



# IEA Guidance Note G3

## Guidance on Evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR)

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Independent  
Evaluation  
Arrangement

[iea.cgiar.org](http://iea.cgiar.org)

## Table of contents

Table of contents .....	i
Introduction .....	1
Content of ToR.....	1
Opening Pages .....	1
Body of the ToR .....	1
Background.....	2
Evaluation Focus .....	2
Evaluation Criteria and Questions: .....	3
Evaluation Approach and Methodology .....	3
Evaluation Matrix .....	4
Organization and Timing of the Evaluation: .....	5
Quality Assurance of ToR .....	5

## Introduction

1. This guidance is intended to help evaluation managers to prepare Terms of Reference (ToR) that are comprehensive in their coverage, clear regarding the expectations from the evaluation and informative for the immediate users of the ToR; namely the evaluation team leader and team, the IEA staff involved and the program or unit evaluated. This document focuses on the content of evaluation ToR.
2. The guidance aims to encourage a certain degree of standardization across the CGIAR. However, the ToR should permit the evaluation team sufficient flexibility to elaborate on and prioritize issues of scope, evaluation questions and methodological aspects, and to pursue major additional issues that emerge during the course of the evaluation.

## Content of ToR

3. The ToR should be a stand-alone document that contains sufficient information about the evaluation to be read by any interested stakeholders. However, it is an instructive document that, above all, guides the implementation of the evaluation. The following sections describe the key elements that ToR should normally cover, presented in an example structure that the ToR may follow.

## Opening Pages

4. The opening pages should have the following information about the evaluation:
  - title of the Evaluation;
  - date of the ToR;
  - commissioners of the evaluation;
  - table of contents;
  - abbreviations and acronyms.

## Body of the ToR

5. In the body of the ToR the following information should be presented:
  - background to the evaluation and context in which it is taking place;
  - brief description of the program, work or unit under evaluation;
  - purpose, general scope and focus of the evaluation;
  - evaluation criteria and preliminary evaluation questions;

- specification of the evaluation team;
  - roles and responsibilities of parties involved in the evaluation;
  - timeline.
6. Common section headings and standard content for the ToR are described hereafter.

### Background

7. The background should provide the context under which the evaluation is planned and conducted, which provides the logic for and determines the design of the evaluation explained in the remaining sections of the ToR.

- **Rationale and context of the evaluation** - Summarize the impetus behind the evaluation, the rationale and the mandate of the commissioning agency. Briefly describe the context of the evaluation in terms of the main sector(s) or issue(s) that the evaluation seeks to explore.
- **Overview of the program, theme or unit** - Provide a short description of the object of the evaluation. In particular, the overview should outline the strategic functions of the unit in the CGIAR or, for research, the objectives and strategies and how they are linked to CGIAR's Strategy and Results Framework. The overview should provide an update on status and recent changes regarding activities, management and finances with links to key documents for further information. The overview provides the basis for specifying competences and skills needed within the evaluation team.

### Evaluation Focus

8. In this section the boundaries of the evaluation are demarcated in terms of the dimensions and components of work to be evaluated, stakeholders who are implicated in any way, expected use and users, and other boundaries that determine the extent of the evaluation. This section sets the basis for designing the methodology and evaluation questions.

- **Evaluation Purpose and Users** - Describe the purpose of the evaluation and the decision-making for which the evaluation is expected to provide information. Identify the main users of the evaluation, in terms of the primary audience or intended users of the Evaluation Report, including what they seek to benefit from the evaluation findings, and how the evaluation is to be specifically used for immediate decision making, learning and accountability.
- **Evaluation Scope** - Define the confines and parameters of the evaluation, for example:
  - ✓ the period covered by the evaluation;
  - ✓ the balance of formative and summative dimensions of the evaluation;

- ✓ the segments of the target population included and the geographic area covered, when applicable;
- ✓ the functions/components of the overall activity to be covered, for example the programmatic and organizational components of a CRP;
- ✓ any special focus areas (i.e., gender, partnerships, etc.);
- ✓ any specific issues that arrive from the rationale or context of the evaluation.

### Evaluation Criteria and Questions:

9. The ToR should provide a clear explanation of the analytical dimensions of the evaluation that link the evaluation criteria to the evaluation objectives. The interpretation of the evaluation criteria is presented in the annex to the Standards<sup>1</sup>, with reference to evaluating research activities. In a CRP evaluation, certain criteria apply specifically to programmatic performance and others to the organizational performance of the program. In addition, there may be specific scope aspects, such as gender, partnerships or capacity-building, which may be presented as explicit dimensions of the evaluation.

- **Evaluation Criteria** - Evaluation criteria include: relevance, science quality, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The importance of different criteria will vary for different evaluations, but evaluations that concern research normally include all six criteria. The ToR should: explain the rationale for emphasizing the particular criteria used; describe each suggested evaluation criteria; and summarize the major issues to be addressed.
- **Evaluation Questions** - List the main evaluation questions that may be addressed by the evaluation for each Evaluation criterion. In the ToR these questions are not to be regarded as exhaustive or final, and it is expected that the evaluation team during the inception phase prioritize and elaborate on the evaluation questions.

### Evaluation Approach and Methodology

10. The ToR should describe in broad terms characteristics of the methodological approaches, methods and analysis to be defined during the inception phase. It should highlight any aspects of the program/unit under evaluation that set certain expectations or boundaries to design the evaluation approach and methodology, such as stage of the program or stakeholder consultation requirements. It should also highlight factors limiting the choice of methods, particularly regarding resources.

11. The ToR needs to specify the phases of the evaluation that usually include the following:

- preparatory phase that is the responsibility of evaluation management;

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<sup>1</sup> <http://iea.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/Standards.pdf>

- inception phase that is the responsibility of the evaluation team;
- inquiry phase during which the evaluation team conducts the evaluation;
- report writing phase.

12. The ToR should specify the activities expected and deliverables expected in each phase.

13. The ToR should describe the measures or mechanisms that will be employed for quality assurance, such as any advisory boards or particular quality assurance tools that will be used as part of the evaluation. This should include a description of how scientific or technical quality will be ensured; if this is through a separate peer review, then the ToR should explain the process by which this will work with and feed into the evaluation. The ToR should indicate that the evaluation will be carried out in conformity with the CGIAR's Evaluation Standards.

14. The main constraints of the evaluation and any limitations of the methodology should be identified and openly discussed as to their implications for evaluation. Particular attention should be paid to methodology, and how any potential or perceived conflict of interest will be handled. Also, be sure to identify any design weaknesses (e.g., intervention logic) or other implementation constraints (e.g., resource limitations).

### Evaluation Matrix

15. The ToR should provide clear guidance for an evaluation matrix to be prepared during the inception phase under the leadership of the evaluation team leader. The evaluation matrix presents the evaluation criteria and corresponding evaluation questions to be addressed in terms of methods, data collection and analysis. The evaluation team, with support from the IEA, should complete the evaluation plan, including development of the evaluation matrix, during the inception phase.

16. The ToR should spell out the expectations for an evaluation matrix including the following:

- the preliminary evaluation questions given in the TOR are sufficiently elaborated and prioritized to reflect the generic questions to be covered and the specific aspects identified during the inception phase;
- overarching evaluation questions will be also included in the evaluation matrix;
- the approach to responding to each evaluation question, including indicators or benchmarking if appropriate;
- the sources of data and other evaluative information to be collected and the methods for collecting are specified for each evaluation question or group of questions;

- the analyses to be conducted on the data/information for addressing the questions are indicated as appropriate.

17. A preliminary evaluation matrix should be presented in the ToR for instructing the evaluation. It can illustrate the relations between the different dimensions of the evaluation (related to programmatic or organizational performance), the evaluation criteria and typical methods of addressing the criteria.

### Organization and Timing of the Evaluation:

18. The evaluation team specification, timeline, governance structure/functions, and key deliverables should be laid out in the ToR.

- **Evaluation Team Qualifications** - Describe the characteristics needed by those implementing the evaluation, including technical qualifications, evaluation skills and experience, languages and personal qualities.
- **Evaluation Governance/Roles and responsibilities** - Specify the management structure of the evaluation and the roles and responsibilities of those involved, including the evaluation managers, reference groups, the evaluation team leader and members, and partners, if applicable. List key stakeholders that will participate in the various stages of the evaluation and briefly describe their planned role(s) and level of involvement.
- **Timeline** and deliverables - Develop a calendar timeline showing the planned evaluation phases (as listed above) and key dates for deliverables, including evaluation findings, draft report and final report, and the plan for soliciting feed-back and decision-making required for finalization of the evaluation process.

### Quality Assurance of ToR

19. The ToR for all IEA commissioned evaluations are prepared by the IEA, or under direct supervision of the IEA. The IEA is responsible for assuring that the TOR contain all the essential elements, appropriately reflects the work to be evaluated and provides clear and accurate information and guidance regarding the evaluation in general and the evaluation team specifically.

20. The IEA should be consulted on ToR for evaluation commissioned and conducted by other bodies than the IEA, for feed-back on ToR quality.

21. The main aspects to be checked regarding ToR quality include the following:

- the introduction of the context to the evaluation is clear and sufficiently detailed, including the background to the evaluation and mandate for commissioning it;
- the subject of the evaluation is described in sufficient detail;

- the intended use and target audiences of the evaluation are clear, including the decisions at different levels that the evaluation is expected for feed-into;
- the ToR clearly describe the scope of the evaluation, including the aspects that it will not cover, and justification for the defined scope;
- the evaluation criteria are defined, and emphasis or prioritization among the criteria are explained, and the ToR appropriately reflect the subject of the evaluation and its objectives;
- the list of evaluation questions is sufficiently comprehensive and tailored to the subject of the evaluation, to guide the evaluation and development of the Inception Report;
- the description of the evaluation methodology takes into account the overall purpose of the evaluation, as well as the needs of the users and the different stakeholder perspectives;
- the team specification is detailed and reflects the subject of the evaluation;
- the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in the evaluation are clear;
- the timelines are realistic;
- the expected deliverable at each stage of the evaluation are well defined, and the process for soliciting feed-back and finalizing the Evaluation Report is elaborated;
- the ToRs permit the evaluation team sufficient flexibility in preparing the Inception Report, and to pursue major additional issues that emerge during the course of the evaluation.

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