

Monitoring and Evaluation Plan Primer for DRL Grantees

I. What is a monitoring and evaluation plan?

A monitoring and evaluation plan (M&E plan), sometimes also referred to as a performance monitoring or performance management plan, is a systematic and objective approach or process for monitoring project performance toward its objectives over time. The plan consists of indicators with baselines and targets; means for tracking critical assumptions; plans for managing the data collection process; and regular collection of data. Evaluations should be scheduled and carried out throughout the course of the program.

Development of an M&E plan is integral to the planning of a program design. In fact, a rigorous M&E plan can be an effective tool for formulating a coherent and well-designed program proposal, both in revealing assumptions and exposing gaps in program planning. As the implementer modifies its program design, it is important to incorporate those changes into the M&E plan and vice versa.

All program proposals being considered for DRL funding **must** include a comprehensive M&E plan. This plan is one of the key criteria in determining the competitiveness of a program proposal.

II. Why is it important?

As a planning document, an M&E plan forces an implementer to think systematically through each of the program components. During program execution, a well-designed plan helps the implementer to keep track of the program's progress and make adjustments if necessary. It is also a valuable tool for demonstrating the effectiveness and impact of a program, generating credible and useful information for both the implementer and donor that contributes to learning, improved performance, and accountability. For the donor, if a program has proven results, the M&E plan is a useful method for showcasing the program's success and documenting the implementer's track record. If the program is less than successful, the M&E plan can help to identify specific weaknesses. In either case, the M&E plan is useful for informing the donor's decisions about future budget allocations and programming.

When DRL's Management Team conducts its bi-annual review of each grant, DRL uses the M&E plan as one way to compare the actual progress and impact of a program against the proposed activities and objectives. DRL compiles this information to measure the collective results of DRL programs and determine trends in program areas.

III. Goals of a monitoring and evaluation plan

A M&E plan focuses on the performance of a project or program and examines its implementation plan, inputs, outputs and outcomes/results. A project is defined as an individually planned undertaking designed to achieve specific objectives within a given budget and time frame. The M&E plan should address the following questions: Did the project take off as planned? What problems and challenges, if any, did it face? Is it being effectively managed? Is it providing planned activities and other outputs in a timely fashion? If not, why? Will the project be able to meet its targets? What are its intermediary effects and impacts? What can be done to improve its performance and impacts?

Most of the information for monitoring and evaluation can be gathered through reviews of project and program documents; developing and conducting surveys, focus group discussions and meetings with participants and other beneficiaries; and interviews with project staff, host country officials and other stakeholders.

A solid M&E plan generally includes a mid-term and final evaluation. The mid-term evaluation can measure the interim progress of a program and identify areas that could be modified to improve performance and impact. The final evaluation can not only assesses the program's overall results, but also provide an analysis on lessons learned and make future recommendations.

IV. Using a logic model to develop a good M&E plan (and program design)

A recommended method for program design and development of an M&E plan is to use a logic model. A logic model is a depiction of the processes and targeted outcomes of the program. It should help the organization to specify strategic objectives, identify what resources are needed, develop indicators to measure progress and proposed results, and communicate the program's potential value.

The components of a basic logic model include:

- Needs: The community need or problem as identified by the organization.
- Inputs: Human and financial resources used for the program implementation.
- Activities: Actions taken or work performed through which inputs are mobilized to produce outputs.
- Performance Indicators: Qualitative and quantitative measures or variables to be applied to the program activities. Performance indicators are directly linked to

measuring progress toward program objectives and are often a combination of monitoring and evaluation.

- Pathways: Linkages that specify how activities of a program lead to the expected outputs, outcomes, and impact of a program through each step of the logic model.
- Expected Outputs: Direct and measurable results expected from program activities. They should be tangible, visible and measurable products of program work. If they are sustainable beyond the activity, they may turn into program outcomes.
- Expected Outcomes: The short-term and medium-term effects of a program's outputs. Outcomes should reflect the results of program's activities and their near-term effects on program goals.
- Expected Impact: The long-term effects of a program, which is linked closely to the overall program objective. Such an objective could be as ambitious as reducing human rights violations in an authoritarian society, or it could be less ambitious, though equally important, such as adding greater female representation to a country's political parties.
- Assumptions: Hypotheses about factors or risks which could affect the progress or success of a program intervention. Our underlying beliefs about the program, the stakeholders or beneficiaries.
- External Factors: Factors which are not explicitly in the control of the program but which can have an important effect on the intended outcomes and impact, such as government policies or changes in the political situation in the country.

While the logic model is represented in a linear trajectory, the relationship between factors may not always be unidirectional. Sometimes factors can mutually affect each other. Thus, the logic model should be viewed as a dynamic and evolving process, which should be re-evaluated and adjusted when conditions change.

On the following page is a template of a logic model and its key components. It includes examples under each component.

Logic Model Template

Needs	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
Needs of the community based on the social, political, and economic conditions of the country or region.	Staff Time Money Materials Equipment Partners	Conduct workshops, meetings Deliver services Provide training Facilitate Partner	Products created Resources developed Services delivered Participants (e.g., NGOs, local citizens, media, host country government officials) reached <i>Measured with Performance indicators</i>	Increased awareness, knowledge, or attitudes Improved skills Change in behavior, practice, or decisionmaking Policy change <i>Measured with Performance indicators</i>	Change in social, economic, or civic condition
Assumptions			External Factors		
Country's political and economic condition Skills and knowledge level of intended beneficiary Implementer's organizational capacity Level of engagement by stakeholders			Change in government policies, such as NGO restrictions Change in political situation, such as a coup or civil unrest Involvement from other donors and implementers		

V. The difference between a goal and an objective

The terms goals and objectives are often used interchangeably, but there are distinct differences between the two, mainly in terms of their level of concreteness. Both terms imply the target desired as a result of one's efforts. However, goals are less structured, whereas objectives are concrete and viewed as targets under the general goal. Also, because goals tend to be lofty in nature, it is not possible to measure the accomplishment of one's goals. But one goes about measuring progress towards a goal by setting tangible objectives with clear timelines, which are possible to measure. For example, country X has set the goal of establishing a free and independent media representing its diverse populations. One program strategic objective is to train a cadre of female journalists on investigative journalism from researching to reporting, while another program strategic objective is to build the management skills of the station managers of a new independent radio station so that they can effectively run the station. Achievement of these objectives suggests advancement towards the end goal of actualizing an independent media.

Below is a table delineating the key differences between goals and objectives.

Goals	Objectives
Broad and visionary in nature	Narrow and time bound
General intentions	Precise
Not resource dependent	Resource dependent
Intangible	Tangible
Abstract	Concrete
Can't be validated	Can be validated

DRL details the goals of its funding priorities in the Request for Proposals. Potential grantees should identify the strategic objectives for its programs in its proposal and briefly explain how their program strategic objectives fit within DRL's goals.

VI. Developing valid and reliable performance indicators

Performance indicators are used to observe progress and measure actual results compared with expected results. Performance indicators should be linked to the program's strategic objectives and focus on outputs and outcomes, as identified by the program's logic model. In differentiating between outputs and outcomes, it can be useful to think of outcomes as developmentally significant changes that impact the beneficiaries, while

outputs are lower-level steps that are not developmentally significant but are essential in achieving results. Outputs may impact the beneficiaries but in a more limited way than outcomes. The link between outputs and outcomes should always be direct. For example, the activity could be training community journalists on investigative journalism through a series of workshops. One output could be the number of community journalists who are trained. The outcome could be the new skills that participants' develop as a result of the workshops. However, it may take many outputs from several activities over time to achieve an outcome or, ultimately, measureable impact. For example, the program objective could be developing quality community journalists in the field of investigative journalism. Besides participating in the series of workshops, leading investigative journalists mentor these community journalists in this trade over the course of a year. The combination of the workshops and mentorship is meant to elevate the quality of work produced by these community journalists.

Measures should be in quantifiable terms and clearly defined. Qualitative indicators, though more rare than quantitative indicators, are acceptable if they provide a reliable means to measure a particular phenomenon or attribute. A good guide for determining performance measures is the acronym SMART. They should be:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Timely

Back to the example described above, one performance indicator is the quality of the participants' written work. This can be measured by having journalism experts systematically compare the participants' work written before and after their participation in the workshops and the mentorship program.

Besides defining the performance indicators in the M&E plan, it is also important to set baselines and targets for each indicator and describe the methodology for measuring the performance indicators (e.g., pre- and post-test surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc.), including the data source (e.g., training sign-in sheets, website hits, survey data) and the frequency of measurement (e.g., after each workshop, quarterly, annually).

To assess trends across the four program areas under the Foreign Assistance Framework (Human Rights and Rule of Law, Civil Society, Political Process and Competition-Building, and Good Governance), DRL has identified a set of standard output-oriented indicators within each program area. *In addition to program-specific indicators, grantees are also required to report on any of these indicators that are relevant to their program*

in the quarterly progress reports, by each quarter and cumulative over the life of the grant, so that DRL can meet its own Department of State reporting requirements.

VII. Use of a Third-party or External Evaluator

Ideally, an experienced evaluator should be involved with the program from the very beginning. The evaluator should collect data relevant to the program's activities and evaluate the implementer's impact. One of the better ways of ensuring that the monitoring and evaluation is done thoroughly and effectively is to hire a third-party or external evaluator -- someone who is not personally involved with the project and, preferably, not directly related to the organization. An external evaluation is not a requirement for DRL programs, but proposals, which include one, tend to be rated more competitively by panelists. An external evaluator can take a fresh look at the program and can be more objective when collecting and analyzing data and presenting the results. Resources for finding a program evaluator include colleges and universities, research firms, and nonprofits or other specialized organizations either in the U.S. or in the country where the program is being implemented.

If the program includes an independent evaluation, DRL should be consulted on the hiring of the independent evaluator and evaluation methodology, where applicable. DRL should also receive the independent evaluator's reports.

VIII. Key definitions

Activity: A specific action or process undertaken over a specific period of time by an organization to convert resources to products or services to achieve results. Related terms: Program and Project.

Assumptions: Hypotheses about factors or risks, such as underlying beliefs about the program, the stakeholders or beneficiaries, which could affect the progress or success of a program.

Baseline: Information collected before or at the start of a project or program that provides a basis for planning and/or assessing subsequent progress and impact. Ideally, the baseline should be measured just before the implementation of activities that contribute to achieving the result.

Benchmark: A standard against which results are measured. Related terms: Milestone, Target.

Beneficiaries: The individuals, groups, or organizations that benefit from an activity, project, or program.

Data: Information collected by a researcher or program implementer. Data gathered during an evaluation are analyzed to yield findings that serve as the basis for conclusions and recommendations.

Data Collection Methods: Techniques used to identify information sources, collect information, and minimize bias during an evaluation. Examples include surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

Evaluation: A systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project or program. Evaluations are undertaken to (a) improve the performance of existing programs, (b) assess their effects and impacts, and (c) inform decisions about future programming. Evaluations are formal analytical endeavors involving systematic collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative information.

Evaluation Design: The methodology selected for collecting and analyzing data in order to reach defensible conclusions about a program or project efficiency and effectiveness.

External Evaluation: The evaluation of a project or program conducted by entities and/or individuals not directly related to the implementing organization. Related term: Independent Evaluation.

External Factors: Factors which are not explicitly in the control of the program but which can have an important effect on the intended outcomes and impact, such as government policies or changes in the political situation in the country (e.g., a law restricting NGO activities, coup).

Goal: The higher-order objective to which a project or program is intended to contribute. A goal should be lofty in nature and not resource dependent.

Impact: A result or effect that is caused by or attributable to a project or program. It can also be a significant and measurable change affecting project beneficiaries. Impact is often used to refer to higher level effects of a program that occur in the medium or long term, and can be intended or unintended and positive or negative. For example, if an education program trains teachers, the number of teachers trained is the outputs, skills acquired by teachers and improvement in teacher's quality of teaching are the outcomes, and the improvement in the education of those teachers' students is the impact. Related terms: Result, Outcome.

Independent Evaluation: An evaluation carried out by entities and persons not directly involved in the design or implementation of a project or program. It is characterized by full access to information and by full autonomy in carrying out investigations and reporting findings. Related term: External Evaluation.

Indicator (or Performance Indicator): A particular characteristic or dimension used to measure intended changes. Indicators are used to observe progress and measure actual

results compared with expected results. Indicators answer “how” or “whether” a project is progressing toward objectives. Indicators can be expressed quantitatively and should be objective and measureable (e.g., numeric value, percentages, indices). Indicators which are qualitative are less common, though acceptable if they provide a reliable means to measure a particular phenomenon or attribute. Examples of indicators include: number of gender-based violence survivors provided social support services and percent change in knowledge about investigative journalism from workshop participants.

Input: Resources used to produce an output or results, such as technical assistance, commodities, capital, and training. Resources provided for program implementation. Examples are money, staff, time, facilities, equipment, etc.

Internal Evaluation: Evaluation conducted by those who are implementing and/or managing the intervention or program. Related term: Self-Evaluation.

Logic Model: A logic model, often a visual representation, provides a road map showing the sequence of related events connecting the need for a planned program with the programs’ desired outcomes and results. It should identify strategic project elements (e.g., inputs, outputs, outcomes, impact) and their relationships, indicators, and the assumptions or risks that may influence success and failure.

Mid-term Evaluation: Evaluation performed towards the midpoint of the program or project implementation.

Milestone: Specific interim events, products, or steps in a process that convey progress toward completion of a deliverable or result. Milestones tend to be output-oriented. Examples include: 5 trainings held, working group established, and law drafted by the working group. Related terms: Benchmark, Target.

Monitoring: The performance and analysis of routine measurements to detect a change in status. Monitoring is used to inform managers about the progress of an ongoing intervention or program, and to detect problems that may be able to be addressed through corrective actions.

Objective: A statement of the condition or state one expects to achieve. An objective should be concrete, time-bound, and measureable and viewed as targets within the general goal. Related term: Strategic objective.

Outcome: Specific changes in events, occurrences, or conditions, such as attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, skills, status, or level of functioning, that are caused by or attributable to outputs or program activities. These often are expressed at an individual level among program participants. For example, an education program might train teachers; the number of teacher trained and the number of skills acquired by the trained teachers are outputs. Training teachers would presumably lead to improved instruction,

which is an outcome. Outcome is often used to refer to more immediate and intended effects. Related term: Result.

Output: A tangible, immediate, and intended product or consequence of an activity within an organization's manageable interest. Program deliverables are generally considered outputs. Examples include: number of journalist trained, number of media articles written, and number of manuals distributed.

Program: A set of activities implemented by a defined set of implementers and designed to achieve specific objectives over a specified period of time that may cut across sectors, themes and/or geographic areas. Related terms: Activity, Project.

Program Evaluation: Evaluation of a set of activities designed to attain specific global, regional, country, or sector development objectives. A program is a time-bound intervention involving multiple activities that may cut across sectors, themes and/or geographic areas.

Project: An individually planned undertaking designed to achieve specific objectives within a given budget and time frame. Related terms: Activity, Program.

Result: A significant, intended (or unintended), and measureable change in the condition of a beneficiary or a change in the host country, institutions, or other entities that affect the customer/beneficiary directly or indirectly. Related term: Outcome.

Scope of Work: A written description of the objectives, tasks, methods, deliverables and schedules for an evaluation.

Self-Evaluation: An evaluation by those who are entrusted with the design and implementation of a project or program. Related term: Internal Evaluation.

Strategic Objective: The most ambitious result that the program can affect and for which it is willing to be held accountable within the planned time period. Related term: Objective.

Target: An expected value or level of an indicator at a specified point in time in the future. The target shows the expected level of achievement or progress in achieving the associated result and forms the standard against which actual results are compared and assessed. A target is defined for each indicator as part of the M&E plan. Related terms: Benchmark, Milestone.

IX. Useful resources

American Evaluation Association

www.eval.org/

United Way, *Outcome Measurement Resource Network*

<http://www.liveunited.org/Outcomes/Resources/MPO/excerpts.cfm>

U.S. Foreign Assistance website

www.foreignassistance.net

World Bank, *Independent Evaluation Group*

<http://www.worldbank.org/oed/>

World Bank, *Independent Evaluation: Principles, Guidelines and Good Practice*

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTDGF/Resources/Evaluation&LearningNote.pdf>

X. Sources

Logic Model Development Guide:

<http://www.exinfm.com/training/pdfiles/logicModel.pdf>

U.S. Foreign Assistance Evaluation Glossary:

<http://communities.usaidallnet.gov/fa/node/1498>

U.S. Foreign Assistance Evaluation Guidelines:

<http://communities.usaidallnet.gov/fa/node/1499>