



IEA Guidance Note G2

Guidance for CRP-Commissioned External Evaluations (CCEEs)

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Independent
Evaluation
Arrangement

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Table of contents

List of Abbreviations.....	ii
Introduction	1
Key characteristics and purpose of a CCEE	1
What should a CCEE address?	3
Roles and responsibilities in CCEEs.....	3
<i>Management of CCEEs</i>	3
<i>Commissioning CCEEs</i>	3
<i>Other responsibilities</i>	3
Planning ahead for CCEEs	6
Designing and managing a CCEE	6
Designing the evaluation.....	6
<i>The initial design process</i>	6
<i>Logistics</i>	7
<i>Communications</i>	7
Selecting and contracting evaluators	7
Managing the Evaluation Process.....	8
<i>Briefing the evaluators</i>	8
<i>Inception phase</i>	8
<i>Field visits</i>	9
<i>Support to the Evaluators</i>	10
Reporting	10
Follow-up to the evaluation.....	11
Publication and dissemination.....	11

Tables

Table 1: Typical roles and responsibilities in a CCEE	4
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List of Abbreviations

CCEE CRP-Commissioned External Evaluation

CCER Center-Commissioned External Reviews (superseded)

CRP CGIAR Research Programs

EPMR External Program and Management Reviews (superseded)

IEA Independent Evaluation Arrangement of the CGIAR

ToR Terms of Reference

Introduction

1. The CGIAR Policy for Independent External Evaluation, approved by the CGIAR Fund Council and the Consortium Board in 2012 (“the Policy”) sets out the mandate, scope and proposed implementation arrangements for evaluation in the reformed CGIAR. This includes a regular Independent External Evaluation of each CGIAR Research Program (CRP) managed by the Independent Evaluation Arrangement (IEA) and the CRP Commissioned External Evaluations (CCEEs) that are a key input into CRP evaluations¹.
2. Ideally, the plan for CCEEs (their timing, coverage and purposes) is drawn up with a view to feeding into the IEA commissioned evaluation of the CRP and in order to serve as an input into the decision making of CRP donors, governance bodies and management. It will be adequately budgeted in the CRP.
3. This Guidance Note is intended as a helpful reference document for those commissioning and carrying out CCEEs, with the aim to increase the quality, consistency and harmonization of planning and approach in conducting CCEEs across CRPs².
4. This Guidance Note is fully aligned with the Guidance Note 1³ on CRP evaluations as it relates to evaluation standards and activities. The guidance is adjusted taking into consideration that CCEEs are internally managed and governed, and address only a component of CRP activities.
5. The Guidance Note covers: what a CCEE should address; roles and responsibilities; planning ahead for evaluations, designing the evaluation, managing the evaluation, reporting and follow-up.

Key characteristics and purpose of a CCEE

6. CCEEs are important for six main reasons:
 - a) they are an important input to the CRP’s own management and governance decisions, regarding ongoing adjustments and improvements to the CRP;
 - b) CCEEs that cover a limited area of a CRP’s work can go into more depth than an overall CRP evaluation;
 - c) well-designed CCEEs can meet funders’ needs for accountability, reducing the need for duplicative and burdensome parallel systems of project review;

¹ There are other studies of relevance for CRP evaluation, not covered by the Policy, which include adoption studies, impact assessment, donor reviews and audits.

² This Guidance note builds on the previous experience with evaluation in the CGIAR regarding Center-Commissioned External Reviews (CCERs) which are analogous to CCEEs, and their relationship with External Program and Management Reviews (EPMRs).

³ <http://iea.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/G1.pdf>

- d) CCEEs can be conducted together with key research or development partners or donors (this is more difficult for an overall CRP evaluation as it covers a very broad area). Jointly-managed evaluations can incorporate wider perspectives as well as fostering wider learning, and they can reduce duplication;
 - e) high-quality CCEEs that cover major components of the CRP help reduce the effort and cost required for conducting the CRP evaluation, which can then use meta-analysis of the results from the CCEEs and other existing data as an important part of its evaluation methodology.
7. The key characteristics of a CCEE are the following:
- a) CCEEs are commissioned by CRP management, managed by a CRP staff member specifically provided with the authority and independence to manage evaluations, and overseen by an oversight body, which may be set up specifically for the evaluation or is an existing body of the CRP or the lead Center;
 - b) CCEEs normally evaluate a component of the CRP, rather than the CRP as a whole;
 - c) CCEEs are based on a systematic approach to address the evaluation criteria and questions;
 - d) CCEE findings and recommendations should be informed by evidence;
 - e) CCEEs form an important building block for overall CRP evaluations, and they should follow the Standards for Independent Evaluation in the CGIAR.
8. CCEEs are partially independent, given that they are CRP commissioned evaluations. Independence in CCEEs can be promoted by addressing the following:
- a) CCEEs should have oversight with adequate independence and the evaluation team should have full independence;
 - b) the CCEE manager should have some structural independence from CRP management, and report to the oversight body;
 - c) the decisions taken on CCEE design and scope should be transparently documented, and the key documents related to evaluation design (Terms of Reference - ToR - and Inception Report) should be made public on the CRP website;
 - d) selection of evaluators should follow a transparent process;
 - e) it is important that CRP management should not improperly influence the selection of the evaluators and the design of the CCEE, for instance by limiting the questions or areas that a CCEE may investigate;
 - f) it is important that CRP management should not improperly influence the findings and conclusions of a CCEE.

9. A CCEE's main purposes are to inform management and relevant CRP staff of the performance of the program component evaluated for learning and adjustment, and to feed into immediate decisions by senior managers such as:
- what adjustments need to be made to research lines, management and partnerships;
 - whether to modify the skill and disciplinary mix of researchers;
 - whether to continue, increase or decrease funding to particular themes or research components.
10. A CCEE may also be commissioned in response to information gaps identified by external stakeholders (such as the IEA or funders) to feed into the overall CRP evaluation.

What should a CCEE address?

11. The CCEEs should address the main evaluation criteria: relevance, quality of science, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. However, this depends on the topic of the CCEE, and particular emphasis may be put on certain criteria. As with CRP evaluations, specific questions will need to be developed for each criterion.
12. In deciding the main emphasis of the CCEE and the key issues that the CCEE is to cover, balance is needed between the preferences of CRP management potentially influencing the set of issues included in the CCEE ToR vs. the independence of the CCEE in covering a range of questions deemed necessary by the evaluation team for addressing the evaluation criteria.

Roles and responsibilities in CCEEs

Management of CCEEs

13. The Evaluation Manager of a CCEE will normally be a CRP staff member, desirably specialized in evaluation who is formally nominated by CRP management and reports to the body that oversees the CCEE. The Evaluation Manager will coordinate the design, implementation and follow-up of the CCEE (see Table 1 below).

Commissioning CCEEs

14. For maximum usefulness, the CRP governance and management need to work together with the IEA and other key stakeholders in planning the schedule of CCEEs, commissioning them and deciding what they should address.

Other responsibilities

15. CCEEs will often be complex and have multiple stakeholders, and it is important that roles and responsibilities are clearly communicated to all involved, in the first instance by the Evaluation Manager. Typical roles are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Typical roles and responsibilities in a CCEE

Role	Who	Responsibilities
Decision to Evaluate	CRP Governing Body	Oversee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the design of the evaluation, development of ToR and contracting of evaluators; feed-back on final draft report and management response to final report; track responses to evaluation recommendations.
CCEE oversight	An existing governing body or <i>ad-hoc</i> panel set by the governing body, representative of organizations participating in the CRP with representation from management, governance and if possible external stakeholders	Provide Oversight for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the design of the evaluation and development of ToR; contracting of evaluators; observance of transparent and independent evaluation process, protecting the independence of the evaluation; feed-back on final draft report, together with CRP management. Will not have authority to modify evaluation findings or recommendations
Evaluation manager	CRP staff member responsible for evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> plan and manage the design of the evaluation; prepare ToRs, develop and manage the evaluation reference group; contract and pay the evaluators; brief evaluators and provide them with logistical support; compile documentation and data, including pre-analysis; put evaluators in contact with key people; troubleshoot emerging problems and conflicts; give feed-back to the draft evaluation report and provide quality assurance; manage feedback processes including communication events; assure the quality of the evaluation process and evaluation outputs; principal point of liaison with the Evaluation Team
Evaluation team	Independent team of evaluators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> working as a team to plan and conduct the evaluation; gathering and analysing data, information and perceptions; contribute to written reports and presentations of findings, under the direction of the team leader.

Role	Who	Responsibilities
Evaluation team leader	Independent expert, with appropriate skills for the CCEE and good team leader qualities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further develop the evaluation design as lead author of the inception report; • lead the evaluation team, the evaluation and the production of reports; Normally lead author on the evaluation report and main presenter of findings and conclusions; • principal point of liaison with the Evaluation Manager and CRP management.
CRP management	CRP leader	<p>Normally member of oversight body, s/he will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brief CRP staff and partners about the evaluation; • coordinate accumulation and preparation of CRP data and information during the entire evaluation process; • help connecting with stakeholders; • allocate adequate time and resources for staff to engage with evaluators and provide information, support in logistics; • feed-back on final draft report (involving staff as appropriate); • develop a management response to the evaluation, including follow-up actions; • help communicate findings and lessons, and act on accepted recommendations.
CRP staff	Team leaders and lead researchers in particular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaborate with evaluators in providing information.
Response to and follow-up of the evaluation	CRP Governing Body Lead-Center Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review management response and decide on actions to be taken based on the evaluation and management response. • monitor implementation.

Planning ahead for CCEEs

16. CCEEs should be planned well in advance. The main reasons for this include:
- a) the need to spread CCEEs over the CRP cycle (the interval between CRP evaluations), to minimize the burden on management and researchers, take into account the absorptive capacity of decision-makers, and decrease the feeling of being ‘over-evaluated’. Therefore, it is important to avoid CCEEs ‘piling up’ just before the CRP evaluation is due;
 - b) the need to ensure sufficient coverage of the CRP to serve as inputs to the CRP evaluation. In principle, at least half of the budgeted activities of the CRP should be covered by CCEEs in a CRP cycle.
17. A monitoring system that accumulates information on program activities and performance within the scope of the CCEE provides an important basis for a CCEE.
18. Planning of the CCEEs is the responsibility of CRP management, overseen by its governing body. The Head of IEA should be involved in developing a provisional plan of CCEEs, their timing and coverage. On the basis of this plan, CRP management can plan for what data needs to be collected either by the monitoring system or through other studies, or be left for the CCEE to collect.
19. CCEEs are funded under the CRP budget. The budget for CCEEs should be proportionate to the size and complexity of the CRP. The CGIAR Policy on Independent Evaluation suggests that 1 percent of total CRP expenditure be budgeted for evaluation within the CRP, including impact assessment.
20. The CCEE budget needs to include all costs of the evaluation, including meetings and field visits, and dissemination of reports and any costs accruing from stakeholder consultations and follow-up.

Designing and managing a CCEE

Designing the evaluation

The initial design process

21. The responsibility for the initial evaluation design is with the designated evaluation manager in the CRP, who will consult key stakeholders.
22. During the evaluation planning the following should be determined, and subsequently summarized in the ToR for the evaluation:
- a) main target audiences and use of the evaluation;
 - b) financial resources available;

- c) emphasis among the evaluation criteria and major questions to be addressed;
 - d) data and information needed and sources for them;
 - e) tentative approaches to the evaluation, given the resources allocated;
 - f) expected evaluation products and tentative timelines;
 - g) skills and other qualities needed by evaluators.
23. If the CCEE is to be a joint exercise with other key stakeholders, for example a major funder or research partner, more time may be needed for planning and communication.
24. In designing the evaluation the Evaluation Manager will normally take the following steps:
- a) consult widely with CRP managers, senior researchers, governing body members, funders and partners to ensure they are well informed on plans for the evaluation and identify important questions for inclusion in the ToR, which will be drawn to the attention of the evaluation team for the inception report;
 - b) review an initial collection of data and information, as a basis for identifying any important gaps in information needed by the CCEE. Identify key questions for the evaluation;
 - c) decide on the skills and other characteristics required by evaluators and the evaluation team as a whole;
 - d) develop ToR for the evaluation for final approval by the oversight body.

Logistics

25. The Evaluation Manager will need to clarify in detail who will be responsible for managing the logistics for the evaluation, and how any costs will be handled and reimbursed.

Communications

26. It is useful for the Evaluation Manager to draw up a communications checklist, listing key stakeholders that need to be consulted *and informed* at various stages of the evaluation.

Selecting and contracting evaluators

27. The Evaluation Manager will take the lead in selecting and contracting evaluators. Identifying evaluators is carried out through a combination of calls for expression of interest and targeted search in evaluation and research networks. An option would be requesting bids or expressions of interest from consultancy firms with experience on evaluation of

agricultural research. Recruiting individuals enables a detailed matching of consultants with requirements. The selection of team is based on a variety of criteria, including extensive evaluation expertise, strong academic and research background, and excellent understanding and knowledge of agricultural research related to CGIAR research programs. Suitable evaluators will have an understanding of the CGIAR, but cannot have been directly involved with the CRP or have other forms of conflict of interest.

28. After the evaluation team leader has been selected, the team leader will be consulted in selecting the rest of the team. To ensure independence, the final decision regarding team membership will rest with the evaluation manager. Documentation of the process and evidence of real search is desirable to demonstrate that the CRP is truly selecting an independent and professional team. Before contracting evaluators, it is good practice to request a signed declaration of interest (see IEA form for Declaration of Interest and Code of Conduct⁴).

29. Evaluation teams may require access to independent specialist expertise, as not all the scientific areas to be covered in an evaluation may be included in the team. One way to address this is through the establishment of a virtual independent panel of experts which can be consulted by the team.

Managing the Evaluation Process

Briefing the evaluators

30. The Evaluation Manager will be responsible for briefing the evaluators at the beginning of the contract, and providing them with an initial selection of documents. The initial briefing documentation includes this Guidance Note 2 and the Standards for Independent External Evaluation in the CGIAR⁵, which also cover ethics expected in CGIAR evaluations.

Inception phase

31. The CCEE begins with an inception phase (indicatively, this may be about two months). This is for the independent evaluation team leader to design the evaluation in detail. It is also for the independent evaluators to prepare for the evaluation by reading the key documents, including those that are most relevant for each member's responsibilities in the team; meeting (virtually or face-to-face) for briefing and preparing a workplan are detailed in the Inception Report. It will be useful to convene a meeting of researchers early in the process to interact with the evaluation team.

32. The Inception Report, which is the responsibility of the team leader, adds specificity to the ToR, regarding the evaluation questions, approaches and methods, stakeholder

⁴ <http://iea.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/interest%2Bcode.pdf>

⁵ <http://iea.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/Standards.pdf>

consultation, and schedule of the evaluation, including field visits. It provides details and is the working level commitment of the evaluation team on the work they will undertake and the products they will produce. The Inception Report is the main point of reference for managing the process. An Inception Report should normally contain:

- a) a brief description of the CRP component being evaluated, including an analysis of the external and internal context within which the evaluation is conducted.
- b) a detailed description of the evaluation approach to be used, data collection methods and tools and why they were chosen, a sampling plan if appropriate, and resource requirements;
- c) detailed plan on how each evaluation criterion is being addressed. The prioritized list of main evaluation questions and how evidence is to be assembled on each question is normally presented in an evaluation matrix;
- d) an updated table of deliverables and dates;
- e) an explanation of any changes made from the original ToR, if these are judged necessary.

33. The draft Inception Report will be submitted to the Evaluation Manager, discussed with CRP managers and accepted by the oversight body.

34. The final agreed Inception Report will form the basis of any changes necessary in the evaluators' contracts. The Inception Report will be a public document that should be communicated to evaluation stakeholders.

Field visits

35. Field visits are usually the most expensive part of any evaluation, but at the same time they often pose excellent opportunities for reality checks on the ground, collecting and validating information and getting feed-back from partners. The visits can pose heavy demands on the time and resources of researchers and partners as well as the evaluation team. Therefore, it is important that the evaluators clarify in the inception phase what information needs to be collected through field visits that cannot be reasonably collected in any other way, including what categories of people need to be interviewed at the sites and how they will be selected. Some important aspects of planning field visits include:

- a) clarity and transparency about need and objectives;
- b) consistency across different visits and different team members conducting visits regarding data and information to be collected and means to collect them;
- c) ethics especially as regards to the modalities of interaction with beneficiaries and other stakeholders (see Evaluation Standards);
- d) efficiency in terms of resources and transaction costs for those involved.

Support to the Evaluators

36. The Evaluation Manager will play a key role in supporting the evaluators and ensuring that the evaluation runs smoothly. The tasks include:
- a) interacting with the team leader on all aspects of the evaluation and on key decision-making during the evaluation process;
 - b) helping evaluators make initial contact with managers of the area being evaluated and other key stakeholders (however, the evaluators are ultimately responsible for the list of people consulted);
 - c) supporting evaluators to obtain key documentation, where they require internal help to obtain this;
 - d) providing comments on and quality assure the Inception Report;
 - e) helping with logistics;
 - f) handling inter-personal problems. Working intensely together to tight deadlines can lead to stress and arguments in the evaluation team, and sometimes between the team and other stakeholders. It is the responsibility of the team leader to manage and resolve any differences. However, if the team is failing to work well, the Evaluation Manager may have to assist with mediating the situation. In extreme cases, the Evaluation Manager may need to consider renegotiating or rescinding the contracts of the team members or of an individual within the team;
 - g) commenting on early draft report for quality assurance and guidance;
 - h) circulating the final draft report to stakeholders for comments.

Reporting

37. The Evaluation Report is the main output of the evaluation. The draft Evaluation Report including the draft recommendations, are circulated for comments and factual checking to CRP management (who should consult with CRP focal points and lead researchers in the participating Centers and other research partners). A workshop on the draft is often very helpful. However, it must be clear that evaluators are independent in drawing the final conclusions and recommendations.

38. Evaluation recommendations should be clearly supported by the analysis of the evaluation evidence, action-oriented, practical and specific, with - where possible - clearly-defined responsibility for each action. Although there is no set limit on the number of recommendations, they should be focused on a practical number of priority issues, to be addressed mainly by management or governing bodies.

39. Communication is not confined to writing the report and disseminating it. The process of communicating with stakeholders throughout the evaluation is vital to learning and improvement on all sides. It helps improve openness to dialogue, challenges

preconceptions and makes it possible for those being evaluated to take on board and respond to the findings before the Evaluation Report is finalized and in the public domain. A communications checklist is helpful. This is normally initially prepared by the Evaluation Manager (see above) and can be updated by evaluators.

Follow-up to the evaluation

40. The management response to the evaluation, including an action plan, is the responsibility of the CRP management.
41. The Evaluation Report together with the management response will be presented to the CRP oversight body, for consideration and confirmation. The lead-Center Board will be responsible for final endorsement of the management response and action plan to the evaluation and for considering any fiduciary and reputational issues that may arise.

Publication and dissemination

42. The final CCEE report will be published on the CRP websites and circulated to relevant stakeholders. Other means of dissemination for key stakeholders may be considered. The report should be provided to the IEA for information and for making it available on its website.

The IEA has issues the following Guidance Notes:

- Guidance Note 1: Guidance for Managing the Independent External Evaluation of CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs)
- Guidance Note 2: Guidance for CRP-Commissioned External Evaluations (CCEEs)
- Guidance Note 3: Guidance on Evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR)
- Guidance Note 4: Guidance on Evaluation Inception Reports
- Guidance Note 5: Guidance on Evaluation Final Reports
- Guidance Note 6: CRP Evaluation: Process for Finalization, Feedback and Decision-making