

Appendix 7
EERE Quality Assurance Guidelines for
General Program Evaluation Studies

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Quality assurance (QA) is essential to the effective development of general program evaluations if they are to have high credibility with program managers, management, OMB, Congress, and other stakeholders. Quality is more than meeting a set of standards, it is an ingrained attitude that plays out in day-to-day behaviors that result in the delivery of programs and products that meet and exceed the needs and expectations of customers and stakeholders.

EERE expects that program managers will hire third-party expert reviewers to review at least the Evaluation Plan and draft report(s). How programs implement such third party review will depend on the scale and the scope of the evaluation. Table 1 provides guidance.

However the review is implemented, it is important to provide the reviewers with a scope for the review. The reviewer should be asked to address a specific set of factors designed to guide but not limit the reviewer’s input. The scope for the review is especially important when multiple reviewers are involved. Reviewers should feel free to raise issues that are outside the scope for the review. This appendix provides a list of such factors.

Table 1: Options for Implementing a Third Party Quality Assurance Review Panel

| Evaluation | QA Review Panel |
|---|---|
| Evaluations with larger budgets, that are broad in scope, that have wide stakeholder interest, and that may be difficult to implement | Establish a standing peer review panel comprised of 4-5 outside experts to review the Evaluation Plan and the draft report. The standing peer review group would attend two or three one-day on-site meetings and provide written comments. The evaluation project manager should respond to review comments and modify the Evaluation Plan and draft report as appropriate. |
| Evaluations with small budgets and narrow scope | Choose two or three outside reviewers with appropriate skills, provide them with the documents and information to be reviewed, and ask them to provide written feedback. The evaluation project manager can: 1) utilize the feedback directly with no further input 2) circulate the feed back among the reviewers and convene a teleconference to discuss the results. The latter option may be the preferred option when there are differences among the reviewers. |
| Selected technical aspects of an evaluation, such as sampling plans, questionnaires, guides, or data analysis | Select two or three persons who understand the content and the technical requirements and have them provide written suggestions. |

The table that follows lists the key evaluation activities that should benefit from a QA review and identifies the related QA factors. The table also identifies the categories of individuals that should be involved in review at each stage. The factors listed in this table can be used to construct a QA plan for specific general program evaluations.

Table 2: Quality Assurance Factors and QA Review Participants

| Quality Assurance Factors | Participants in the QA Review |
|--|---|
| Development of the SOW | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes statement of objectives of the evaluation. • Focus is on issues that are critical to the program. • Evaluation has the backing of program managers, managers, stakeholders and others who have an interest in the outcome of the evaluation. • Utilizes evaluation designs and data collection and analysis techniques that are appropriate to the goals and objectives being addressed. • Utilizes evaluation designs and data collection and analysis techniques that are based on generally accepted scientific evaluation practice. • Has funding and timelines that are commensurate with the expected results. • Incorporates procedures that test to see that data collection activities are reliably producing valid data. • Provides for continuing review of intermediate, draft and final work products. • Program to be evaluated is described sufficiently well to allow evaluators to understand it. • Key questions to be answered by the evaluation have been identified. • Proposed data collection and analysis methods will produce relevant data at an acceptable cost. • Data collection and analysis methods are feasible. • Resources and timeframe in which the evaluation is to be conducted are sufficient to complete the research activities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation project manager • Program manager • Stakeholders interested in the results of the evaluation |

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| Quality Assurance Factors | Participants in the QA Review |
|--|---|
| Contractor Evaluation Plan | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QA panel consisting of one or more third party evaluators has been established. • Contractor understands the program. • All of the key evaluation questions have been identified. • Key questions can be answered with the proposed data collection and analysis methods. • Proposed sample sizes are adequate. • Procedures for drawing the sample frames and collecting the data are feasible. • Those procedures will produce data that are relevant to the questions to be answered. • Procedures to assure the validity and the reliability of the data to be collected have been proposed. • Analysis methods are appropriate and contractor has the knowledge and skill to undertake the analysis. • For statistical methods, the degree of relationship between indicators, tests of significance, and confidence intervals for sample estimates will be included in the analysis, as appropriate • The analysis will incorporate results of any previous related studies. • There is a reasonably detailed outline or description of the expected reports or products that matches the goals of the evaluation. • Contractor work plan has been submitted for review to the QA panel. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation project manager • Program manager • Others as identified by the evaluation project manager • QA panel (see Table 1) |

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| Quality Assurance Factors | Participants in the QA Review |
|--|--|
| Sampling, Data Collection Instruments, and Data Collection Activities (Either as described in the Contractor's Evaluation Plan or as Produced during the Project) | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contents of the data collection instruments map to the researchable issues and goals and objectives of the evaluation. • There is sufficient sociographic, firmographic or demographic data to describe the populations of interest. • Any guides or survey instruments are structured in accordance with good design principles. • In surveys, closed response sets have been used wherever possible and the items in the response sets are complete and unique. • Guides or questionnaires been reviewed by people who understand the program. • Surveys have been pre-tested. • Data validation procedures have been incorporated. • Population list or sample frame represents the population. • There are procedures in place to replace sample points for refusals, dropouts, and points that cannot be contacted. • Any inferred data values use appropriate inference methods. • Above factors are examined by QA panel during the Evaluation Plan review. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation project manager • Program manager and/or program personnel • QA panel (see Table 1) |

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| Quality Assurance Factors | Participants in the QA Review |
|---|--|
| Draft Report | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QA panel consisting of one or more third party evaluators has been established. • There is an approved outline for the report. • The outline for the report includes a description of the program, a list of the researchable issues, a discussion of data collection and analysis methods, a discussion of the limitations of any data collected, and a logically organized set of content chapters. • The data have been structured properly for the analysis. • The metrics and indices that have been constructed have a substantive, logical and statistical basis. • The analysis techniques are appropriate. • The discussion in the text is supported by the data. • The summaries and conclusions follow from the analysis. • The reports present answers to all questions asked. • Report versions have been submitted for review to the QA panel or equivalent. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation project manager • Program manager • Program personnel • Stakeholders • QA panel (see Table 1) |
| On-going | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the evaluators have encountered difficulties that will impact schedule or budget there is a plan for addressing these difficulties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation program manager • Evaluation contractor |