the findings. • Apply a multiple lines and levels of evidence (MLLE) approach to assess weight of evidence.
Report evaluation findings	• Communicate findings to broader stakeholder groups as required. • Style of report needs to reflect the audience and how the information is to be used. • Ensure there are no surprises for stakeholders.
Adaptive management	• Apply findings to improve implementation of plans, accountability or policy decisions. • Negotiate changes to program where relevant.
Review evaluation process	• Review and adapt evaluation plan and implementation accordingly if the evaluation process is ongoing. • Undertake and communicate changes with partners if required. • Where the evaluation process is complete, ensure there is documentation about ‘what worked and what didn’t’ in the evaluation as part of project closure. This information can assist future evaluation processes.