



DeGEval

Gesellschaft für Evaluation e.V.

Recommendations for Clients of Evaluations

An Introductory Brochure for the Field
of Public Administration

www.degeval.de

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Introduction

Evaluation is of crucial importance, both internationally and in the German-speaking world. It is established in very diverse fields of application, such as structural policy, education and science, health, development policy, town and regional planning, social services, public administration, industry, the labour market, technology, and the environment. This requires differentiation of evaluation approaches and methods. Evaluation practice too, however, is developed to different degrees within these fields.

The high, and ever-growing, demand for evaluation involves many opportunities, but also risks. These are concerned with the quality of evaluations, the professionalism of evaluators, as well as the framework for evaluation, thus also affecting the clients of evaluations. A central aim of **DeGEval – Gesellschaft für Evaluation (Evaluation Society)**, founded in 1997, is thus to advance the professionalisation of evaluation, as well as to provide all those involved in evaluation or interested in its issues with a framework for a continual exchange of information. To this end, DeGEval has produced a series of publications, including the “Standards for Evaluation”, which set out quality criteria for performing systematic, data-based evaluations.

The recommendations set out by DeGEval here are aimed at the clients of evaluations, primarily at organisations and institutions of public administration such as state and federal departments, regional and local authorities, public corporations, publicly financed institutions, as well as churches and foundations.

The target group comprises people who are responsible for, control, develop or implement measures within their organisation, but who have not yet had much opportunity to get to know

the instrument of evaluation and to experience it for themselves. DeGEval would like to encourage this group of people to make use of the instrument

DeGEval Publications

- 2001: “Standards for Evaluation”
- Since 2002: Zeitschrift für Evaluation (“Journal of Evaluation”)
- 2004: “Guidelines for Implementation of the Standards in the Field of Self-Evaluation”
- 2004: “Recommendations on Education and Training in Evaluation”

of evaluation and to employ it when it is necessary to give an account of something or to learn from current and previous processes. The recommendations given in this booklet are thus to be seen as an introduction for clients to the field of evaluation.

The objective of the recommendations is to present important aspects concerning the assignment of evaluations for typical measures such as

- programmes, projects
- legal regulations
- institutions

in a consistent and systematic way. Definitions will only be referred to if they are necessary within the framework of the individual recommendations. Here, terminology that is common in the field of public administration will be employed.

Work packages within an evaluation assignment

prepare

**define
framework**

**tender
assign**

**plan
perform
accompany**

**disseminate
implement**

As the degree of detail possible within an introductory booklet is obviously limited, on the DeGEval homepage a list of links to guidelines for evaluations in various subject fields, as well as to glossaries, has been created. This col-

lection is added to and updated on a regular basis (www.degeval.de¹). The recommendations themselves can be used as a check list.

The structure of the recommendations is based on the work packages that have to be carried out in the course of an evaluation. These work packages generally do not simply follow on from one another, but rather frequently overlap or are connected with each other via feedback loops.

1. How is an evaluation prepared?

The initiative behind an evaluation can stem from various parties and be triggered by diverse causes. For example:

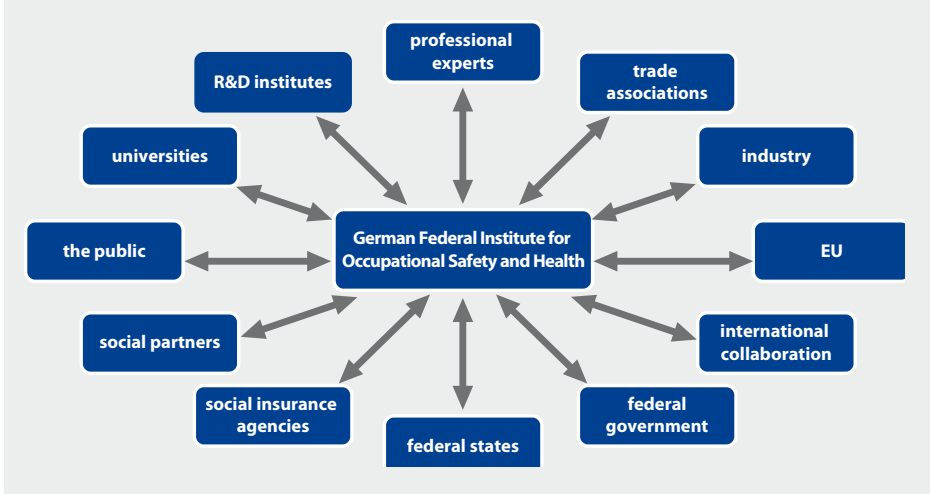
- if additional decision-making bases are required with regard to the continuation of a measure
- if managers of a programme wish to discover possibilities for improvement or gather arguments to use in competing for public resources
- if the management of an institution wants to set up internal procedures for aligning tasks with future requirements
- if the learning process of actors is to be supported by structured reflection on the goals, measures and outcomes of political processes and programmes
- if those with political responsibility require well-founded design information or a basis for justifying policies and individual measures
- if EU support funds are associated with the requirement of carrying out evaluations
- if legislators explicitly order evaluations of legal regulations
- if the quality of legal regulations is to be improved and the degree of regulation lessened.

In order for evaluations to provide the desired information, two central requirements have to be met: clarification of the system and openness to results among those involved.

¹ German language website

To clarify who may be affected by the outcomes of the evaluation, the person(s) responsible should first of all produce a visualisation of the “system” that is to be evaluated. In order to ensure that all significant stakeholders are considered, it is recommended that enquiries are made as to who decision-makers, managers and target groups are, and what their environment is like.

Schematic portrayal of the relationship network of the BAuA



The diagram shows the example of the complex system of the BAuA² (German Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) in Dortmund, which has relations with a very diverse range of partners. The arrows are indicators of a relationship. They do not differentiate, however, what kind of relationship it is or should be; clarification of this may form part of the evaluation. In preparing an evaluation of projects, programmes or legal regulations, a visualisation analogous to this one should be carried out.

In some cases, it may also be necessary to consider relationships between different stakeholders. Within an institution too, differentiations should be made between participating work units and levels of management, along with their respective relationships in the form of responsibilities or dependencies.

As a second step, it should be clarified what room there is for altering the relevant system, and whether important participants are also prepared to enact change. This requires them to be convinced of the benefit of the evaluation, and to be incorporated in the planning process from an early stage. For even if the various stakeholders, with varying perspectives and assumptions, converge towards the evaluation, a common basic understanding is required that evaluation can only achieve its full potential if it is prepared, assigned, planned, implemented and accompanied with an openness to its results.

2. How is the framework of an evaluation defined?

It must be differentiated between important stakeholders what is to be achieved with the evaluation. For this purpose, the framework of the evaluation needs to be defined. This requires the specification of the intended application of evaluation results by stakeholders, the time-point at which the evaluation is to be carried out, the form of the evaluation, and its scope. The roles of stakeholders and, if necessary, the role of an external evaluation team to be commissioned, need to be clarified prior to the evaluation with regard to responsibilities, functions and competencies.

Application of evaluation results: For what activities do we require the evaluation?

Evaluations should be based around the intended use of evaluation results, i.e. they should provide answers to concrete questions that stakeholders need answering, for instance if a new project is to be planned, if a decision is to be made about the continuation of a programme, or if transferable concepts are to be obtained from model programmes for standard use. Questions can be posed by all stakeholders. It is helpful here to refer to issues dealt with by similar, successfully completed evaluations as examples. In addition, the form and extent of possible gender relevance of the evaluand should always also be examined. It is not always possible, however, to satisfy all wishes (see "Scope of the evaluation" p. 12). Once questions have been collected, they are ordered and then condensed to form the terms of reference of the evaluation.

Time-point of the evaluation: What exactly do we want to know and when?

An evaluation should be prepared and implemented in such a way that its results are available at the time-points specified by stakeholders. The start of an evaluation should thus be calculated based on the time-point of its use, taking necessary advance time into consideration, whereby time buffers should usually be scheduled in. Ideal conditions for the learning process of all stakeholders, as well as for the application of evaluation results, can be created by the sequence: ex-ante evaluation, accompanying evaluation, ex-post evaluation.

Ex-post evaluations are concerned with the impact, goal attainment and economy of measures. Here clients should consider from what time-point intended changes can be expected to appear and how they can be monitored, so that evaluation results have adequate

Typical questions for an ex-post evaluation of projects and programmes

- To what extent were goals, target values and the target group plausibly derived and formulated in such a way that they could be evaluated?
- What impacts were observed among the target group and others?
- Were the target values achieved?
- How would the starting situation have progressed without the measure?
- What recommendations result for comparable projects and programmes?

Typical questions for an accompanying evaluation of programmes

- To what extent were goals, target values and the target group plausibly derived and formulated in such a way that they could be evaluated?
- How is the implementation of the measure progressing? Are the rules of quality management being observed?
- Is the target group being reached? Are the instruments effective; are there more efficient alternatives?
- Should goals, target values and the target group, as well as instruments and their implementation, be adjusted?

significance. In the case of short-term projects, for example, an evaluation is usually carried out (shortly) after the end of the project. Regarding programmes spanning several years, the time-point of the evaluation following the end of the programme depends on whether short- or long-term impacts are to be examined.

An accompanying (formative) evaluation of a measure makes sense if its results are to be used, for example, for the adjustment of the programme or amendment of the legal regulation.

Evaluations of an existing institution require sufficient time to have passed since work commenced, so that changes are visible.

When formulating the terms of reference to be dealt with by the evaluation, it is frequently the case that goal attainment is not easy to establish because the goals have not been defined precisely enough within the description of the measure, the formulation of the legal regulation, or in the remit of an institution. Stakeholders or the evaluation team are then left with the difficult task of retrospectively determining what is likely to have been meant at that time. It is equally problematic if state-

Typical questions for an accompanying evaluation of institutions

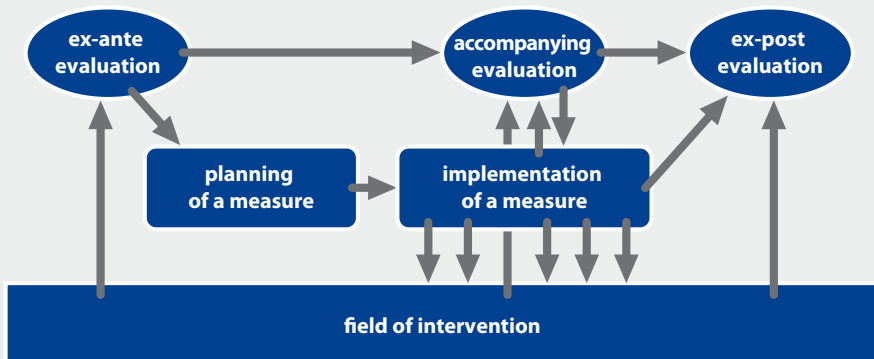
- To what extent are the mission and tasks plausibly derived and formulated in such a way that they can be evaluated?
- What can be learnt from the task fulfilment of comparable institutions?
- What potential is there for cooperation with other public or private institutions?
- Are stakeholders satisfied with task fulfilment?
- To what extent does the strategy of the institution accommodate current and future requirements of tasks and task fulfilment?
- Are existing management instruments for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of task fulfilment adequate?

ments regarding changes cannot be made because appropriate data were not collected prior to the introduction of the measure (baseline data) and cannot be obtained retrospectively either. In order to avoid such situations, it is advisable to perform an ex-ante evaluation - in the case of measures - or an impact assessment - in the case of legal regulations - in advance, and to set up a monitoring system.

Typical functions of an ex-ante evaluation

- Establishment of the starting situation
- Appraisal of the problem situation
- Justification of the measure or of the setting up of an institution
- Recommendations on the determination of goals, target group and target values, or the mission and remit
- Recommendations on the selection of instruments and their implementation, or on the organisational structure and process organisation
- Safeguarding of evaluability: How can goal attainment be established? How can the necessary data be obtained?
- Appraisal of side-effects

Example of process linkage between evaluations and measures



Types of evaluation: Who performs the evaluation?

Here a distinction is drawn between external and internal, and between self- and third-party evaluation. Crucial to this differentiation is the relationship of the evaluation team with the managers of the projects and programmes or the persons responsible for a legal regulation or institution. In the case of an external evaluation, a further distinction can be made based on whether the mandate is assigned by the organisation responsible for the measure or by another party. All types of evaluation involve opportunities and risks.

It can normally be assumed that, in the case of a self-evaluation, subject knowledge will be greatest and methodological competence lowest, meaning that consultation with specialists in possession of methodological knowledge is to be advised. Methodologically controlled self-evaluation is limited to focussed questions and narrow measures. In the

Types of evaluation

- External evaluation: Evaluation team external to the organisation responsible for the measure.
- Internal evaluation: Evaluation team within the organisation responsible for the measure, but not involved in implementing the measure.
- Self-evaluation: Performed by the managers of the measure.

Methodological competence comprises in particular knowledge of:

- Quantitative and qualitative methods of applied social research
- Data collection
- Statistics
- Data processing, analysis and interpretation
- Project organisation

case of an external evaluation, conditions are usually exactly the opposite, but it should be able, as far as possible, to rely on internal controlling and monitoring, in particular on the collection of process data. If sufficient methodological knowledge as well as subject knowledge exists within the institution responsible

for a measure, it becomes feasible to carry out in particular accompanying evaluations internally.

It can also usually be assumed that more resources are required in the case of external assignment than for internal evaluations. Considering the relevance of objectivity, credibility and methodological competence, evaluations of larger-scale measures or evaluations as preparation for political decisions should be assigned to external actors. Evaluations of an existing institution should be carried out at regular intervals of several years, in a purposeful sequence, as internal and external evaluations. Generally speaking, in the case of longer-term measures, the combination of both types of evaluation – external evaluation utilising the results of an internal evaluation – is to be recommended.

Scope of the evaluation:

What outlay is adequate given the benefit?

It is important that the evaluation, and thus its scope, is appropriate for the subject. The expense involved in the evaluation should be proportionate to its utility. The definition of the evaluand should be precise and comprehensible, but it may also require a compromise between manageability and the demand for systematic, comprehensive analysis, especially if several measures interact. Limitations in scope can result from the methodology that can be applied, the availability of data, data protection, or from financial restrictions. There is no fixed relationship between programme and evaluation costs; it varies depending on, for example, the degree of innovation of a project, the range and duration of a programme, the number of instruments employed, and the heterogeneity of target groups and stakeholders.

3. How is an external evaluation tendered and assigned?

External evaluations should be competitively assigned. The work unit responsible for the evaluation usually publishes application documents, or, in substantiated exceptional cases, releases them to a limited group of potential applicants (the “DeGEval...Mail” email service is also available for publishing purposes). The application documents can be aimed at institutes, compa-

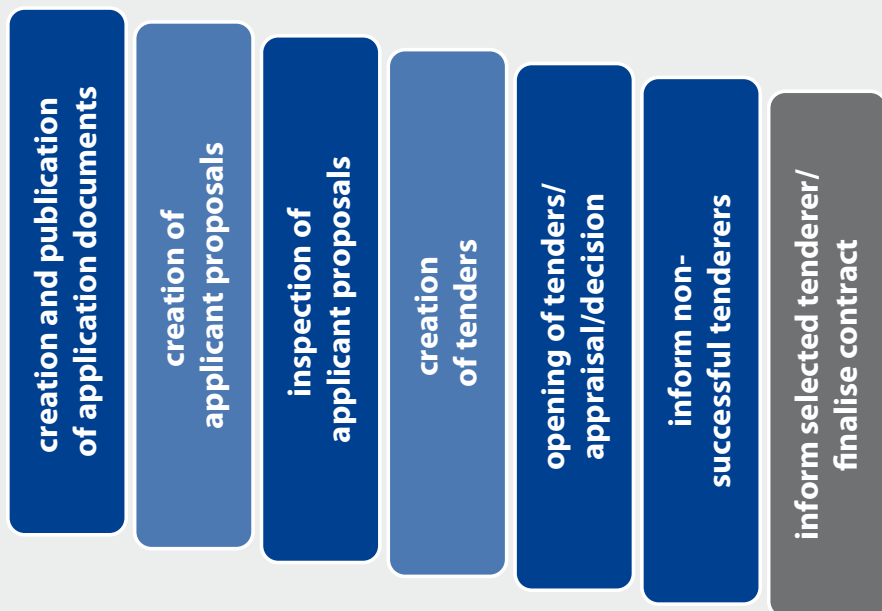
nies or individuals (usually with a team). They contain, among other things, the evaluand, application deadlines, the tender and its implementation, formal requirements of written communications, the form and content of the tender, and of the reports (cf. section 5), exclusion criteria (e.g. insolvency processes, as well as personal interests in the evaluand), requirements of the competence of applicants, appraisal criteria and their weighting, if possible a financial framework for tenders, as

Competence of the evaluation team

- Subject knowledge, methodological competence, as well as social and personal competencies (publications)
- Evaluation competencies gained from education and training
- Experience of evaluations of comparable objects within the evaluation team (references, publicly accessible reports on completed evaluations)

well as personal interests in the evaluand), requirements of the competence of applicants, appraisal criteria and their weighting, if possible a financial framework for tenders, as

Example of tendering and assignment process



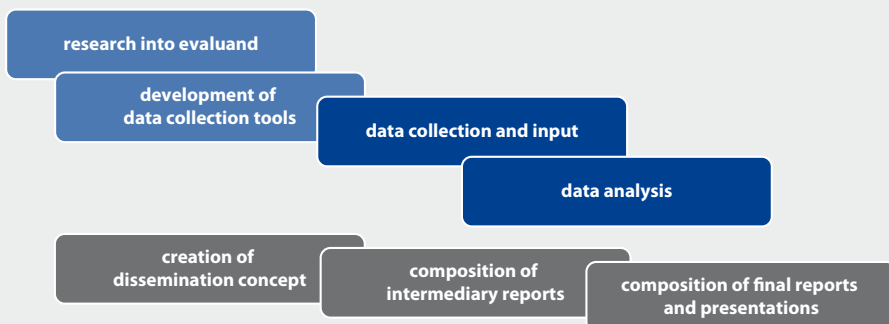
well as the number of applicants who are to be invited to submit a bid, and if applicable a planned negotiating procedure. The tendering and assignment of an external evaluation by public clients or beneficiaries of public funds are subject to relevant national and, if the scope of the assignment exceeds a certain threshold value, European public procurement law.

At the initial stage, applicants (or a consortium of bidders) submit proposals for inclusion in the tendering procedure in accordance with the application documents. At the second stage, those applicants that are selected are then asked by the client to submit a tender on the basis of the programme of work. These two stages can also be condensed into one, by requesting the submission of tenders straight away.

In addition, the following information should be made available by the client, or its sources disclosed: case history and description of the measure, or mission, remit and programmes of work of the institution, relevant legal regulations, and political documentation.

Tenders should contain statements on evaluability, an evaluation design, a time and work schedule (milestones for the submission of reports), and details on the division of tasks within the team, as well as breaking down the costs accordingly. Tenders must always deal with the issues of the terms of reference, but may extend them or render them more precisely. They should define the planned evaluation methods and instruments, including quality assurance, the indicators to be used, and the data required for answering the

Example of a work schedule during the implementation phase of an evaluation



questions posed in the terms of reference, if applicable with reference to the specified financial framework. (In the case of sub-questions, alternatives of varying expense may also be put forward.) It should be made apparent that the security, dignity and rights of persons involved in an evaluation are protected, and to what extent. Information about comparable, successful evaluations at home and abroad, along with personal references, makes it easier to appraise the level of experience of the evaluation team.

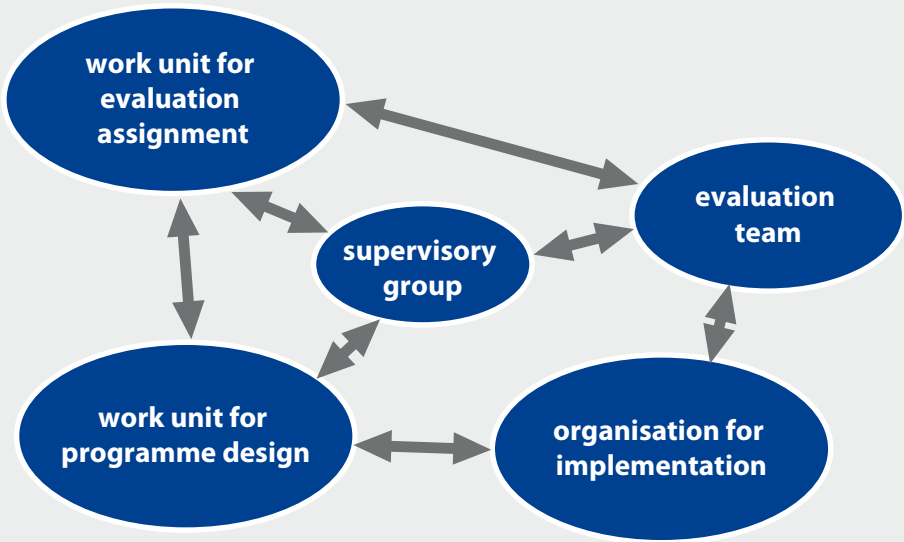
The tenders must be opened at the same time and in the same room. When assessing them, it should be examined whether the tenders fulfil the requirements. So that offers are not only appraised based on cost considerations (costs are just one selection criterion; they do not reveal anything about the quality of the evaluation and its validity), clients are strongly advised to consult specialists with methodological competence. When a decision has been made in favour of one of the tenderers (or consortium of tenderers), the other tenderers need to be informed of this. Following the expiry of a 14-day period of appeal, the selected tenderer (or consortium of tenderers) can be informed and the contract finalised.

4. How is the performance of an external evaluation accompanied?

Before an evaluation is carried out, the organisational structure should be determined. Its complexity depends on the scope of the evaluation. In all cases, one representative is named from the client's side and one from the evaluation team. For larger evaluation contracts, a supervisory group is set up with decision-making representatives of the client and the evaluation team.

The client should make available the results of internal controlling and monitoring, especially process data, the results of internal and self-evaluations, status meetings, workshops, appraisals, recommendations of boards of trustees, and final reports of previous external evaluations. Those with responsibility for policy and the managers of the measure or leadership of the institution should make clear their expectations of the evaluation in dialogue with the evaluation team, as well as revealing their procedures and strategies with regard to the measure or institution. They must not, however, try to exert one-sided influence on the course of the evaluation and the final report. If an institution is being evaluated, the management of the institution should

Example of organisation for a programme evaluation



have the opportunity to prepare their answers to questions posed within the terms of reference of the evaluation, and to provide the evaluation team with these.

The evaluation team must report to the client on a regular basis or at defined milestones, in the form of progress reports and presentations, on the work status, possible gaps in the terms of reference, the availability of data and, where necessary, problems that have arisen in the implementation of the evaluation. Deviations from the tender or assignment, in particular with regard to methods and the deployment of evaluation instruments, must be presented to the client for their approval.

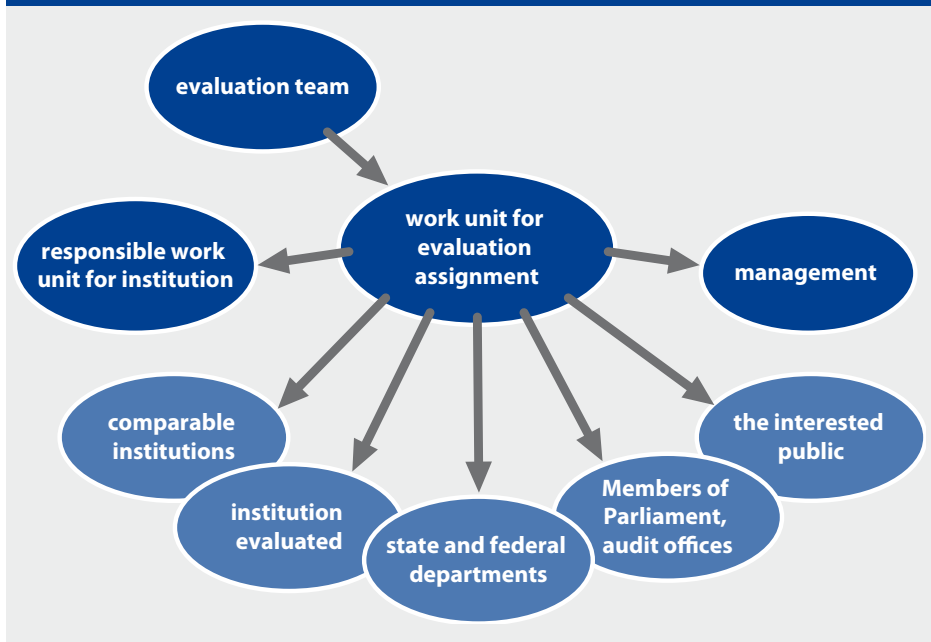
The specified framework and the awarding of an evaluation should be disclosed to stakeholders by the client, who is also responsible for ensuring that stakeholders are informed about progress and intermediary results during the course of the evaluation team’s work, as well as about the final results.

The draft of the evaluation report should be made available to managers and stakeholders, e.g. through workshops or the internet, so that facts can be corrected and suggestions included in the final version.

5. How are evaluation results disseminated and implemented?

For the dissemination of evaluation results, a concept should be developed which considers the different informational needs of the various stakeholder groups and other interested parties. This refers to the time-point, scope and

Example of diffusion of evaluation results in the case of a state or federal institution



format of progress reports and final reports, e.g. in the form of press releases or summaries, or specific events such as workshops or presentations within decision-making bodies.

The final report for the client must be of publishable quality and well readable, must present the measure, legal regulation or institution in context, describe the process of the evaluation, and provide well-reasoned answers to the questions posed within the terms of reference. An appendix should facilitate the examination of information sources, as well as of the analysis,

appraisal and recommendations. The final report and its appendix should be published.

It is usually the case that a lot of questions refer to how the measures, legal regulations, or the remit and procedures of institutions under evaluation should be altered or redesigned. As soon as recommendations on this have been submitted by the evaluation team (often prior to the final report of the evaluation), significant stakeholders should clarify what responsibilities, functions and competencies they are to assume during the phase of the implementation of evaluation results. In addition, after an appropriate period of time, feedback on the results of the implementation should be given to the evaluation team.



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