Monitoring and Evaluation Policy

Foreign Agricultural Service – Food Assistance Division
United States Department of Agriculture

Background

USDA is committed to ensuring a strong culture of evaluation and learning from experience. The policy described in this document sets forth an ambitious agenda for monitoring and evaluation in the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and demonstrates the Agency's will to achieve results that make positive changes for people living in poverty. The Agency places a high level of importance on managing for results, and to this end, the Food Assistance Division (FAD) adheres to a Results Oriented Management (ROM) approach that supports the Agency's capacity to manage public resources thoughtfully, to ensure accountability and transparency, and to help ensure that programming is driven by evidence and not by anecdote.

The purpose of this monitoring and evaluation policy is to institutionalize results oriented management in the programs administered by FAD, in particular the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition (McGovern-Dole), the Food for Progress, and the Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement Programs. This policy will guide the integration and implementation of monitoring and evaluation systems and processes into FAD programs and will serve to inform Agency staff and stakeholders of its expectations regarding program monitoring and evaluation. The policy outlines the purpose of monitoring and evaluation, the range of methods used to monitor and evaluate programs, the roles and responsibilities of Agency staff, program participants, and other key stakeholders, and the ways in which monitoring and evaluation information will be used and disseminated to inform decisions regarding program management and implementation.

This policy also seeks to address the findings from external reviews that have been focused on USDA food assistance programs. In 2007, and again in 2011, GAO conducted an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of U.S. Government food assistance programs.[1] These reports noted the need for improvements in monitoring and evaluating USDA's food assistance programs. GAO also conducted assessments on federal agencies' monitoring and evaluation policies (2016) and on the quality and dissemination of agencies' program evaluations (2017). These assessments included USDA and reflected that FAD's M&E practices meet many of the quality standards in the evaluation field, but that there remains room for improvement.[2] In response to these reports and previous reports conducted by GAO and the USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG), FAS established a Monitoring and Evaluation unit within the Office of Capacity Building and Development (OCBD) in FY 2007. The Monitoring and Evaluation Staff (MES) is responsible for managing and providing technical assistance in performance management and evaluation of capacity building and development programs, including food assistance programs.

FAD's monitoring and evaluation policy as it is described in this document, is based on various laws and policies that guide performance management and the review of food assistance programs. The *Government Performance and Results Act* (GPRA) established in 1993 and the

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[1] For more information see: http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07560.pdf and http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11491.pdf.
[2] For more information see: https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/680042.pdf and https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/683157.pdf.

subsequent *GPRA Modernization Act* established in January 2011, require agencies to develop and regularly report on Agency goals and objectives, including outcome oriented goals, performance indicators, targets, and their links to U.S. Government priorities.[3] The FAD M&E Policy also reflects monitoring and evaluation guidelines issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on how Federal Agencies can comply with the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA) of 2016 (FATAA guidelines).[4]

Furthermore, USDA adheres to the Paris Declaration Principles on Aid Effectiveness, as well as the Accra Agenda for Action, which reconfirmed and amplified the principles of ownership, mutual accountability, and managing for results.[5] The Agency's evaluation policy also draws significantly from guidance established by the American Evaluation Association on a more effective government and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC).[6] The OECD/DAC Evaluation Network aims to increase the effectiveness of international development programs by supporting robust, informed, and independent evaluation through improving evaluation policy, sharing good practice, and supporting the development of operational and policy lessons.

The FAD monitoring and evaluation policy is also guided by food assistance program legislation. Food for Progress, McGovern-Dole, and Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement (*see* 7 CFR Part 1499.13, 7 CFR Part 1599.13, and 7 CFR Part 1590.13) require, unless otherwise specified in an agreement, independent, third party evaluations.[7] The legislation governing the monitoring and evaluation requirements for these programs is further established and defined in this policy.

Beginning in 2009, the Food Assistance Division (FAD) of USDA/FAS began to undertake a strategic course of action to develop and institute a comprehensive ROM System to support the achievement of Division and Agency-wide program goals. Results Oriented Management focuses on higher-level program results such as the outcomes and the impact of programs, while also monitoring program activities, inputs and outputs. It promotes management decision-making at a more strategic level than can be achieved through tracking activities, collecting anecdotes and documenting individual success stories. ROM can help to improve internal and external program coordination and ensure that funds are allocated to programs that achieve results and have the greatest impact. To this extent, FAD's ROM System is integrated into key management structures and processes within the Division including, strategic planning, performance and accountability reporting, policy formulation, project management, financial and budget management, and human resource management.

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[3] For more information see: https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-111hr2142enr/pdf/BILLS-111hr2142enr.pdf
[4] For more information see: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/M-18-04-Final.pdf and https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-114publ191/content-detail.html.
[5] For more information see: http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm
[6] For more information see: https://www.eval.org/evaluationroadmap and http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/
[7] For more information see: https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/CFR-2012-title7-vol10/CFR-2012-title7-vol10-sec1599-13 (McGovern Dole), https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/CFR-2012-title7-vol10/CFR-2012-title7-vol10-sec1499-13 (Food for Progress), and https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2018-title7-vol10/pdf/CFR-2018-title7-vol10-sec1590-13.pdf (Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement).

This policy is effective from the date established and will be applicable to all food assistance programs. This policy applies fully to projects funded in FY2018 and beyond, while projects funded in FY2017 and before will use the policy as a guiding principle in fulfilling the established requirements of their current agreement. The original policy first published in May 2013 applied fully to projects funded in FY2012 and served as a guiding principle for projects funded in FY2010 and FY2011.

Definitions and Purpose - Monitoring and Evaluation

This policy applies to the three Food Assistance programs previously mentioned – the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition (McGovern-Dole), the Food for Progress, and the Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement Programs – and to the individual projects within each program. A project is comprised of a complementary set of activities, implemented by an organization, in a country or countries, over an established period of time. USDA performs monitoring and evaluation at the program level, though much of the guidance in this policy reflects monitoring and evaluation at the project level.

All food assistance projects will support this monitoring and evaluation policy and the relevant ROM program frameworks by developing and implementing a range of monitoring processes and structures including, a results framework outlining the project's causal logic and the critical assumptions underpinning the project's strategy, a performance monitoring plan that includes performance indicators and data collection methods and approaches, and an evaluation plan. This approach is complementary to FAD's operational guidelines related to project design and implementation including, among other things, the use of project audits, work plans, and financial plans.

Monitoring involves connecting relevant information to strategic decisions. Monitoring is used by program management and key stakeholders to assess performance and use of program resources. It assists in the oversight and continuous review of program implementation and the assessment of progress in meeting program objectives and results. Monitoring should be based on systematic data collection of established performance indicators including process, output, and outcome indicators. Performance monitoring is necessary for project management but it is only one part of a ROM system.

> **Accountability:** Obligation to demonstrate that work has been conducted in compliance with agreed rules and standards or to report fairly and accurately on performance results vis a vis mandated roles and/or plans. This may require a careful, even legally defensible, demonstration that the work is consistent with the contract terms.
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> --OECD/DAC

Monitoring is complementary to evaluation and both processes support FAD's ROM system. As such, monitoring and evaluation plans should be developed in coordination with one another to ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources and information.

Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of both on-going and completed projects

with regard to a project's design, implementation, and results. Evaluations are used to deepen the Agency's understanding about how and why things work or do not work, to provide evidence of success, and to strengthen future programming and strategic planning. Specifically, evaluations aim to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of a project or program.

Evaluation is a tool for learning and accountability. Accountability is understood as involving two responsibilities or duties: the responsibility to undertake certain actions and the responsibility to provide an account of those actions. The four primary audiences of accountability include donor accountability, which emphasizes financial accounting and results attainment, beneficiary accountability, which involves project implementation, practice, policies, and outcomes, internal accountability, which pertains to organizational mission, values, members, supporters, and staff, and finally horizontal accountability, which comprises peer agencies and institutions of practice.

As stewards of public resources, USDA is accountable to the American people and to program beneficiaries and stakeholders. Of primary concern is that the resources reach the target beneficiaries and that they actually produce the intended changes to reduce food insecurity; improve literacy; increase use of health, nutrition and dietary practices; increase agricultural productivity; expand trade; and improve effectiveness of food assistance through local and regional procurement. When rigorous and carefully designed evaluations are transparent and made publicly available, they help to ensure that public resources are used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

To be accountable also implies the need to learn from programmatic successes and failures. Organizational learning is a key focus of evaluations in FAS with the primary audience including USDA, program participants, other key stakeholders and national and local governments where the programs are implemented. Important in the learning process is the translation from evaluation findings and recommendations to changes in the design and implementation of programs and program planning and management. USDA will also ensure the sharing of lessons learned to the broader group of stakeholders through the publication of evaluations.

USDA strives to have an integrated system for reporting and follow-up on evaluation findings and recommendations. The system will seek to enhance and improve learning within USDA, among and across regions, programs and sectors and to ensure that where applicable, lessons learned about programs in Latin America, for example, are shared with Agency staff and organizations managing and implementing programs in Africa and Asia.

Guiding Principles for Monitoring and Evaluation

This monitoring and evaluation policy adheres to a number of guiding principles. Taken together, the principles are mutually reinforcing and complimentary to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation policy and its supporting processes and systems meet the desired purpose of learning and accountability. The monitoring and evaluation processes and systems underpinning this policy will become an integral component of project design and management.

Monitoring will be conducted throughout the duration of each project. The monitoring data and information will serve to inform the performance monitoring reports and support management decisions and ongoing, organizational learning. Monitoring should be objective, based on data quality standards, logically linked to program efforts, useful, and should measure changes plausibly caused by the project. Project management, including program participants, USDA program staff, and other key stakeholders, will be responsible for the continuous use of monitoring and evaluation information in the implementation of the projects. Such information will assist project management in identifying opportunities and challenges and whether or not mid-course project alterations need to be made, what changes need to be made, and how such changes should be implemented.

Regular monitoring and evaluation information will also be used by FAS to meet its regular reporting and accountability requirements. This includes the Department's annual Performance and Accountability Report[8], annual budget requests, interagency reports, and Congressional, OIG, and GAO reviews as well as public requests.

To the extent possible and feasible, evaluations will be timed in order to inform project funding decisions. This will help to ensure that management decisions regarding future project funding are evidence based and strengthen the link between results and resource allocation. An expanded body of knowledge about effective interventions and necessary conditions for project success and sustainability will also improve future project design and strategy.

Reflective of USDA's commitment to ownership and mutual accountability, monitoring and evaluation principles will, to the extent possible, seek to build and enhance partnerships, build the capacity of organizations to conduct rigorous monitoring and evaluation, and increase the knowledge base on lessons learned and good practices in international efforts to address food insecurity.[9]

Evaluation efforts managed by FAS focusing on strategic areas of interest, special studies, and impact evaluations will be undertaken in partnership with other USG agencies, other donor governments and foreign governments to the extent possible and feasible. Such an approach will support the Paris Declaration principles on harmonization and partnership and the U.S. Government efforts to ensure a whole of government approach.

USDA supports the use of multiple evaluation designs depending on the purpose of the evaluation. As a general principle, evaluations should be designed using the most rigorous evaluation methodology appropriate and feasible and with due consideration to available resources. The selection of an

Principles for Monitoring and Evaluation:
• Designed and timed for use
• Use the Best Methods Available
• Practical and Efficient
• Planned Early
• Sufficiently Resourced
• Conducted Ethically
• Shared Transparently

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[8] For more information see: https://www.usda.gov/our-agency/about-usda/performance
[9] For more information see: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/M-18-04-Final.pdf

evaluation design should take into account factors including the history of the project or similar projects in the country, and whether the project or an aspect of the project is a "pilot" or is as-yet untested. The selection of evaluation methods should depend on the purpose of the evaluation, the questions being asked, the level of rigor and evidence required, and project design. Mixed methods approaches should most often be used including both qualitative and quantitative methods to the extent possible and practicable.

Impact evaluations, using quasi-experimental and experimental designs, including randomized evaluations, will be supported by USDA as appropriate. Impact evaluations aim to assess changes in program participants' behaviors or wellbeing and seek to establish a cause and effect relationship. Direct and indirect impacts will be assessed as well as intended and unintended impacts.

Impact evaluations implemented by USDA and program participants must include a well-defined counterfactual and seek to assess whether, for example, a school feeding program led to observed changes in learning and school performance or whether the observed changes in school performance were a result of other changes in the implementing environment. Impact evaluations aim to identify attribution of the program interventions to the outcomes observed using control or comparison groups.

As specified in regulations (*see* 7 CFR Part 1499.13, 7 CFR Part 1599.13, and 7 CFR Part 1590.13), evaluations will be independent and conducted by a third party. Specifically, the regulations specify that the third party conducting the evaluation:

> **Counterfactual:** The situation or condition which hypothetically may prevail for individuals, organizations or groups were there no development intervention.
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> --OECD/DAC

- Is financially and legally separate from the participant's organization;
- Has staff with demonstrated knowledge, analytical capability, language skills and experience in conducting evaluations of development programs involving agriculture, education, and nutrition;
- Uses acceptable analytical frameworks such as comparison with non-project areas, surveys, involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation, and statistical analyses;
- Uses local consultants, as appropriate, to conduct portions of the evaluation; and,
- Provides a detailed outline of the evaluation, major tasks, and specific schedules prior to initiating the evaluation.

Independence of the evaluation function from program implementation and management is a core principle of USDA evaluation. Independence helps to ensure both credible and objective evaluations. USDA supported evaluations should be conducted by people who are not involved in the implementation and management of the project, and the evaluation process must be free from political influence and organizational pressure. For external evaluations, all evaluation team members will provide a signed statement attesting to a lack of conflict of interest, or disclosing any real or potential conflicts of interest.

Another guiding principle for FAD's M&E Policy is that monitoring and evaluation should be conducted in an ethical manner. [10]   Monitoring and evaluation activities should appropriately balance the desired creation of evidence with the protection of human subjects, including safeguarding the dignity, rights, safety, and privacy of participants. Evaluators are responsible for applying ethical principles in all stages of the evaluation, and for raising and clarifying ethical matters with stakeholders during the course of the evaluation. [11]

USDA supports projects that incorporate and support rigorous and robust monitoring and evaluation systems from the design or proposal stage, throughout the project duration, and, to the extent possible, post-project implementation.

Project Development

Results Frameworks

Before awards are made, organizations are responsible for clearly identifying and articulating how the proposed project will contribute to USDA food assistance program results frameworks. USDA Food Assistance Results Frameworks can be found on the Food Assistance Information System's website.[12] Organizations should clearly identify the project strategy and what result(s) the project expects to achieve. Organizations, therefore, must develop a project specific results framework that a) identifies the project's logic and expected results at various levels and b) clearly links to the USDA program results frameworks.

The proposed project strategy and expected results should be clearly grounded in the country context and knowledge of existing relevant national and local programs. For example, a proposal submitted in support of USDA's McGovern-Dole program focused on improving literacy of school age children may focus on the intermediate results for improving quality of literacy instruction and improving attentiveness and exclude project activities focused on improving student attendance if the proposal can clearly justify that school attendance is not a hindering factor in improving literacy. Countries, for example, with high rates of school enrollment and attendance and access to schools may not necessarily warrant project activities focused on this intermediate result.

The project-level results framework will be used to guide project monitoring and evaluation.

Performance Monitoring Plans

In addition to submitting a project-level results framework, organizations will submit a draft performance monitoring plan (PMP) that defines performance indicators and identifies data

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[10] For more information see: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/M-18-04-Final.pdf
[11] For more information see: https://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=51
[12] Please see the Food Aid Information System website at: https://apps.fas.usda.gov/fais/public

sources, collection methods, and reporting frequency, as well as why and by whom indicator data will be analyzed, used, and reported.[13] The plan must include the relevant FAD standard indicators and should include custom (project-specific) indicators if applicable. FAD standard indicators have been identified in the *Food Assistance Indicators and Definitions* handbook.[14] Standard indicators are used by USDA to measure progress in achieving USDA's *program* results. The standard indicators will allow USDA to report progress among all of its projects across results areas (*i.e.* literacy, good health, nutrition and dietary practices, agricultural productivity and trade) or country specific achievements. Feed the Future and other interagency standard indicators will be incorporated into FAD's standard indicator handbook. All standard indicators are required for projects to report on where relevant to the project's strategy.

In addition, organizations may include custom indicators that they deem key to monitoring program performance and accountability. As a good practice, these custom (project-specific) indicators should be based on broad stakeholder input. Although not required, organizations should include custom indicators that have been developed through a participatory approach involving key stakeholders. The organization may wish to hold a stakeholders meeting to develop the project's proposed results framework, performance monitoring plan, and performance indicators. Using a participatory approach will help to ensure that all stakeholders' requirements and needs are met, comprehensive knowledge of the implementing environment and country needs, knowledge of existing data collection tools and activities for performance data collection, institutionalization and ownership of the results framework and project strategy, and clearly articulated roles and responsibilities.

In the development of standard and custom indicators, USDA believes indicators should meet the following criteria:

> **Direct** – the indicator should, as closely as possible, measure exactly the relevant result.
> **Objective** – the indicator should be precise and unambiguous about what is being measured and how. There should be no doubt on how to measure or interpret the indicator.
> **Adequate** – the indicator(s) should sufficiently capture all of the elements of a result.
> **Practical** – the data can be obtained to inform the indicator in a timely and efficient manner and the data are of high-quality.

The full set of indicators selected to monitor project performance should be kept to the minimum necessary to inform project management and oversight. They should also be realistic in terms of project resources allocated to performance management including data collection, analysis, and reporting.

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[13] For a sample PMP and key components of a PMP, please see Annex A.
[14] Please see the Food Assistance Division website at: https://www.fas.usda.gov/programs/resources/guidance-food-aid-program-standard-indicators.

In addition to drafting a PMP, organizations will also establish draft baseline values and annual and life-of-project targets for all indicators during project development. Established targets should be realistic and ambitious. Baseline values will be confirmed when the baseline evaluation is done after the agreement is underway, and the project may request to amend baseline values or targets if the baseline data justifies such changes.

Evaluation Plans

Organizations will draft a preliminary evaluation plan with a description of required evaluation activities, including proposed design, methodology, timeframe, and management of evaluation activities. Organizations should include a detailed description of their evaluation management function and budget allocation for monitoring and evaluation. The evaluation plan should also include a section describing the proposed monitoring system and protocols for collecting, storing, analyzing, and using data as part of regular project monitoring.

USDA recognizes the range of project sizes, scopes, and durations across the Division's programs. As described above, USDA will support the use of multiple evaluation designs depending on the project characteristics and purpose of the evaluation. In support of USDA's general principles for evaluations, evaluations should be designed using the most rigorous methodology appropriate and feasible taking into account available resources, project strategy, current knowledge and evaluation practices, and the implementing environment. Proposals should aim to include strong evaluation design, including impact evaluation that seeks to advance the knowledge base and lessons learned in Food Assistance.

Organizations submitting proposals under any of the food aid solicitations may propose to engage with partners with strong expertise in evaluation to assist in evaluation design, implementation, data collection, and analysis. Advantages of engaging with an experienced independent evaluation firm from the initial project design phase include a better ability to integrate a rigorous evaluation design into activity planning, and more broadly a chance to mitigate challenges and build a strong M&E foundation from the project's inception. Proposing organizations should also consider the appropriate costs for the management and implementation of monitoring and evaluation activities.

Organizations must allocate, at a minimum, three percent (3%) of the project budget towards monitoring and evaluation. The three percent minimum is exclusive of organization monitoring and evaluation staff salaries and staff travel. Design of monitoring databases, database licenses, infrastructure for data collection such as tablets, and external contracts for evaluations and special studies are typically included in the three percent minimum. For evaluation plans which include conducting impact evaluations, FAS expects costs to range between five to ten percent (5% - 10%) of the project budget.

Project Implementation

After project award, project performance monitoring plans and evaluation plans will be finalized in coordination and cooperation with FAD program staff and MES within three (3) months after project award. FAD program staff and MES will work with the program participant to finalize the performance monitoring and evaluation plans. This may include refinements to the plan to ensure that the definitions for the USDA standard indicators are clearly articulated, indicators selected and identified are appropriate and consistent with USDA expectations, and plans for performance measurement, evaluation and reporting meet USDA requirements.

Projects will be responsible for establishing indicator baseline information and targets for which the project will regularly measure performance against. The baseline information for indicators must be measured and established prior to the start of project activities.

During project implementation the project will be responsible for:
- Submitting a revised performance monitoring plan and evaluation plan three (3) months after project award
- Submitting external evaluation TORs and reports to USDA for review and approval
- Reporting performance on indicators and targets semi-annually in project performance reports
- Updating USDA on any changes to the project's monitoring and evaluation, including requesting changes to targets if desired

Having a valid baseline is critical as a foundation for quality monitoring and evaluation throughout a project's life cycle, but project participants may work with USDA to identify potential opportunities to begin project activities with a continuing population in a project, or with a population outside the baseline sample, on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, projects should carefully consider how the selection of their beneficiaries affects the design of their baseline study and should consult with USDA on the timing of beneficiary identification and data collection. Projects must submit a terms of reference document describing the baseline study to USDA for review and approval.

Projects should submit a baseline evaluation within six (6) months of award signing, for USDA review and approval.[15] Final versions of USDA baseline evaluation reports will be made public. After the baseline evaluation is approved, projects are required to report progress and achievements in meeting the targets established for each of the standard and custom indicators in the semi- annual performance reports. Such information will help project management, FAD staff, and key stakeholders determine whether the project is on track to achieve its intended results. Discussion of the performance indicators must include a narrative description, as outlined in the PMP, of how the project used the information for project management. Target

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[15] For example, if the award is signed September 30, baseline information should be submitted by March 31. On a case -by-case basis, USDA will consider extension requests for submitting baseline information.

modifications can be requested after baseline information is submitted and updated in a baseline amendment.

Following submission of the project semi-annual performance reports, FAD staff will review the reports and provide, in writing, any follow-up observations or questions for the project team. FAD may request, for example, additional information or clarifications regarding the performance indicator data submitted or seek to discuss challenges or opportunities that may have arisen during the reporting period. FAD may request a conference call with or a written response from the project team to discuss the project reports.

The project semi-annual performance reports and monitoring data and information will help to inform project midterm and final evaluations.

Midterm Evaluations

The purpose of midterm evaluations may vary across projects and will depend on the evaluation design outlined in the evaluation plan. In general, however, midterm evaluations should be used to assess progress in implementation; assess the relevance of the interventions; provide an early signal of the effectiveness of interventions; document lessons learned; assess sustainability efforts to date; and discuss and recommend mid-course corrections, if necessary. A variety of methodologies may be used to carry out midterm evaluations. While midterms typically use some or all of the same methodologies and tools as the baseline and final evaluations, the evaluation plan should explain and justify any differences in the midterm design.

All food assistance projects of four (4) years in duration or longer are required to carry out a midterm evaluation. FAS will negotiate with organizations whether and to what extent a project of three (3) years in duration or shorter will carry out a midterm evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation is to critically and objectively review and take stock of the project's implementing experience and the implementing environment, assess whether targeted beneficiaries are receiving services as expected, assess whether the project is on track in meeting its stated goals and objectives, review the project-level results frameworks and assumptions, document initial lessons learned, and discuss necessary modifications or mid-course corrections that may be necessary to effectively and efficiently meet the stated goals and objectives.

The project will be responsible for managing and allocating sufficient funds for the midterm evaluation. The midterm evaluation must be conducted by an independent third party. According to the food assistance program regulations, the independent third party conducting the evaluation must be financially and legally separate from the organization.[16] The purpose of

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[16] OECD/DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation defines a review as "an assessment of the performance of an intervention, periodically or on an ad hoc basis" and notes that the use of the term "evaluation" tends to refer to a more comprehensive or in-depth assessment than a "review". Reviews tend to emphasize operational or implementation aspects of a project. FAD subscribes to this definition and the focus on implementation issues and considers a project review to satisfy midterm evaluation requirements. For more information on the evaluation definitions please see: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/29/21/2754804.pdf.

contracting with an independent consultant is to bring an independent and unbiased perspective to the evaluation process and to bring specialized skills or experiences to the project evaluation process where necessary.

If the organization maintains an evaluation unit, USDA requires that the organization's evaluation unit provide oversight on the evaluation.

Midterm Project Evaluation	
Process	**Timing**
✓ Prepare for midterm project evaluation	
✓ Identify internal project evaluation team	
✓ Develop project evaluation TOR, including methodology	Approximately four (4) months after implementation of key project activities
✓ Submit TOR to USDA for review and approval	
✓ Identify external consultant	
✓ Conduct assessment and collect stakeholder input	
✓ Submit final midterm evaluation report to USDA	Within 90 days following evaluation fieldwork and no more than 15 days after evaluation report completion
✓ Discuss actions to address findings and recommendations with USDA project manager	No later than 30 days following submission of final midterm evaluation report
✓ Report on implementation of follow-up actions	Ongoing, in future project reports as appropriate

The evaluation should be managed by an organizational staff person or a project staff person with significant knowledge and expertise concerning evaluation. Ideally, the organization would maintain an evaluation unit that was separate from the staff or line management function of the project being evaluated. Such a structure helps to ensure the independence and impartiality of the evaluation process and report of findings, conclusions and recommendations. In their evaluation management role, organizational or project staff can participate in the evaluation by giving input to evaluation questions, or providing logistical support in locating beneficiary sites to the evaluator, for example. The evaluator, however, should directly collect data from beneficiaries and analyze that data, for example. When conducting the midterm evaluation, the project should consider participatory approaches to involving key stakeholders including implementing partners or sub-contractors, local and national government partners, project beneficiaries and other donor partners. The project shall also invite USDA to participate in the evaluation, particularly during discussions related to mid-course corrections or changes in strategy, results frameworks, and critical assumptions.

The evaluation may occur precisely at the mid-point in project implementation (i.e. for a 30 month project the midterm review may occur during month 15) or earlier depending on the project work plan and implementation timeline. Exact timing of midterm data collection may also be adjusted to account for factors such as delays in project implementation start, timing of

baseline data collection, the school calendar, and the agricultural season. Literacy assessments, for example, should occur at the same time during each school year, and the midterm evaluation schedule should account for this. The project may determine the most strategic timing of the evaluation, however, the timing should allow for sufficient time for the implementation of project activities. The project should allow at least four months of implementation of key project activities before developing the terms of reference (TOR) for the midterm evaluation. The project is required to keep USDA up to date on the scheduling of the midterm evaluation through the submission of project reports.

The program participant's evaluation unit will develop the TOR for the midterm evaluation which includes the purpose and scope of the evaluation, specific issues or questions to be addressed in the evaluation, prospective approach and methodology, timing and work plan of the evaluation, ethical considerations, and evaluation management and selection of the evaluation team. The evaluation TOR must be submitted to USDA for review and approval prior to the selection of the evaluation team and implementation of the evaluation. As a general practice, the draft evaluation TOR should be submitted to USDA no later than three (3) months prior to the start of the evaluation activities.

Unless identified in the project proposal, the independent evaluation consultant(s) should be selected through a competitive procurement process. The selection of the evaluation contractor or consultant(s) must be based on professional competency, experience in relation to the evaluation tasks, independence from the program participant, avoidance of conflict of interest, and experience and knowledge of the country in which the evaluation will be conducted.

As the final output of the evaluation, the project is required to submit a detailed report outlining the purpose of the evaluation, methodology, primary questions, findings, lessons learned to date, and recommendations. The final midterm evaluation report should include proposed actions the project deems appropriate to address the review findings and recommendations. The project is required to submit the midterm evaluation report to USDA for review and approval. The final report must be submitted to USDA within 90 days following the evaluation fieldwork and within 15 days of finalizing the midterm evaluation report.

Within 30 days of receiving the final midterm evaluation report, USDA will engage collaboratively with the project staff to discuss the proposed actions that need to be taken to address the findings and recommendations. The participating organization must include information on the progress of implementation of the agreed upon actions in future semi-annual performance reports. Final versions of midterm evaluation reports will be made publicly available.

Final Evaluations

Each project is required to undergo a comprehensive, independent final evaluation. The purpose of the final evaluation is to assess whether the project has achieved the expected results as

outlined in the project-level results framework. The final evaluation should assess areas of project design, implementation, management, lessons learned, and replicability. It should seek to provide lessons learned and recommendations for USDA, program participants and other key stakeholders for future food assistance and capacity building programs. The evaluation will likely use mixed methods approaches as outlined in the agreed upon evaluation plan. In general the final evaluation should assess:

Relevance-The extent to which the project interventions met the needs of the project beneficiaries and is aligned with the country's agriculture and/or development investment strategy and with USDA and US Government's development goals, objectives, and strategies. Relevance should also address the extent to which the project was designed taking into account the economic, cultural and political context and existing relevant program activities.

Effectiveness-The extent to which the project has achieved its objectives. Effectiveness should also assess the extent to which the interventions contributed to the expected results or objectives.

Efficiency-The extent to which the project resources (inputs) have led to the achieved results. An assessment of efficiency should also consider whether the same results could have been achieved with fewer resources or whether alternative approaches could have been adopted to achieve the same results.

Impact-Assessment of the medium and long-term effects, both intended and unintended, of a project intervention. Effects can be both direct or indirect and positive or negative. To the extent possible, the evaluation should assess the extent to which the effects are due to the project intervention and not other factors.

Sustainability-Assessment of the likelihood that the benefits of the project will endure over time after the completion of the project. Sustainability should also assess the extent to which the project has planned for the continuation of project activities, developed local ownership for the project, and developed sustainable partnerships.

In addition to the focus on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact as described above the evaluation may focus on other areas of particular interest to USDA, project staff or key stakeholders. Input on the scope and purpose of the evaluation therefore must be solicited from key stakeholders during the planning stages of the evaluation as described.

The program participant will be responsible for allocating sufficient funds, managing, and contracting with an independent consultant(s) to conduct the final evaluation. As with midterm evaluations, if the program participant maintains an evaluation unit, USDA requires that the unit provide oversight on the evaluation. The evaluation should be managed by an organizational staff person or a project staff person with significant knowledge and expertise concerning evaluation. Ideally, the organization would maintain an evaluation unit that was separate from the staff or line management function of the project being evaluated. Such a structure helps to ensure the independence and impartiality of the evaluation process and report of findings,

conclusions, and recommendations.

The timing of the final evaluation should be established at the start of the project and included in the project work plan and updated as appropriate. In general, the evaluation should be timed to inform new programming decisions and strategies. Final project evaluations should be planned at least six (6) months prior to the completion of a project.

USDA supports a participatory evaluation process. This helps to ensure the quality, validity, utility and mutual ownership of the evaluation findings and recommendations. As a result, USDA staff, as well as, relevant program participant staff and key stakeholders should be involved cooperatively in the design and implementation of the evaluation to the extent possible and appropriate including but not limited to the evaluation preparation and planning, as a key informant and key stakeholder, reviewing findings, conclusions and recommendations to ensure factual accuracy of the evaluation report and discussing and addressing evaluation recommendations.

The organization's evaluation unit should develop a TOR for the evaluation which includes the purpose and scope of the evaluation, specific issues or questions to be addressed in the evaluation, prospective approach and methodology, timing and work plan of the evaluation, ethical considerations, and evaluation management and selection of evaluation team. The evaluation TOR must be submitted to USDA for review and approval prior to the selection of the evaluation team and implementation of the evaluation. As a general practice, the draft evaluation TOR should be submitted to USDA no later than three (3) months prior to the start of the evaluation activities.

Unless identified in the project proposal, the independent evaluation consultant(s) should be selected through a competitive procurement process. The selection of the evaluation contractor or consultant(s) must be based on professional competency, experience in relation to the evaluation tasks, independence from the program participant, avoidance of conflict of interest, and experience and knowledge of the country in which the evaluation will be conducted.

The final evaluation report must be submitted to USDA for review and approval within 90 days following the evaluation fieldwork and before the project closes (before the project end date). The final project evaluation will be made public as described below.

Other Evaluation Activities

FAD, in cooperation with MES, may identify additional evaluation activities of strategic interest to the Agency. This may include higher-level country-based or thematic evaluations. FAD may focus specific evaluation activities, for example, on understanding the impact of microfinance activities or agricultural extension programs on agricultural productivity.

USDA managed evaluations may also include impact evaluation activities as defined above.

Such activities require collaboration with the program participants and therefore will be defined in more detail in the solicitation process.

When selecting projects to undergo impact evaluation FAD will consider:
- Projects that have the potential or expectation to scale-up or receive future funding;
- Projects that propose new interventions, where little evidence on their effectiveness exists;
- Projects that are considered "pilot" projects; and
- Projects or interventions receiving a significant amount of USDA funds.

USDA may also decide to conduct an evaluation after project completion. Such an evaluation may seek to assess the long-term effects and sustainability of a project.

In order to ensure the availability of adequate data and information to support a post-project evaluation USDA may require a project to submit any quantitative data that is collected by the project, in particular data that is collected for evaluation purposes. The data must be submitted in a user-friendly readable format with accompanying data documentation. Data submitted should not be aggregated but should be individual level record data. The data and proper documentation should be provided in a format that is sufficiently useable and readable by USDA or its evaluation contractor.

Data Quality Standards and Assessment

USDA and program participants utilize monitoring and evaluation data to inform current and future funding activities, assess the performance of its programs, and report on the results of its programs to external stakeholders including Congress, other USG partner agencies, OMB, GAO, other external stakeholders including partner countries and the public. Therefore, USDA places a strong emphasis on ensuring a high level of data quality for its performance measures.

The following criteria should be considered when assessing data quality:[17]
> **Validity** – Data measure the result or outcome it is intended to measure.
> **Reliability** – Data collected over time are comparable. Trends are meaningful and allow for measurements of progress over time. Data collection methods and analyses are consistent over time.
> **Precision** – Data have a sufficient level of detail to be useful in decision-making and to present a fair picture of performance.
> **Integrity** – Data quality is routinely monitored. Data quality assessments are integrated into data collection processes and procedures to ensure data are not erroneously reported or intentionally altered.
> **Timeliness** –Data are collected in a timely manner to inform management decision-making and strategic planning. The expectation is that data are reported semi-annually.

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[17] Definitions have been drawn from USAID's TIPS sheet on Data Quality Standards, https://www.fsnnetwork.org/sites/default/files/tips-dataqualitystandards.pdf

All final project evaluation plans should include a discussion on how the project will ensure and maintain the quality of monitoring and evaluation data at all levels involved in data collection from data collected by field staff/monitors to analysis and reports of performance data in project reports. Projects should develop tools and guidelines for project staff and implementing partners to ensure that all relevant partners understand the definitions of the performance measures, data collection methods, and reporting processes and procedures.

Projects are required to develop a process for verifying and validating data to ensure that the data submitted in the project reports meets the criteria above. The process should be outlined in the evaluation plan. USDA may request to review data quality assessments or may wish to conduct a data quality assessment in cooperation with the project during a project site visit.

If after conducting a data quality assessment the project identifies weaknesses or concerns with the accuracy or quality of the data the project should provide this information to USDA in the semi-annual performance reports. The project may request to revise or correct previously submitted data to USDA and should provide such information in subsequent semi-annual performance reports. The project should include a narrative noting the data quality issues experienced and describe corrective action the project has taken to ensure such reporting errors do not affect future semi-annual performance reports.

Facilitating the Exchange of Information and Enhancing Learning

In support of the USDA open government initiative[18] and to increase transparency and learning, all final versions of USDA evaluation reports will be made publicly available on the FAS website. Evaluators shall provide a copy of the evaluation reports that is free of personally identifiable information (PII) and proprietary information. In addition, USDA will regularly publish information on project and program level results and accomplishments. This will ensure that the widest audiences as possible are reached and that other organizations learn from FAS's experiences. Principled exceptions may be made where classified, personal, or proprietary information is concerned. Finally, USDA regularly discusses evaluation reports with key stakeholders, including internal staff, implementers, and interagency partners where appropriate, for the purpose of applying findings to program improvement. Reports are disseminated and saved as part of project records.

USDA invests in the training of key staff in evaluation management and methods, and staff uses their expertise to enhance the quality of monitoring and evaluation in food aid projects and also to integrate results into planning and decision-making. MES trains implementing partners on monitoring and evaluation where feasible, with an emphasis on applying quality M&E practices to strengthen program results. MES also participates in internal and external knowledge sharing events in order to foster learning and to build on M&E best practices in the broader evaluation field.

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[18] For more information and the USDA Open Government Initiative please see: http://www.usda.gov/open.

The facilitation and exchange of lessons learned and good practices will lead to improved program design and effectiveness of current and future efforts in food assistance and capacity building. USDA also supports and encourages its partner organizations in efforts to increase transparency and learning.

Annex A. Sample Performance Monitoring Plan

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	INDICATOR DEFINITION AND UNIT OF MEASUREMENT	DATA SOURCE	METHOD/APPROACH OF DATA COLLECTION OR CALCULATION	DATA COLLECTION		ANALYSIS, USE & REPORTING	
				WHEN	**WHO**	**WHY**	**WHO**
Immediate Objective 1: Increased business sector activity in target areas **"Areas" may include regions, communities, groups, administrative units, associations, organizations, enterprises, countries, or special populations.**							
1. Number and percent of existing firms that expanded businesses over the past year	Definition: Firms included are those receiving training and/or seed funds directly under LED or QZ programs and those vendors/suppliers who are indirectly involved in LED, LMAC/RR or EC. Business expansion is self-reported using a survey that asks Y/N if expansion has occurred. Disaggregated by LED, LMAC/RR and EC, based on direct and indirect involvement. Unit: # of assisted firms that report business expansion; among firms assisted, # of firms that report expansion as a % of total firms assisted	Project Survey	Data will be collected for each firm 1 year after seed funds are received. One year is counted after the last disbursement of funds. Data will be collected from all qualifying firms (i.e. not a sample survey). Survey will include questions about net revenues. This data may be used ultimately in this indicator in lieu of expansion questions.	Quarterly, to capture all results from firms whose one year post-service delivery period terminates in that period.	Local specialists to administer survey to be reviewed by regional coordinators.	Periodic management reviews (semi-annual) Technical Reports (semi-annual)	Regional coordinator in conjunction with Project Director.