

PROGRAM CYCLE

ADS 201 Additional Help

MANAGING THE PEER REVIEW OF A DRAFT EVALUATION REPORT

All draft evaluation reports are required to go through a peer review process. This document shares good practices for conducting and managing this review. An effective review process **helps ensure high evaluation quality**, an important step to successfully sharing, applying, and learning from evaluations.

Policy

The Automated Directives System (ADS) establishes the minimum criteria for all evaluation reports. [ADS 201.3.6.9](#) specifies that the evaluation report should be reviewed against [ADS 201maa, Criteria to Ensure the Quality of the Evaluation Report](#) and [ADS 201mah, Evaluation Report Requirements](#). The office managing the evaluation must organize the peer review of an evaluation draft report (see [ADS 201.3.6.9](#)). Mission Orders on evaluation **may** outline the standards for the peer review process. Final content of the evaluation is determined by the evaluation team.

USAID staff may suggest edits to the substance of a report, but should not require that changes be made to findings or conclusions. Per [ADS 201.3.6.9](#), implementers, funders, and members of the evaluation team must be given the opportunity to write a statement of difference regarding any significant unresolved differences of opinion, to be attached to the final evaluation report.

Guidance

The Evaluation Toolkit provides assistance in the process to monitor compliance of evaluation reports with the USAID Evaluation Policy (see [How-To Note: Preparing Evaluation Reports](#); the evaluation report template **per [ADS 201mah](#)**; and the [Evaluation Report Checklist and Review Template](#)). In addition, the Toolkit contains guidance on documenting statements of difference, which is part of the review process.

Types of reviews

Similar to the process for reviewing an evaluation statement of work (SOW), there are different kinds of reviews for draft evaluation reports. The processes and purpose of these reviews often vary.

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.

- **Compliance review.** This review is best conducted by the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) of the Evaluation in the Program Office or the evaluation point of contact to ensure the evaluation meets the standards established in [ADS 201maa, Criteria to Ensure the Quality of the Evaluation Report](#).
- **Peer review.** The COR/**Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR)** of the evaluation should coordinate this review. The review **should** include two kinds of peer reviewers:
 - Individuals who have not directly participated in the evaluation, project, or activity but bring subject matter or technical expertise to an evaluation.
 - USAID staff managing and implementing the project or activity being evaluated.

The peer **review** should **include the COR/AOR for the evaluation and at least two other people**. At least one peer reviewer should have expertise in evaluation methods. Please 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. Regardless of the number of reviewers, no more than half should come from the technical office that oversees the activity or project being evaluated to ensure objectivity and independence of the review. Reviewers should check the evaluation **for factual clarifications of findings and conclusions and ensure they are supported by the evaluation data to the extent possible** (Tools: [Evaluation Report Checklist and Review Template](#) and [USAID Evaluations: Statement of Differences Questions and Answers](#)) and ask questions about recommendations **to determine if implementers are able to take actions based on the recommendations**.

- **Stakeholder review** (including implementing partners, alliance partners, host-country government partners, and others). Similar to the review by USAID staff involved directly in the project or activity, this group of reviewers should identify factual clarifications or address any limitations that the evaluators may have noted in the report (e.g., missing documentation, data, etc.). **They should also review for contextual accuracy, such as spelling of names of people and places, positions and titles of people interviewed, etc.** They should ask questions about recommendations relevant to their work. **Per ADS 201.3.6.9, these reviewers may prepare a statement of difference following the review of the draft report.**

What is the value of the review of the draft evaluation report?

There are numerous reasons to engage stakeholders, USAID staff, and peers in a review beyond the USAID requirement. These include:

- Ensuring that the required elements **in ADS 201mah** are included.
- Improving the overall quality of the evaluation. The peer review process can involve experts in evaluation and the technical subject area of the evaluation.
- Increasing the independence and objectivity of the evaluation. By bringing in additional staff members from other parts of the Mission or Agency, the response to an evaluation can benefit from perspectives that are not too close to the activity, project, or program being evaluated, thereby promoting a **broader range of perspectives**.
- Facilitating buy-in from internal stakeholders regarding the content of the evaluation. By bringing in the primary audiences who may use the evaluation results, the review can help ensure that the evaluation report meets the needs of these audiences.

Before the draft evaluation report is received

There are steps that the individual managing the evaluation in the Program Office can take to **prepare those who are relevant to** the review process:

1. Engage with the Program Office, Technical Offices, and Contract Office to update them on the evaluation **review** process; and
2. **Clarify the type of review and input reviewers can provide. If significant differences remain after the review, remind reviewers that a statement of difference can be attached to the final report.**

Managing the review process

Once the evaluation report is **formally** received, **the COR/AOR** of the evaluation should organize the review process. Mission staff should consult their Mission Order on Evaluation for peer review practices specific to their Mission. Below are some key questions to answer when conducting a peer review:

When to conduct the reviews?

Missions should aim to conduct the review after a **full draft of the evaluation** is completed **by** the evaluation **team**. If the **COR/AOR** finds that an evaluation draft report is incomplete, they should avoid circulating it. Instead, they should consider returning the evaluation **report** to the evaluation team with instructions for completing the report. A complete draft streamlines the review and ensures that reviewers focus on substantive issues within the report.

When scheduling the peer review, the COR/AOR for the evaluation should ensure that sufficient time is allowed after the peer review to compile, consolidate, and prioritize comments prior to returning reviewer comments to the evaluation team.

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 draft evaluation report. If considering including USAID/Washington staff members in the peer review, the individuals involved should be contacted to determine their standards for how long they typically take to review an evaluation report, ensuring 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 evaluation report, request written comments on the draft evaluation report, or both. Many Missions choose to ask peer reviewers to fill out standard review sheets or checklists (see [Evaluation Report Checklist and Review Template](#)), while others prefer reviewers to send comments utilizing a standardized format.

After the review

The COR/AOR for the evaluation should consolidate and share the comments with the evaluation team. A statement of difference, if submitted, should typically be written by USAID staff, other funders, or implementing partners involved directly in the project or activity.

If statements of difference are submitted, the COR/AOR for the evaluation should share them with the evaluation team. The evaluation team should be given the opportunity to revise and respond to the statements in the evaluation report.

For more information

The following is more information on the requirements for evaluation reports to inform the peer review process:

- Your Mission's Standardized Mission Order on Evaluation and the Model Mission Order for Evaluation (noting that the new ADS 201 supersedes any conflicting language)
- [ADS 201.3.6.9, Evaluation Reports](#)
- [ADS 201maa, Criteria to Ensure the Quality of the Evaluation Report](#)
- [ADS 201mah, USAID Evaluation Report Requirements](#)

- From the Toolkit:
 - Guidance: [How-to Note: Preparing Evaluation Reports](#). This note provides current good practice in preparing evaluation reports, the main deliverable for most evaluations. These practices also serve as a guide for reviewing the quality of draft evaluation reports submitted by the evaluation team.
 - Tool: [Evaluation Report Template](#). This template is an optional tool to help improve consistency of the evaluation report with USAID formatting standards.
 - Tool: [Evaluation Report Checklist and Review Template](#). This template includes two tools: a checklist for compliance and a peer review template. The tool includes guidance for users on each tool and the correct usage.
 - Guidance: [USAID Evaluations: Statement of Differences Questions and Answers](#). Each USAID evaluation report should include any Statements of Difference as an annex. These statements describe any significant unresolved difference(s) of opinion by funders, implementers, and/or members of the evaluation team.

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