EVALUATION PLANS AND OPERATIONS CHECKLIST
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This checklist is for conducting preliminary, formative metaevaluations. It is organized according to seven main aspects of an evaluation. By examining an evaluation plan or process against the specific checkpoints in each category, an evaluator can derive direction for strengthening the evaluation plan or operations.

I. Conceptualization of Evaluation. Evaluators and clients/stakeholders should establish a shared, sound understanding of the guiding concept of evaluation.

☐ Definition	How is evaluation defined?
☐ Purpose	What purposes(s) will be served?
☐ Values	What values will undergird this evaluation?
☐ Questions	What questions will be addressed?
☐ Information	What information is required?
☐ Audiences	What persons and groups will be served?
☐ Agents	Who will do the evaluation?
☐ Process	How will the evaluation be conducted?
☐ Standards	By what standards will the evaluation be judged, e.g., utility, propriety, feasibility, and accuracy?

II. Sociopolitical Factors. Evaluators and clients should identify and effectively address affected/concerned groups.

☐ Involvement	Whose sanction and support is required, and how will it be secured?
☐ Audience communication styles	Considering the communication styles of the client and other members of the audience, how can the evaluator best convey the evaluation findings?
☐ Internal communication	How will key audience needs for information on the evaluation's progress be determined and met, and how will communication be maintained between the evaluators, the sponsors, and the system's personnel?
☐ Internal credibility	Will the evaluation be fair to all system participants and clients and not biased in favor of or against any stakeholder perspective(s)?
☐ External credibility	Will the evaluation be free of bias?
☐ Realistic expectations	How will the evaluator make clear to stakeholders that realistically only a subset of their information needs will be addressed?
☐ Security	What provisions will assure security of the data?
☐ Protocol	What communication channels will be honored and employed?
☐ Public relations	How will stakeholders be consulted and kept informed about the intents and results of the evaluation?
☐ Political viability	How will evaluators stay abreast of social and political forces associated with the evaluation and use this knowledge when planning and carrying out evaluation procedures?
☐ Evaluator qualifications	Does the composition of the evaluation team assure knowledge of context and competence in content and methodological areas?
☐ Stakeholder confidence	What checks will be made to ensure that the evaluation plan and the composition of the evaluation team are responsive and acceptable to the key stakeholders?

III. Contractual/Legal Arrangements. Evaluators and clients should establish clear working agreements to ensure efficient collaboration and protect involved parties' rights.	
☐ Client, evaluator, & other roles	Who is the sponsor, who is the evaluator, who are the other audiences, and how are they related to the evaluand?
☐ Evaluation products	What evaluation outcomes are to be delivered and in what form?
☐ Equitable evaluation service	What safeguards assure that the evaluation will serve all levels of stakeholders in addition to persons in leadership or decision-making roles?
☐ Realistic commitments	What clarifications assure that the evaluation can proceed while making reasonable efforts to serve a broad audience but not becoming bogged down in overidentifying and consulting with stakeholders?
☐ Delivery schedule	What is the schedule of evaluation services and products?
☐ Editing reports	Who has authority for editing evaluation reports?
☐ Access to data	What existing data may the evaluators use, and what new data may they obtain?
☐ Access to stakeholders	Are there sufficient safeguards to assure that evaluators may contact involved stakeholders?
☐ Prerelease reviews	Will the client and representatives of the intended audience(s) be provided appropriate opportunities to review draft reports for clarity and fairness prior to their finalization and release?
☐ Release of reports	Who will release the reports, and what audiences may receive them?
☐ Responsibility & authority	Have the system personnel and evaluators agreed on what persons and groups have both the responsibility and authority to perform the various evaluation tasks?
☐ Finances	What is the schedule of payments for the evaluation, and who will provide the funds?
☐ External audit	Is there provision, as needed, to have the evaluation plan reviewed and the evaluation work audited by another evaluator whose credentials are acceptable to the client and trusted by the other key stakeholders?
☐ Contract review & revision	Is there appropriate provision for reviewing and amending the contract in response to emergent developments in the evaluation?
IV. Technical Design. Evaluators should convert a general evaluation plan to a detailed, yet flexible technical plan.	
☐ Objectives	What is the evaluand intended to achieve/produce, and in what terms should it be evaluated?
☐ Variables	What classes of information will be collected, e.g., context, inputs, processes, outcomes?
☐ Program description	Will the object of the evaluation (e.g., the program) be described sufficiently, so that stakeholders will understand its nature?
☐ Investigatory framework	Under what conditions will the data be gathered, e.g., experimental design, case study, survey, site review, examination, etc.?
☐ Instrumentation	What data-gathering instruments and techniques will be employed, and how will the evaluator assure that they address the key evaluation questions?
☐ Sampling	What samples will be drawn, how will they be drawn, and will they meet both utility and technical requirements?
☐ Data gathering	How will the data-gathering plan be implemented, and who will gather the data?

☐ Data storage and retrieval	What format, procedures, and facilities will be used to store and retrieve the data?
☐ Data analysis	How will the data be analyzed?
☐ Sources of interpretation	Who is charged to interpret findings, e.g., the evaluators, various stakeholders, a regulatory body, etc.?
☐ Bases for interpretation	What bases will be used to interpret findings, e.g., objectives, assessed needs, contractual specifications, laws and regulations, democratic ideals, social norms, performance by a comparison group, technical standards, polls, judgments by reference groups, etc.?
☐ Methods of interpretation	What methods will be used to assign value meaning to findings, e.g., focus groups, a Delphi study, advocacy and adversary reports, etc.?
☐ Reports	What reports will be used to disseminate the evaluation findings?
☐ Reporting media	Considering the preferences of the audiences, what are the most appropriate means of reporting findings, e.g., detailed technical reports, summaries, press conferences, study sessions, memos and letters, video presentations, etc.?
☐ Reporting language	Will reports need to be presented in different languages—technical and nontechnical, English and other language(s) —to meet the needs of different audiences?
☐ Reporting format	Will reports be carefully formatted to enhance their readability?
☐ Responsive design	What ongoing evaluation planning process and resource plan will assure flexibility for adding to or otherwise revising the evaluation questions and obtaining unanticipated, pertinent information?
Delimited design	Is there a clear delimitation of the design, including the purpose of the evaluation and the questions that will be answered?
☐ Attention to trade-offs	How will the evaluation address trade-offs between comprehensiveness and selectivity at each stage of the evaluation: planning; budgeting; and collecting, organizing, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting information?
☐ Technical adequacy	What are assurances that the findings will be reliable, valid, and objective?

V. Management Plan. Evaluators should control and direct the evaluation efficiently and enhance the host agency's capacity to evaluate.

☐ Organizational mechanism	What organizational unit will be employed, e.g., an in-house office of evaluation, a self-evaluation system, a contract with an external organization, or a consortium-supported evaluation center?
☐ Organizational location	Through what channels can the evaluation influence policy formulation and administrative decision making?
☐ Policies and procedures	What established and/or ad hoc policies and procedures will govern this evaluation?
☐ Staff selection	Who will conduct the evaluation?
☐ Staff composition	Will the composition of the staff be responsive to the concerns of key stakeholders?
☐ Credibility of staff	Does the plan demonstrate that the staff will be competent, experienced, and credible in the pertinent content, environment, and methodological areas?
☐ Commitment of staff	Does the plan commit staff to the required time and effort and not just their reputations to the evaluation?
☐ Work management	What oversight and control will be administered to assure that evaluators devote time and effort, as well as their reputations, to the evaluation?

☐ Facilities	What space, equipment, and materials will be available to support the evaluation?
☐ Data-gathering schedule	What instruments will be administered, to what groups, according to what schedule?
☐ Maintaining focus	Are there sufficient safeguards to prevent gathering extraneous information?
☐ Reporting schedule	What reports will be provided, to what audiences, according to what schedule?
☐ Training	Who will provide what evaluation training to what groups?
☐ Installation of evaluation	Will this evaluation be used to aid the host institution to improve and extend its internal evaluation capability?
☐ Budget	What is the structure of the budget, is it sufficient but reasonable, and how will it be monitored?
☐ Allocation of resources	Have the resources for the evaluation been appropriately distributed across data collection, analysis, and reporting, placing the most effort on the most important information requirements?

VI. Moral/Ethical Imperatives. Evaluators and clients/stakeholders should clarify and confirm the evaluation's role in ethically serving some socially valuable purpose.

☐ Philosophical stance	Will the evaluation be value based, value plural, or value free?
☐ Evaluator's values	Will the evaluator's technical standards and values conflict with the client system's and/or sponsor's values; will the evaluator face any conflict of interest problems; what will be done about possible conflicts?
☐ Judgments	Will the evaluator judge the program; leave that to the client; or obtain, analyze, and report the judgments of various reference groups?
☐ Objectivity	How will the evaluator avoid being coopted and maintain his or her objectivity?
☐ Equity	How will the evaluator make sure to address and honor the needs and rights of all stakeholders equitably, taking appropriate account of their gender, ethnicity, and language backgrounds?
☐ Cost effective-ness	Compared to its potential payoff, will the evaluation be carried out at a reasonable cost?

VII. Utility Provisions. Evaluators should plan and execute steps that promote constructive uses of the evaluation findings.

☐ General prospects for utility	Will the evaluation meet utility criteria of relevance, scope, importance, credibility, timeliness, clarity, and pervasiveness?
☐ Mutual understanding	Is it quite certain that the evaluator understands the client's requirements and that the client understands the extent and limitations of the evaluator's commitment?
☐ Acceptability of the approach	Is there confirmation that the evaluator's approach is acceptable to the client and key stakeholders?
☐ Responsive-ness	Throughout the evaluation, will there be sufficient flexibility and resources to identify and address new audiences and new questions?
☐ Collaborative design	Will the evaluator directly involve clients and other stakeholders in designing and conducting the evaluation?
☐ Boundaries of use	Are there clear stipulations concerning what stakeholder needs will be served and which ones would be outside the evaluation's boundaries?
☐ Realistic expectations	Will appropriate steps be taken to help stakeholders develop realistic expectations considering available financial, time, and personnel resources?

☐ Service to all stakeholders	Are there adequate provisions to assure that the evaluator will determine the evaluation needs of the various stakeholders and, within feasibility limits, serve all levels of stakeholders?
☐ Tailoring	Are there appropriate provisions for tailoring reports to the needs of the different audiences?
☐ Stakeholder perspectives	What value perspectives do the stakeholders value most, e.g., educational, social, scientific, technical, economic?
☐ Trade-offs	Does the evaluation plan adequately consider trade-offs between comprehensiveness and selectivity at every step in the evaluation: planning, budgeting, and obtaining and reporting information?
☐ Acceptance of the plan	Are there provisions for clearly describing the evaluation plan to the full range of stakeholders and demonstrating that the plan is realistic and methodologically sound?
☐ Progress reports	Are there provisions for keeping interested audiences informed about the evaluation's progress?