planning, monitoring & evaluation
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Evaluation Guideline No 4
How to undertake rapid evaluations

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Addressed to	Government departments and entities who are undertaking evaluations (programme staff and M&E staff) as well as evaluators of government programmes and policies.
Purpose	The purpose of this Guideline is to provide technical guidance on undertaking *rapid evaluations* – either internally, facilitated or undertaken externally
Policy reference	This guideline should be read in conjunction with DPME's National Evaluation Policy Framework 2020; the Guideline on Developing Evaluation terms of Reference and all DPME Evaluation Guidelines (available on the DPME website[1]).
Main changes in this version	
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Part A: Introduction to rapid evaluation

1 Introduction

Evaluations are important for assessing the performance of an intervention and how it can be strengthened. The National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) 2019 suggests the use of rapid evaluations as one of the forms of evaluation to be considered (DPME, 2019). It suggests that 'Quick evaluations are conducted during emergencies[2]; or as part of preliminary analysis to help determine priorities, identify emerging problems and trends, and enable decision-making to either support a full-scale evaluation or project adjustments to meet the needs or project objectives. It may be responding to an unplanned senior management request or demand for urgent information, a juncture where a critical decision needs to be made on a programme or intervention and up to date information is needed urgently. The implementation of this type of evaluation is usually faster, more dynamic and complex' (ibid p 24).

A number of mechanisms have been developed for more rapid evaluative approaches, including evaluative workshops, annual review models as well as rapid evaluations. Evaluative workshops are mentioned in the NEPF, there is a DPME guideline, and outlines of this method, annual reviews and rapid evaluations are provided in UNICEF Evaluation Office, (2019).

A wide variety of approaches and methodologies have been used in the broader area of rapid evaluations. McNall & Foster-Fishman, (2007) do a good job of summarising these different approaches[3]. They mention:

- Participatory rural appraisal (or participatory learning for action) – family of approaches and methods to enable rural people to share, enhance, and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan

[1] https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za/pages/guidelines-other-resources
[2] [2] For example the COVID pandemic which was ongoing when this guideline was being revised
[3] For those interesting in taking forward this approach, their paper is worth reading to show the range of approaches that can be drawn on.

and to act;
- Real-time evaluations – particularly developed for humanitarian crises such as COVID-19, systematically collecting data as the crisis unfolds;
- Rapid Feedback evaluations using existing programme data to make a quick, preliminary assessment of programme performance;
- Rapid assessments - teams of researchers are deployed to gather information from small samples of key informants and local residents using surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, transect walks, and mapping;
- Rapid Ethnographic Assessment tends to make use of a more limited range of research methods and to be more exclusively focused on exploring indigenous understandings of health issues than does RA;
- Rapid evaluation and assessment methods (REAM) – methods used to gather data in an emergency response situation in order to share information in real time (Mertens & Wilson, 2019).

This Guideline is an introduction to doing rapid evaluations, either conducted internally or externally. The first part provides an overview of what rapid evaluation is and when to select it. Part B uses the structure of the DPME guideline on terms of reference and introduces particular aspects in relation to rapid evaluation.

This guideline aims to specifically provide guidance for implementing rapid evaluations in a government context. The guideline has been developed collaboratively between the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), the Western Cape Department of the Premier (DoTP) and the Twende Mbele African government M&E initiative.[4]

2 Purpose of the Guideline

The purpose of the guideline is to provide guidance to government staff on how to undertake rapid evaluations, in this case meaning evaluations that are undertaken in 6-12 weeks from start to production of the report.

This guideline is designed to assist government departments and entities to plan and undertake rapid evaluations, either alone, facilitated by experienced external evaluators[5], or by outsourcing them to service providers. These options are discussed in more detail in section 5.3.

The Guideline provides a definition and description of rapid evaluations with a focus on practical execution (section 3), deciding when to apply them (section 4), with implementation options (internal, procurement externally, or hybrid) discussed in section 5. It then outlines how they might be applied using the structure of the guidelines for terms of reference produced by DPME[6] which outline six key evaluation considerations:
1. Background to the evaluation
2. Focus of the evaluation (purpose, evaluation questions, users and stakeholders, scope)
3. Evaluation design and methodology
4. Evaluation plan (products/deliverables, activities, time frame)
5. Budget and payment schedule
6. Management arrangements (role of steering committee and technical working group, evaluation team).

[4] The contributors were Ian Goldman, CLEAR-AA who built on an early draft by Antonio Hercules. In addition DPME, Western Cape Office of the Premier and three peer reviewers contributed with comments. Twende Mbele is a partnership of African governments promoting M&E.

[5] Where this option is used, contracting of one individual only may be needed, with a defined TOR, rather than outsourcing the evaluation

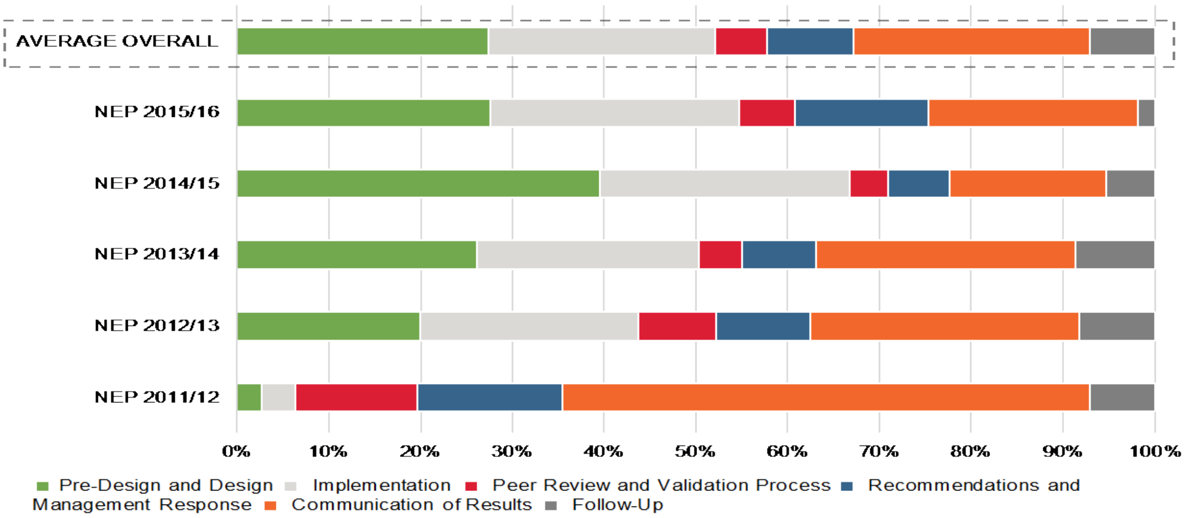
[6] https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za/images/gallery/DPME%20Evaluation%20Guideline%202.2.1%20How%20to%20develop%20TORs%20for%20Evaluation%20Projects(Full).pdf

These are used to structure this guideline, and are considerations to apply when considering a rapid evaluation.

3 What do we mean by *rapid* evaluations?

In order to make evaluations rigorous and generate findings which can be extrapolated across a country, or wider, they may require a lot of data being collected, with many sample points, perhaps over time. The design is intended to ensure the findings are robust; but means they can be costly to implement and can take a long time to complete. Many national evaluations in South Africa take 18 months from inception to approval by Cabinet. The reasons for this are often not the undertaking of the evaluation itself but the preparation for the evaluation, supply chain process (which is now often taking 6 months) and communication post approval (see Figure 1). Ensuring there is buy-in from stakeholders is key to ensuring evaluations are used, as is the working with evaluation steering committees, and consultation once the evaluation report is completed. Then there is the process of obtaining a management response, improvement plan and in the case of national evaluations, approval by Cabinet. On average, field work constitutes the smallest proportion of the time spent on implementation. Rapid evaluations are intended to reduce the costs of evaluation projects and the time they take.

Figure 1: Overview of time spent on the evaluation, by activity



Source: DPME, (2018) p16

Rapid evaluation is essentially defined in terms of timescale. Rigorous evaluations can take 12 months to 5 years depending on the design, with impact evaluations often taking the longest when a baseline and endline are needed. So what do we mean by rapid? In this case we are looking for evaluations which can produce a result that can feed into policy and practice quickly, but yet are sufficiently robust to provide good guidance for decision-making. Inevitably there is a trade-off – more time allows for more data points, more interviews, more literature, and more time in ensuring that the process is good quality, involves stakeholders etc. In addition, as Figure 1 shows, a lot of the time goes in the consultation process, pre and post the actual evaluation. So it is most likely you can do rapid evaluations where these processes can be shortened.

Rapid evaluation is not a substitute for more rigorous evaluations as one has less confidence in the findings, and there is less time in the process (eg how many drafts shared with stakeholders can you afford). However, evaluations can be done fairly rigorously, using methods that are faster (eg with groups rather than individuals), or using existing data, and using enough of a team that work can happen in parallel; and that can provide timely guidance for policy processes which need a rapid set of evidence.

So for the purposes of this guideline, **we see rapid as being evaluations that can produce a final report in 6-**

12 weeks. This implies a main data collection period of a maximum of two weeks to one month, to allow time for the initial activities, organizing of data collection, analysis of the results, writing a draft report, getting feedback and finalising the report.

4 Deciding when to use rapid evaluations

4.1 Why should you consider rapid evaluation?

The commonest reason why a rapid evaluation may be needed is responding to an unplanned senior management request or demand for urgent information, a looming deadline where a critical decision needs to be made on a programme or intervention and up to date diagnosis or information is needed urgently, or a context where there is a rapid process of change and any significant delay in the production of an evaluation is likely to render the results of the evaluation irrelevant or out of date. *This should not be a substitute for planning for decisions which are known well in advance* (eg a programme is coming to an end in 2 years, what will we do afterwards). In the latter case an evaluation can be planned and budgeted for years in advance.

Ellins, (undated) suggest the following reasons for doing a rapid evaluation:

- Where contexts change (e.g. COVID-19) and ongoing feedback of findings ensures relevance and usefulness of the findings;
- Supporting learning and improvement as innovations/pilots are tested out in real world settings;
- Providing timely information about potential for scale up/roll out across the wider system;
- For practical considerations e.g. funders may not be able to commit resources for longer assessments.

4.2 Advantages and disadvantages

The essential benefit of rapid evaluations is around time and cost. A more rapid evaluation means quicker feedback to policy which for emerging priorities is important. For example, this guideline is being written during the COVID-19 emergency. Policy feedback is needed very rapidly to decide if measures are working and so rapid and real-time methods may be needed.

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of rapid evaluation

Advantages of rapid evaluation	Disadvantages
Time from commissioning to report with recommendations is shorter, so can be more timely, especially for emerging priorities which could not be planned for	Less time on the process with stakeholders which can reduce ownership, as well as feedback to improve quality
Easier to undertake rapid evaluations with internal people as the time commitment is less If conducted internally no supply chain process which speeds up the process.	Less time on data collection, reducing robustness and ability to draw inferences on wider application – so generally less suitable for more than small or electronic surveys Needs internal people to allocate dedicated time Needs sufficient evaluation/research capacity internally If undertaken internally can be less objective, or more easily dismissed by senior management Quality can also be compromised if internal capacity (for analysis, report-writing, etc.) is weak.
Lower cost as they are quicker, but also if they use internal people	Can feel rushed, and stakeholders feel they have not been consulted
Possibly more flexibility to use innovative methods, as less constrained by generalisability	Can be less time for learning, as methods and tools have to be applied quickly and correctly. Little time to learn new approaches.
	Can be reduction in quality, as fewer quality control measures, analysis may have to be happening during data collection etc.

In general a challenge is that rapid evaluations require more and more skilled people than do less pressured evaluations. This can be a problem to conduct them internally.

4.3 Which situations suggest rapid evaluations are needed

We need to define different contexts which would justify a more rapid or a more rigorous evaluation. Table 2 shows some cases. Rapid evaluations can also be distinguished in terms of their intended purpose, for example, being conducted in real-time, or alongside larger evaluations, to support innovation, development and implementation (Ellins, undated).

Table 2: Situations favouring rapid or more robust evaluations

Type of evaluation	Situation favours	Example
Rigorous major evaluation	Where you need to be very sure that the picture is correct: • Where the programme or policy is very large and you need a very clear picture of benefits and how it is working; • Where the implications of the policy/ programme is critical and will affect peoples lives and communities at large; • Where much is at stake, or there is a lot of contention about the programme or policy so it is key that the result can't be challenged.	>R500 million programme For example the Child Support Grant, where its impact is contested
	Where you can anticipate and plan for the decision points by scheduling the evaluation well in time	Planning for an evaluation to report 4 years in from a programme start prior to decisions on a next phase
Rapid evaluation	Where realtime feedback is needed	In a newly unfolding emergency situation e.g. floods
	Where you have to get the results in 2-3 months	In a relatively stable emergency situation e.g. migration
	Where the primary purpose is formative to feed-in to ongoing policy and planning processes	Mid-term review of an implementation programme
	For organizational learning and problem solving	A problem has emerged – how do we deal with it?
	Where the evaluation budget is very limited	Got 0-R400 000 for an evaluation
	Where focusing on narrower topics and/or specific geographical areas	Specific areas targeted so participatory work in that area will be relevant

5 Deciding how to implement rapid evaluations

5.1 How to address the speed

Supply chain process and internal approvals
A key issue around speed is whether a **supply chain process** will be needed. Three options have been suggested, of which two require a supply chain:

1. Entirely by internal teams (internal model);
2. By an internal team facilitated by an experience external evaluator (facilitated model);
3. Outsourced (external model).

Departments need to build capacity to undertake these internally. However in the near future until evaluation specialists are recruited, the model needed is likely to be facilitated, except where government evaluation specialists are in post and can lead the process (for example from DPME).

Departments can also consider establishing a panel of experience evaluators to act as facilitators. This should simply the supply chain process.

Even where there is no supply chain departmental approvals will still be required and this can take some time.

Data collection and analysis

Note that because the data collection phase will be shortened, a significant time is still needed for *preparation*, so that the data collection can proceed rapidly and efficiently. You need to be well prepared! 'Because the RE timeframe is short, the workplan and timetable must be well thought out ahead of time. Methods must be strategically considered, and the process of data collection and analysis must be synchronized to prevent idle downtime for the field-based data collection team.'(I-TECH, 2008).

The ways to ensure that data collection can be done as quickly as possible include:

1. **Good preparation with focused enquiry** – so limited scope and evaluation questions [7];
    - Limiting scope – so few evaluation questions and limiting geographical scope for data collection;
    - Focusing the evaluation questions around specific and well-defined evaluation needs and developing a detailed evaluation matrix (particularly working with the internal team to define data/information sources);
    - Negotiating and agreeing on criteria for selection of key informants and literature etc;
    - Developing methodologies to ensure that data collection and analysis can take place in parallel (templates for data recording, points in time for discussion and agreement on emerging themes, adaptation of tools etc.);
    - Regular meetings with end users – which will need them to schedule this time.
2. **Pragmatic (truncated) methods**:
    - Reducing the literature review – so accessing for example a few critical international papers, not a wide search. In some cases this may not be needed but judicious use of key international examples could help give some inspiration of what good practice could be;;
    - Narrowing the secondary data – reducing the reports that are looked at;
    - Depending more on existing data rather than collecting new data – this could be a desktop approach using existing administrative data, survey data, monitoring reports etc, with less reality testing of these in the field;
    - Where new data:
        - Reducing the number of data points. For example if this is a national evaluation, doing 2-3 provinces, not 5; reducing the number of sample points per province; or reducing the number of interviews with more focus on a few key respondents;
        - Doing more group work rather than individual interviews. For example having a workshop with programme managers and key stakeholders, with all the NGO partners in a welfare programme; using focus groups rather than individual interviews; using participatory rural appraisal techniques with beneficiaries;
        - Doing more phone interviews rather than face to face (face to face can be very expensive, but you may miss out on key richness if field visits are insufficient);
        - Short surveys, e.g. online, Microsoft Forms, survey monkey etc (but this biases the sample to those with internet/mobile phones).
3. **Working in teams**, ensuring data collections happens in parallel, so if you have a team of 4, each taking one site/respondent, not having 2 people at one site. This also facilitates discussion and analysis of results as they emerge;

[7] Part contributed by Mine Pabari who peer reviewed the guideline

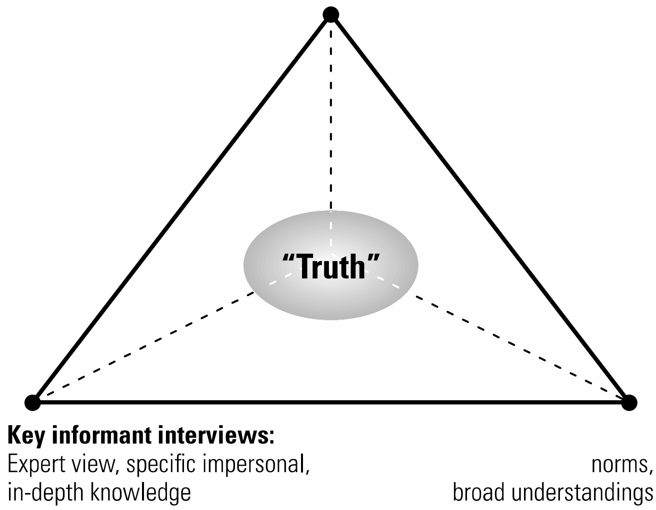
4. **Accessible outputs** – short reports, , short videos, evidence briefs.

As indicated in Figure 1, much of the time associated with evaluations can be around the *governance* (eg evaluation steering committees agreeing methodology, checking deliverables etc) and in follow-up. In a rapid evaluation process this must be minimised. So while there is likely still to be a need for an evaluation steering committee, this needs to agree at the outset the methodology, scope (eg locations for participatory work), as once the rapid evaluation starts the next interaction is likely to be at draft report stage. For this reason too having insiders as part of the evaluation team can avoid the risk of lack of ownership that could arise. It is important also to brief the client along the way so they are familiar with what is happening.

5.2 How to maximise robustness

The major disadvantage of rapid evaluations is that they are less robust. So a key methodological challenge is to try and ensure that while employing the tactics above to speed up the evaluation, ensuring it is as robust as possible within the time and resources available. A key element is to ensure that a rapid evaluation is *realistic* and can be achieved, as that the *scope* is not too wide and that expectations can be measured (Ellins, undated). It is easy for expectations to rise to be that of a full evaluation, and care must be taken to avoid scope creep.

Figure 2: Example of triangulation



Source: I-TECH (2008)

The most important way of ensuring robustness is using *triangulation* – using a mix of complementary qualitative and quantitative methods and multiple data sources, which increases the validity and reliability of data (see Figure 2) (I-TECH, 2008). Another way of triangulation is by using a vertical transect methodology to test what is emerging at different levels of the system[8].

One method to increase robustness is by *including insiders* in the team who know the systems. This also helps to build ownership. However you have to manage the risk of bias – ensuring that the rationale for methodology/tools is documented (including the changes that take place during the course of the evaluation), biases are identified upfront and during the course of the evaluation, etc[9].

5.3 How to maximise ownership and likely use of the rapid evaluation

Evaluations are conducted to make a difference, not to sit on a shelf. It is important to maximise the likelihood of them being used (DPME, 2019). Goldman & Pabari, (2020) draw out lessons for maximising the likelihood of the use of evidence. They discuss how evidence use interventions are undertaken to build awareness, agreement and trust amongst others, so building the motivation, capability of decision makers and their opportunity to use evidence. They also point to the importance of conceptual use (building understanding of the intervention and why it is or isn't working) and process use (e.g. learning from the evaluation during the process, such as from a theory of change workshop).

[8] For example in work done in Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa on governance issues relating to sustainable livelihoods approaches, participatory work was undertaken to look at what was emerging at community (micro) level, then this was tested at district/local government level (meso) adding in district-level issues, then at provincial level adding in provincial level issues, and finally at national level (Goldman et al., 2000).

[9] Contribution from Mine Pabari, peer reviewer

Some of the evidence use interventions that could be applied here to maximise the likelihood the rapid evaluation is used includes:

Table 3: Possible interventions to maximise the likelihood that the rapid evaluation is used

Aim	Evidence use intervention
Building agreement/ understanding/trust and commitment to using the results	Solicit key (internal or external) stakeholders predictions of what evaluation findings will be, prior to either the evaluation fieldwork, or at least, prior to the disclosure of the findings. Feedback in face-to-face meetings which combines reference to prior expectations and then the actual evaluation findings is much more likely to lead to very active engagement and dialogue[10]. Use of evaluation steering committees to formalise partnerships Having insiders as part of the evaluation team, and eventually conduct the evaluations internally Stakeholder workshop to develop the theory of change and validate the results Having external evaluators as facilitators of the evaluation process rather than simply outsourcing
Strengthening ability and confidence of stakeholders to use the evidence	Running capacity-building (e.g. learning-by-doing, workshops and formal training courses) around the rapid evaluation process Involving insiders eg from government and possibly the area if a specific geographical area is targeted
Institutionalising/ formalising use of the evidence	Use of management responses and improvement plans to formalise action needed
Ensuring access to the evidence	Producing accessible 1/5/25 page reports and policy briefs Report being available on a knowledge repository

Source: adapted from (Goldman & Pabari, 2020)

A key element for ownership is the involvement of internal staff. This is much more realistic for rapid evaluations, where staff may need to be fully occupied on an evaluation over 6-12 weeks, not 12 months plus. Rapid evaluations are probably more difficult than longer evaluations as there is significant expertise needed to undertake many activities rapidly in parallel, and to conduct analysis in parallel to data collection. Therefore experienced evaluators are still needed, but these can operate more as facilitators, working with an internal team.

A focus for government should be developing capacity of specialist evaluation staff in departments to lead rapid evaluations, working with programme/policy staff. In this way *internal evaluation* can use experienced staff to assess their organization's policies, programs, or problems, promoting organisational learning and "influencing behaviour" and informing operations, management, and/or strategic planning" (Torres, 1991). Internal could be here include DPME evaluation specialists leading an internal team from a department, or a mixed DPME/departmental team. This can help to promote empathic and responsible decision-making through the fair and sensitive representation of multiple issues and perspectives, and based on the use of evaluative information (ibid). In Part B 4.2 we mention some of the challenges relating to internal evaluations.

6 Summary of the main features of rapid evaluations

Summarising from the above, rapid evaluations typically have the following main attributes:

- Focus – more likely to be an internal evaluation, stronger formative and problem-solving aspect (Mathison, 1991), focusing on an issue emerging that could not be planned for, or a mid-term evaluation when a full evaluation is not needed;
- Resource constrained:

[10] Rick Davies, peer reviewer

  - Smaller budgets;
  - Intensity – focused evaluation executed within a short or compressed period of time;
  - Time – reduced project timelines in comparison with full scale evaluations;
- Teamwork:
  - Typically two to four team members, led by experienced evaluator,
  - Evaluation and policy/programme expertise;
  - Often use internal staff – relying on qualified and experienced officials, sometime facilitated by an experienced evaluator;
- Pragmatic methods - mixed evaluation research methods – with strong use of secondary qualitative and quantitative data. No large surveys except electronic. Strong focus on triangulation for robustness. Good use of literature - a clear theoretical framework helps in ensuring robust analysis[11];;
- Planning – tightly planned to deliver within typically short periods of 4 weeks to 3 months;
- Evaluation management – evaluation steering committee, supported by technical working group (TWG).

Part B: Designing a rapid evaluation

This section of this guideline is designed to be read along with DPME's Guideline on Developing Evaluation Terms of Reference. We use the suggested structure of the TORs, hence we are restarting the numbers from section 1 of the TORs.

1 Background information and rationale

1.1 Background to the intervention being evaluated

This should be as per any evaluation and end with a problem statement – what needs to be looked at.

2 Focus of rapid evaluation

2.1 Purpose of rapid evaluation

The purpose of rapid evaluations is similar to that of any evaluation - what is it that we want to understand about the intervention? However it usually has a stronger formative side (for learning), and also is likely to more specific in focus. The table in the DPME guideline for TORs is adapted to show what might be a purpose statement for a rapid evaluation (see Table 4).

Table 4: Core question (purpose) for each type of evaluation

Typical questions	Example, rephrased as purpose	Type of evaluation	Rapid evaluation purpose
What is the current situation and root cause of the problem?	To assess the current situation of malnutrition in South Africa and the root cause of the problem.	Diagnostic	Works as a purpose if there is enough existing data (eg evaluations) to draw from. If not focus on specific province
Is the logic of the intervention design robust and likely to work?	To review the likely success of the design of the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development (ECD) and how the design can be strengthened.	Design	Works. An evaluation focusing specifically on design can be quite rapid.
Is the intervention being	To assess whether the Business	Implemen-	Works. However the number of

[11] Matodzi Amisi, peer reviewer.

Typical questions	Example, rephrased as purpose	Type of evaluation	Rapid evaluation purpose
implemented as specified (and in some cases are the outcomes being achieved), and why?	Process Services scheme is being implemented as specified (and in some evaluations you may ask are the outcomes being achieved), and to explain the performance.	tation	data points will be more limited. Many rapid evaluations are likely to be around whether implementation is working or not and why.
How have beneficiaries' lives changed as a result of the intervention?	To assess whether the child support grant is leading to sustained impacts on the levels of education and longer term benefits for children.	Impact	Not easy. Could do a theory-based evaluation for a small geographic area as an exploratory study.
What are the costs in relation to the benefits? Is the programme providing value for money?	To assess the costs in relation to the benefits of early childhood development centres, compared to home-based provision.	Economic	Can be done. Need to be able to access good data on benefits/ effectiveness. Can do estimate of effectiveness from specific geographical areas but generalisability limited.
What is the evidence from all evaluations related to the topic in question?	To assess what is emerging from all evaluations undertaken of programmes relating to contact crimes and the implications for the future.	Evaluation synthesis	Works. Synthesis is good method for rapid evaluations as can then use existing evaluations and focus interviews etc on how to strengthen.

2.2 Key evaluation questions

Typically *rapid evaluations* have a more limited set of evaluation questions in comparison to bigger evaluations in the National/Provincial or Departmental Evaluation Plans. These questions are linked to the purpose of the evaluation, and emphasise establishing what the *results* or *performance* of policy/programme/strategy delivery has been, or to make urgent improvements because there is already evidence that there are/may be obvious problems. These can then inform key strategic decisions needed relatively soon.

Common rapid evaluation questions:

1) What results have been achieved? (effectiveness, impact, cost/effectiveness);
2) Is the theory of change underlying the intervention working and the intervention has contributed to the results seen? (you won't have a counterfactual, and you are more likely to be able to talk about contribution rather than attribution);
3) Have the right things been done? What do people think about the value of the various outcomes they have experienced? (addresses relevance, effectiveness);
4) Have things been done well? (efficiency, effectiveness);
5) How are other government programmes/policies/ procedures affecting achievement of programme results? (coherence);
6) Are the results sustainable?
7) What are the gaps and how could the intervention be strengthened in the future?

The scope in addressing these questions may need to be limited, see below under scope.

2.3 Intended users and stakeholders of the evaluation

DPME's guideline on TORs shows a table identifying potential users of the evaluation and how they will use it. This is likely to be similar for rapid evaluations, except that there is a greater likelihood that rapid evaluations will be undertaken for internal learning and problem-solving processes, rather than broader accountability purposes.

2.4 Scope of rapid evaluation

This section describes what to focus on in the evaluation (and so what not to cover). The scope of a rapid evaluation is usually smaller and more limited in comparison with full-scale evaluations. As with DPME's Guideline on TORs consider the time period; intervention components to be covered (may be limited to most critical); geographic and institutional coverage of the evaluation (again may be limited); sector and thematic areas (again may be limited); and clarify what is outside the scope of this particular evaluation and should not be considered.

3 Design of rapid evaluations

3.1 Research design

This section covers the approach, design and key elements of the methodology to be used by the evaluation team. Rapid evaluations can also be diagnostic, design, implementation, outcomes or economic. For specific guidance refer to the DPME Guideline for the specific type of evaluation[12]. Another resource is UNICEF Evaluation Office, (2019) which goes through each type of evaluation suggesting the purpose, questions and methodology.

The major difference with rapid evaluations is the trade-off between research rigour, timeliness and cost – the importance of getting an evaluation assessment quickly to take a more informed policy/programme management decision. Consider the approaches raised in Part A of the guideline, sections 5.1 and 5.2.

The following elements of the research design are suggested, and these require a skilful evaluation input:

1. Assessing the evaluability of the intervention you are looking at. You need to ensure some degree of fit between an intervention theory of change, the availability of data, and stakeholder interests, to be clear what sort of evaluation is viable[13].
2. Using a **theory of change** to better understand a policy/programme/project and how it is supposed to work. Use the theory of change to decide the key evaluative questions to focus on if the theory of change is working.
3. Use a **logframe** if such exists or otherwise key performance targets to use as the benchmarks to evaluate against.
4. Using a **mixed methods approach**, using whatever secondary data exists, using existing data with limited new data collection, and qualitative methods to understand how things are working and how they can be strengthened. Quantitative data should stress existing data (eg from project monitoring, or administrative data), or a simple survey type exercise can be conducted, eg an online survey.
5. Using **participatory** approaches, e.g from participatory rural appraisal.

> **Box 1: The Grade R Evaluation**
> The Grade R evaluation was rapid (it took 3 months), cheap (it cost around R300 000), and it provided a very robust picture of impact. It was able to do so because a scoping study had been undertaken prior which showed that suitable data already existed. Using administrative data on Grade R attendance, linked with performance data on learning outcomes achieved from the Annual National Assessments, data from 18 000 schools was drawn to provide a very rigorous picture of impact.

Using five main DAC criteria: five of the six standard "lenses" for evaluation are recommended, with impact being the least easy to accommodate in a rapid evaluation.[14]

i. Policy relevance and stakeholder appropriateness;
ii. *Effectiveness*: of policy/programme/project/service delivery,

[12] https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za/pages/guidelines-other-resources
[13] A useful guide to evaluability assessment is at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a0d40f0b652dd000534/61141-DFIDWorkingPaper40-finalOct13.pdf
[14] Including a new DAC criteria, coherence.

iii. *Efficiency*: of resource utilization, as well as management and administration;
iv. *Coherence:* the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution;
v. *Impact* – the most difficult to cover unless there is existing data that can be used e.g. see box 1[15]. The issue of contribution to impact can be covered in looking at whether there is evidence the theory of change is working;
vi. *Sustainability*: of funding, institutionalisation and expertise.

The *rapid evaluation* design will establish the parameters of the trade-off between research rigour, usefulness (including timeliness), and cost.

3.2 Methodology

The basic methodologies for rapid evaluations are:

- **Document review**; use this for policy and documentation review, to assist with understanding policy context, and later to determine policy relevance and appropriateness when evaluation analysis is undertaken and conclusions reached.
- **Literature review;** to understand wider literature on the topic and what this says about good practice in the intervention. Helpful for getting a good theoretical framework. This may not be needed for a rapid evaluation, but using a few key references can be very helpful;
- **Use of secondary data**: this could be from project monitoring or administrative data.
- **Key informant interviews** – establish who the key policy/programme/project/service delivery informants are – these are usually the custodians, managers, implementers, and major stakeholders who are involved in day-to-day oversight and implementation. Interviewing the right people can provide very rich background. 'Good key informants are thoughtful and articulate and show interest in the evaluation.' (I-TECH, 2008). The number of interviews are likely to be more limited than in a full evaluation and so careful selection is needed;
- **Focus group discussions**: discussion between several people on a particular topic guided by a facilitator. This can be very helpful as a way of discussing with several stakeholders at once;
- **Workshops**: these can be very rich in developing theories of change, or in validating findings. They were a key part of the vertical transect methodology mentioned earlier.
- **Participatory exercises**: exercises often with community members to understand issues affecting their lives and to build community ownership of the research process. There are a wide range of tools that can be used. There is a useful South African guide to these[16].
- **Direct observation**: observation of a component of the program being evaluated;
- **Short surveys**: e.g. online, Microsoft Forms, survey monkey etc (but this biases the sample to those with internet/mobile phones).

There are now a range of examples of technology-facilitated approaches, software packages that enable people to capture information via smartphones and to quickly relay that information to a common web interface, not just from standardised surveys but also open-ended interviews recorded with video/audio[17].

It is important to establish clear constraints upfront such as duration, budget, availability of resources, time, etc. With these in mind, decide on what will work technically (evaluation), and practically. Bear in mind purpose, scope, key evaluation questions, design and then decide on method. Part A section 5.1 gives further inputs on how to restrict time on data collection.

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[15] See box 1. The Grade R evaluation is at https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za/evaluations.aspx?keyword=grade%20R
[16] Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340788405_Guide_2_Facilitators_Guide_for_Community-Based_Planning
[17] Rick Davies, peer reviewer. A set of resources are available at https://mande.co.uk/2011/lists/software-lists/me-software-a-list/

Sampling: can be tricky in *rapid evaluations – sufficient coverage* of key informants is required. It is important to keep this manageable in the tighter evaluation timelines and limit the number of interviews, typically 30-50 or so, especially if there is a team to share the interviews. You will need to use purposive sampling as numbers cannot be representative, e.g. selecting well performing and poorly performing facilities in two provinces, not five provinces. In section 5.2 we discuss briefly managing bias.

4 Evaluation plan

4.1 Products/deliverables expected from the evaluation

There is not the time for multiple deliverables which have to be checked and approved e.g. by a steering committee. Therefore key deliverables could be:

- Inception report with detailed methodology;
- Theory of change workshop;
- Draft report;
- Stakeholder workshop to validate results;
- Final report.

4.2 Activities

A possible schedule for the activities including preparation is included in table 4.

Preparation: Key preparatory activities include:

- Developing the TORS and deciding on the implementation model – internal/facilitated/outsourced. This has implications for whether a supply chain process will be needed, and if so what type;
- Consider whether an Evaluation steering committee and Technical Working Group is needed and composition and role (discussed further in 6.1);
- Identifying data available that cover the key performance indicators, assembling this or ensuring access from relevant departments, as well as key documents, so that this does not delay the evaluation;
- If part of the team is external, recruit. If a facilitated model is used, some system of having a panel of individuals who can facilitate evaluations may be appropriate. If outsourcing, for speed again a panel may be needed;
- For internal team get permission from their supervisors for them to dedicate time to this assignment. Realistically this may be at 50-80% of time, but during the data collection weeks it would need to be 100% or this model is not realistic.

Inception phase: it is important to compress this phase and while in fuller evaluations the methodology development may take place over a longer period, in a rapid evaluation it is likely to have to be be done within the initial inception phase. It is likely to need 1-2 weeks from the inception meeting to complete the methodology and instruments, depending on how many different methods are being employed. It may be sensible to involve the Technical Working Group (see 6.1) in some of this phase to facilitate sign off.

Theory of change workshop: this should happen very early, ideally during the inception phase to guide the questions and instruments, or immediately afterwards, prior to data collection, but after programme documents have been reviewed.

Table 5: Possible schedule for 12 week evaluation

Activity	Prep						Week						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Preparation													
Develop TORS and decide implementation model – internal/facilitated/outsourced													
Possibly establish Evaluation Steercomm and Technical Working Group													
Identify data available and ensure access, as well as key documents													
If part of team is external, recruit.													
For internal team get permission for them to dedicate time													
Inception													
Inception meeting													
Team works on revised proposal and detailed methodology, report structure													
Presentation of methodology to ESC and sign-off													
Steercomm ensures permission to interview, access to data etc													
Data collection													
Document review re policy background, programme													
Theory of change workshop													
Literature review if needed													
Plan for interviews/data collection													
Interviews/data collection													
Analysis													
Workshop emerging findings/recommendations													
Writing draft report													
Reporting													
Submit draft report													
Comments back													
Finalise report (approval by email)													
Evaluation steering committee meetings (including attending workshops)	1				2					3		4	

Data collection: As much relevant secondary data as possible must be identified and made available because of the tight project timelines. Qualitative data is usually relatively easily available, and respondents (key informants) may well be accessible. Although performance data should be included in quarterly and annual reports, and the intervention's systems should collect, organise, capture, and store key performance data, access to quantitative data of reasonable quality is often more challenging, particularly in provincial and local government spheres. Extensive surveys with big samples are unlikely to be feasible.

It is important to be able to access pre-existing datasets containing critical performance for the quantitative assessment of performance (results). This presupposes good planning by departments and entities long before a rapid evaluation is actually implemented.

The Technical Working Group of key stakeholders (see section 6) should make sure that the availability of data against key performance indicators' (e.g. from the logframe) is provided upfront otherwise the evaluators can spend weeks trying to get access to the data.

Analysis: evaluation quality relies on the appropriate and accurate use of evaluation measurement criteria, "impartial" presentation and analysis of evidence, and coherence among findings, conclusions and recommendations. Where possible, to save time data analysis should be conducted in parallel with collection, e.g. building analytical tables or coding using text analysis software. Frequent team meetings to share emerging data can help with this.

Validation: it is useful to test emerging findings with key stakeholders to stimulate interest and ensure there are no surprises which could lead to rejection of the evaluation. This can also lead to further questions being asked – so it becomes an iterative process. It is important also to present the draft findings, conclusions and recommendations to key stakeholders at a meeting/workshop to discuss, provide feedback and validate and refine. This maximises the potential for useful feedback, and increases the chances of evaluation validity and usefulness after project completion.

Reporting: the existing DPME guideline on a 1/5/25 page summary evaluation report is appropriate for a rapid evaluation.[18]

Overcoming bias – when officials undertake an internal evaluation there are possibilities that politeness and peer respect or fear of rocking the boat may lead to bias and assessment errors. Schweigert, (2011) refers to the issue of dual loyalty to evaluation standards of public trust and accountability, but also loyalty to their organization of hire where they serve as a member of the staff '.

These risks may be mitigated through the appointment of officials not closely tied to the given intervention being evaluated, as well as involvement of an experienced evaluation practitioner. Internal M&E units have a key role in ensuring quality and that the evaluation can challenge the status quo. This also requires support from senior management, including symbolic measures emphasising that evaluations must be frank and honest if constructively critical. Involving evaluation specialists from DPME, Office of the Premier, can also help to provide objectivity.

4.3 Time frame for the project

Table 6 summarises possible deliverable and milestones based on a 12 week evaluation.

18 https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za/images/gallery/Final%20DPME%20Report%20Summary%20Template%2017.02%2023.pdf

Table 6: Outline deliverables and example of payment schedule

Deliverable	Expected milestones (see table 4)	% payment
Approval of Inception Report including detailed methodology and proposed report structure	Week 2	30%
Theory of change workshop	Week 2-3	
Workshop with stakeholders to validate and refine the findings and recommendations (this is likely to be before the draft report)	Week 9	30%
Submission of draft evaluation report for review in 1/5/25 format	Week 10	
Approval of the **final evaluation report**	Week 12	30%
Submission of all datasets, metadata and documentation (including interviews) when data is collected, **powerpoint or audiovisual presentation of the results**	Week 13	10%
Project closure meeting		

5 Budget and payment schedule

Rapid evaluations typically cost significantly less than full scale evaluations, which for DPME cost around R2 million. A fully internal rapid evaluation would have to cover the cost of travel for data collection, and potentially two stakeholder workshops. It is unlikely to cost more than R100 000. If an experienced evaluator is used to facilitate the evaluation, and the rest of the team are internal, then assuming the experience evaluator spends 50% of their time on the evaluation over 60 days, the figure is likely to be an additional R300-400 000. If the contract is outsourced to a team of 4, then there is likely to be an additional R500-600 000. So this gives us a likely range of

- Full internal – R100k;
- Facilitated – around R400-500 000;
- Outsourced – R1-1,2 million.

Officials undertaking an internal rapid evaluation would need to be available at least 50% of the time for the evaluation to make headway, with potentially researchers for more of the time. This must be recognised as a major commitment.

A possible payment schedule is in Table 6.

6 Management arrangements

6.1 Role of steering committee

Where evaluations are national involving DPME as well as a department, or several provinces or departments, they should have a steering committee comprising the main departments and agencies involved in the intervention in question, and the evaluation custodian. This is helpful for ensuring ownership of the evaluation by affected organisations/units, as well as providing oversight of the evaluation. If it is all internal then this may or may not be established, and could involve different directorates or branches that are affected. The M&E Unit should provide the secretariat for the evaluation. The roles of the steering committee could be as per the DPME template[19] but can be simplified.

19 https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za/images/gallery/Terms%20of%20Reference%20for%20Evaluation%20Steering%20Committees.pdf

Important partners in civil society, business, labour should also be considered for the steering committee if their organisation is key to implementation, and they need to own the results. Other organisations or individuals with particular expertise or knowledge can also be brought into the steering committee, or be invited to the stakeholder workshops.

Suggested meetings of the steering committee are shown in Table 4, twice meeting formally as the steering committee and twice participating in workshops.

As suggested in the TOR Guideline, a Technical Working Group (TWG) is likely to be needed to deal rapidly with practical issues quickly such as instruments and work interactively with the evaluation team. The role of the technical working group (TWG) is very important: it prepares the initial Terms of Reference (including content of sections 4.1-4.11 in this guideline), guides and supports the evaluation team through the compressed project timelines, unlocks blockages that may be presented, and quality assures the evaluation during execution. The TWG requires representation of the policy/programme custodian, an M&E expert, and other advisory technical expertise as required. A TWG can take on the following arrangement in terms of key roles:

- *Evaluation lead* from custodian departments/unit – responsible for overall project management, secretariat support and quality control, as well as liaison with stakeholders;
- *Policy/Programme manager*: (an) individual(s) with expert policy/programme/project/service delivery knowledge and networks;

The Technical Working Group (TWG) is expected to meet at least twice a month during a rapid evaluation, interacting regularly but informally with the evaluation team to facilitate the project being completed on time.

6.2 Team needed[20]

If the intervention being evaluated is of some size, a team of at least four is recommended to cover a fair amount of ground in a short space of time, enabling considerable work to happen in parallel and to share the tasks. If more extensive data collection is required, then for the data collection element the team can be expanded. This is needed whether the team is internal or external.

The team requires an experienced evaluator, who is able to design and respond quickly to the emerging needs to the evaluation, and the credibility/gravitas to interact with senior managers relating to the intervention being evaluated. If this is not available in the departments then it is a good idea to recruit someone to play this role (the facilitated option). They are likely to be needed for 40-50% of the time.

It would be helpful if there is at least one team member who is familiar with the programme being evaluated, and can therefore assist with knowing who to contact, and to understand the challenges. This can also help in document review, as they know the relevant policy documents. They are likely to be needed for 50% of the time.

There is also a need for at least two people who can undertake data collection, eg interviews, who have some experience of the tools being used, e.g. interviews or focus groups, and who can share the load of analysis and writing. At least one of these people should be fairly experienced otherwise they are unlikely to be able to work quickly and efficiently. They are likely to be needed for 80-100% of the time during data collection, analysis and writing.

Teamwork is crucial for the rapid, flexible demands of the processes of data collection, analysis, interpretation and write-up until the evaluation is complete – this means that team members must be

[20] For simplicity this guideline does not include the section in the DPME guideline on proposal required. Hence the team is included here at 6.2.

available for the intense period of implementation.

Signed:

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Date:

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