

EVALUATION GUIDELINES

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Introduction

Search for Common Ground has outlined, in this document, certain expectations and understandings regarding good practice for external evaluators to follow. All sections must be adhered to for an evaluation report to be accepted unless we approve an exception in advance.

The document is also for SFCG staff to use as a reference when undertaking an evaluation process. This document does not include technical instruction on developing a terms of reference or determining methodology, but has guidance on the process and standards.

Note:

- The term "programme team" refers to the Country or Programme Director and country/programme staff.
 - ILT is the Institutional Learning Team of SFCG
 - DM&E is Design Monitoring and Evaluation
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1. Evaluation Management

Who from SFCG manages the evaluation needs to be decided, and this needs to be discussed and agreed well before the evaluation process begins. Determining factors include the expertise and experience available at the country/programme level, and the availability of a DME specialist.

- In the majority of cases, and where possible, the DME specialist becomes the Evaluation Manager. In this case, the specialist will work very closely with the country team to plan and implement the evaluation. The specialist acts to some degree as a buffer between the evaluator(s) and the country office. In this case, and where possible, the DME Coordinator is the focal point for the evaluation within the country office or programme.
- In other situations a project team or someone within the same programme office may be managing the evaluation directly. In this case, the DME specialist can play the role of advisor.
- The evaluator(s) must communicate effectively with the Evaluation Manager, who is the focal point for the evaluation at SFCG.
- The Evaluation Manager is responsible for; making the final selection of an evaluator(s); communicating SFCG comments on reports to the evaluator(s); ensuring the quality of the evaluation process; signing off on all deliverables and processing the evaluator's invoice.

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2. Working within the Terms of Reference

- Rigorous discussion and consideration will have gone into the development of the evaluation objectives and specific questions as outlined in the terms of reference (TOR). These become the primary focus of the evaluation. They are not to be interpreted as guidelines or suggested topics to investigate, but represent the questions that must be answered.
- Immediately upon assignment, the evaluator(s) and the Search staff team will review the scope of work within the terms of reference to ensure that all parties have a common understanding of expectations and focus. The evaluator(s) are responsible to ensure they provide comments or suggestions on the TORs at an early stage in the process.
- If the scope of work is too broad, refinement may be necessary in order to produce a quality product. If this is the case, it needs to be addressed and agreed by Search programme team and evaluator(s). Any changes need to be documented and approved by the Evaluation Manager.

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3. SFCG DME Language

SFCG has developed definitions for commonly used terms within the evaluation field as a means to facilitate communication within the organization. The incorporation of these meanings is currently a work in progress and the evaluation process should support these efforts. There is a draft DME Glossary and the evaluator should adhere to this language in their fieldwork and subsequent report.

- The SFCG DME Glossary should be provided to the evaluator (s).

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4. Key Steps in the Evaluation Process

The Search approach to evaluation is grounded in the guiding principles of our work: empowering and committed to building capacity; designed to lead to action; honest and productively critical; culturally sensitive; participatory (to the greatest extent possible); evidence-based, and in accordance with standards for ethical research. Whilst each evaluation will be different, there are some common steps in the process and each evaluation will produce the following deliverables:

- **Initial briefing:** The evaluation manager will brief (either in person or by telephone) the newly contracted evaluator(s) at the inception of the evaluation. This briefing will review the TOR and the Search Evaluation Guidelines, field questions from the team and make initial arrangements for delivering key documents to the team. The evaluator(s) and evaluation manager will reach agreement on requirements for any initial desk research and on the timing for submission of the first deliverable (usually a detailed methodological plan)
- **Document review:** For the evaluator(s) to be most effective in the initial meetings with the programme team, it is expected that the evaluation team will conduct a document review prior to the fieldwork. A document review includes programme documentation (e.g. M&E plan, monitoring data, baseline research, donor reports, proposals) and relevant reports or publications from other donors or the research community.
- **Methodology discussion:** Once the TOR has been discussed and confirmed with the programme team, the evaluator(s) should also review the methodological paper with the same group. This can occur in the same meeting as the TOR discussion or a separate one. This discussion should insure that that the Search team is clear on the evaluation methods and review potential logistical and cultural constraints and suggestions. As time in-country is expensive, the evaluator(s) will arrange for meetings (either in person or by telephone) with the Search team prior to arriving in country.
- **Deliverable 1 - Methodology and Approach Paper:** The proposed approach and methodology is to be submitted to the evaluation manager prior to enactment for review and discussion and where possible prior to the meeting with the country programme.
- **Mid-point discussion:** At the mid-point in the evaluation, usually just before or during any fieldwork, the evaluation manager and the evaluator(s) will hold a "touching base" discussion to review progress and any constraints experienced to date.
- **Draft Findings Discussion:** The evaluators will schedule a draft conclusion workshop at the end of the fieldwork to discuss the draft conclusions to date with

the Search programme team. This opportunity to directly engage with staff is vital to the ultimate utilisation of the evaluation. Note: it is not expected that the evaluator(s) will have a comprehensive or final set of conclusions/recommendations at this time.

- **Deliverable 2 - Draft Final Evaluation Report:** The evaluator(s) will submit a *draft* evaluation report to the Search programme team for review. Usually, Search will have between 2 and 3 weeks to provide feedback. The evaluation manager is responsible for submitting all Search feedback to the evaluator.
- **Deliverable 3 - Final Evaluation Report:** This report should address any comments made by Search in the Draft Final Report. If feedback has not been addressed then the evaluator(s) must inform Search why they have made this decision. It is the role of the evaluator or evaluation team to consider Search feedback and questions and incorporate them where appropriate. The evaluation manager will sign off on the final document when it is satisfactory to all parties.

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5. Methodology:

- Search subscribes to a mixed (qualitative-quantitative) approach to evaluation. In each evaluation the evaluator(s) in consultation with the programme team and the evaluation manager will determine the specific methodology.
- The choice of methods should be based upon the evaluation objectives, key research questions, resources available and the degree of generalization and precision required. Involving the Search programme team in the design process is important for insuring the credibility and ultimate usefulness of the evaluation.
- The evaluator(s) must make use of project documents and particularly any baseline or monitoring data available.
- Quality Standards: the standards of utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy developed by the American Joint Committee on Standards for Evaluation should be adhered to www.eval.org/EvaluationDocuments/standards.html
- Methodologies should make every effort to engage directly with 'the people' who participate in and/or benefit from our work. This includes those who are directly involved as well as others who may benefit yet are more removed. Although it is recognised that the views of community representatives (e.g. civil society leaders, NGOs) are valuable they should not constitute the majority of the data sources, unless they are the target group for a particular project or set of evaluation questions.
- Independent data sources (e.g. people, agencies) - names that did not come from Search staff - should constitute a minimum of 25% of those contacted in cases where random sampling is not occurring.

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6. Evaluation Ethics

All evaluators should aspire to gather high quality information in a conflict-sensitive and contextually appropriate manner.

- Evaluators are responsible to Search, but also have a wider responsibility to the institutions, groups and individuals involved on the ground. The needs and sensitivities of the respondents must be considered.
- Data collectors must be adequately trained and must operate in an objective, unbiased style.
- The evaluation should cause as little disruption as possible to the ongoing effort.

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7. Report Writing

- Reports should be written for a general audience using clear and accessible language. They should be easy to read and technical jargon should be avoided.
- Reports should be between 25 and 35 pages (excluding appendices).
- Reports must have an Executive Summary of 2 to 4 pages.
- The full evaluation report will provide 'evidence-based' conclusions. This evidence needs to be clearly illustrated to support the findings in the report.
- Recommendations should be practical and the majority of them must be linked directly to conclusions.
- Quotes and stories can be a valuable medium to illustrate conclusions. Every effort should be made to incorporate these into the final document.

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8. Confidentiality

Search is committed to constructively critical investigations that examine the strengths and weaknesses of its programmes. To maximise learning, people involved in evaluations need to be able to trust that evaluators will keep confidential anything of a sensitive nature, whether personal, organizational, social, or political. The professional quality of an evaluator includes an ability to recognize differences from culture to culture in expectations about confidentiality. Confidentiality applies to ***both*** the written document as well as verbal recitations of the experience.

- Evaluators will be asked to sign a confidentiality clause when they sign the contract.

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9. Evaluation Report Quality Checklist

The checklist below is used to determine whether the evaluation report has met the standards required by Search.

Question	Comment
Is the language of the report in line with Search language (this document and the DME Glossary)	
Have all parts of the Terms of Reference been followed?	
Does the main report plus annexes comply with the reporting guidelines in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure and content • Length • Clarity • Format 	
Does the report contain a comprehensive and clear executive summary ?	
Have all the major documents been reviewed, and the contents adequately reflected in the report?	
Is the methodology clearly described and adequate?	
Was the method of selecting respondents for the evaluation credible?	
Have all the major stakeholders been consulted, and their views adequately reflected in the report?	
Has the extent of participation been adequate?	
Are the conclusions clearly supported by the evidence presented?	
Are the Recommendations relevant, feasible, useful and linked to conclusions?	
Does the report contain a clear assessment (incl. scores if appropriate) of the evaluation criteria?	
Have the following cross-cutting issues been adequately addressed in the evaluation process and the report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender • Children and Youth 	
Is the overall quality of the evaluation process and the report acceptable? Is it: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • useful • accurate • independent • credible • ethical 	
Have comments received on the draft report been adequately taken into account?	