Appendix:

Planning materials for an Evaluation Working Group

Documents and templates for establishing and facilitating an evaluation working group
September 2020 / Office of Evaluation Sciences

OES GSA

Introduction

An Evaluation Working Group (EWG) can help Evaluation Officers engage with agency stakeholders to develop an Annual Evaluation Plan and evaluation policy, and offers the opportunity to foster familiarity with evaluation concepts within an agency.

The materials included in this appendix can be used - with modification if needed - to plan and stand up an EWG. These materials are similar to those used by GSA in Spring 2020, and can be tailored to fit agency needs for developing guidance and feedback for evaluation planning.

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Sample Timeline and Agendas for Evaluation Working Group

Schedule	Agenda
3 weeks before 1st meeting	● Evaluation Officer (EO) develops a list of potential Evaluation Working Group (EWG) members.
2 weeks before 1st meeting	● EO sends Call for Evaluations email and form to agency staff. ● EO selects and announces the EWG membership and sends pre-read documents to members.

1st EWG Meeting	*Sample EWG First Meeting Agenda:*
	● Introductions
	● Briefing from Evaluation Officer (EO)
	    o Background on the Evidence Act
	    o Purpose of the working group
	    o Expectations for members
	● Defining "significant" evaluations
	    o Presentation / activity on defining "significant"
	    o Document recommendations on significant evaluation definition and criteria
	● Discuss agency's Evaluation Policy

1 week after 1st meeting	● EO receives responses from the Call for Evaluations

2nd EWG Meeting (1 month after 1st meeting)	*Sample EWG Second Meeting Agenda*
	● Update on agency's learning agenda
	● Revisit definition of "significant" evaluations
	● Review evaluations nominated for inclusion in the AEP
	    o Vet and rank the evaluations submitted against the criteria for "significant"
	    o Draft list of recommended "significant" evaluations

2 weeks after 2nd meeting	● EWG members or representative present "significant" evaluations to leadership
3rd EWG Meeting (1 month after 2nd meeting)	*Sample EWG Third Meeting Agenda* ● Discuss final content and recommendations for AEP content ● Evaluation policy and implementation guidance discussion ● Feedback on Evaluation Working Group model ● Wrap up and adjourn
After 3rd meeting	● Document the EWG's process and include lessons learned ● Create an annual calendar for the EWG

Invitation to Serve in [Agency Name]'s Evaluation Working Group

The [Agency Name]'s Evaluation Officer (EO) invites you to serve on an Evaluation Working Group. Please respond no later than **[date]** with your interest.

What is the purpose of the Evaluation Working Group?
Under the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act), [Agency Name] will develop an Annual Evaluation Plan. The Evaluation Working Group will make recommendations on priority evaluations to be included in [Agency Name]'s first Annual Evaluation Plan. Responsibilities of the working group will include:
- Convene monthly, one hour meetings from [date - date];
- Provide input into [Agency Name]'s Evaluation Policy;
- Provide input on [Agency Name]'s definition and criteria for priority [Agency Name] evaluations;
- Review ongoing, planned, and proposed evaluations against the priority definition; and
- Recommend which priority evaluations should be included in [Agency Name]'s Annual Evaluation Plan.

Who can serve on the Evaluation Working Group?
[Agency Name] uses evaluations to inform program and policy planning efforts, improve program effectiveness, and test innovative solutions to identify what works. We are reaching out to our colleagues who are interested in this topic, have expertise in agency programs, and are curious about building and using evidence and data at our agency.

Ultimately we hope to have 8-12 participants from across the agency to serve on the EWG in FYXX. If you are not able to commit to participation at this time (attending one monthly meeting in [time period]), please feel free to respond and recommend another agency employee you think would offer valuable contributions to this group.

What are the benefits of participating in the Evaluation Working Group?
Evaluation Working Group members will be a part of an innovative initiative to help [Agency Name] implement the Evidence Act. Evaluation Working Group members will learn about programs and policies across the agency and build knowledge on evaluation methods and data.

Call for evaluation: email to agency staff

[Agency Name] Colleagues,

Thank you for your interest in organizational learning and how we can better use evidence to achieve our mission at [Agency Name]. As you may know, we are in the process of crafting [Agency Name]'s Annual Evaluation Plan (AEP) and identifying potential evaluation ideas for inclusion. As part of this process, I would like to hear what evaluations may be on your radar.

I am currently working with leadership to identify potential evaluations that tie to [Agency Name]'s learning questions, but also want to take this opportunity to hear your thoughts on other planned, ongoing or proposed evaluations to be considered for [Agency Name]'s AEP and to receive additional support to help ensure successful completion. Documenting these promising ideas will create an opportunity for further discussion about design, methodology, resources and more as we build and use evidence across [Agency Name].

Please submit your ideas using the form by [Date] if you would like them considered as part of the [Agency Name] AEP, currently in development. I will also use this form to collect and review new ideas on an ongoing basis, so please feel free to add ideas in the future as well.

I am excited to review your ideas, consider how it might inform [Agency Name]'s Annual Evaluation Plan, and continue the conversation.

Best Regards,

[Evaluation Officer Name]

Call for evaluation: inventory form to gather planned, ongoing and proposed evaluations

At [Agency Name], we build and use evidence to better serve the Public, our agency partners and fulfill our mission. [Agency Name]'s Evaluation Officer is interested in your evaluations ideas: where can we generate valuable information that empowers us to better achieve our mission? What would help your program/team learn and improve?

Please use this form to share your evaluation idea(s). Remember that an evaluation is an "assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of one or more programs, policies, and organizations, intended to assess their effectiveness and efficiency." It answers questions like:
   - Does it (i.e., program, pilot, policy, intervention, or sub-component of these) work?
   - How well does it work (i.e., size of the effect)?
   - How does it work?
   - For whom does it work?

[Agency Name]'s Evaluation Officer will review submissions on a rolling basis for possible inclusion in [Agency Name]'s Annual Evaluation Plan (AEP), and follow up where possible. Documenting these promising ideas will create an opportunity for further discussion about design, methodology, resources and more as we build and use evidence better across [Agency Name]. Thank you for your interest and ideas!

Form questions:
   1. What program or policy is the focus of the evaluation? [open-ended response]
   2. What office has the primary responsibility for this program or policy? [short text response]
   3. Describe the evaluation (e.g., topic, questions to answer, benefit to agency). This should be high level and fewer than 2000 characters. [open-ended response]
   4. What else should we know about this evaluation idea? [open-ended response]

Thank you!

We appreciate you taking the time to share your idea for how we could learn and improve as an organization. We look forward to reviewing your idea, considering how it might inform [Agency Name]'s Annual Evaluation Plan, and continuing the conversation.

Welcome letter for Evaluation Working Group members

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the first ever [Agency Name] Evaluation Working Group (EWG)! I am delighted you are devoting your time to be part of this important effort and want to thank you in advance for your contributions. The members of this group come from diverse backgrounds but are collectively passionate about building and using evidence and data at [Agency Name].

The primary goals for the Evaluation Working Group are to:
- Provide input into [Agency Name]'s Evaluation Policy
- Develop [Agency Name] criteria for priority evaluations to be included in the Annual Evaluation Plan
- Make recommendations on evaluations to be included in [Agency Name]'s first Annual Evaluation Plan

To accomplish these goals, the EWG will convene monthly, one-hour meetings between April - June 2020. The meeting schedule is as follows:

	Meeting Schedule
April	- Discussion of agency's Evaluation Policy - Annual Evaluation Plan (AEP) overview - Defining priority evaluations for the agency
May	- Revisit the agency's definition of priority evaluations - Vet and rank the evaluations submitted against the criteria for priority evaluations
June	Discuss final recommendations for AEP content

As part of these activities, EWG members will learn about a wide range of programs and policies across the agency.

To help you prepare for the first meeting (invite forthcoming), we request that you please read the attached PDF packet. These materials are intended to provide context on the topics we will discuss and allow us to keep our meetings brief and targeted. For those interested in reading further, I am attaching further optional reading.

Thank you, again. You are part of an innovative initiative to help [Agency Name] implement the Evidence Act and I look forward to working with you!

Pre-meeting recommended readings for EWG members

Evidence Act Title 1 overview - A brief summary of the main components of Title 1 of the Evidence Act, with links to additional resources.

Evidence Act quick reference sheet - This provides definitions for commonly used terms and acronyms related to the Evidence Act.

Annual Evaluation Plan overview - A summary of what's included in the Annual Evaluation Plan and the benefits of creating a plan.

Sample evaluation description for an Annual Evaluation Plan.

A guide to developing your agency's Annual Evaluation Plan (sections 1 and 3) - These two sections of the guide provide a background on why AEPs are beneficial and the definition of "significant" evaluations.

Examples of evaluation policies:
- General Services Administration, Office of Evaluation Sciences
- Corporation for National and Community Service
- Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families
- Department of Labor

Optional pre-meeting readings for EWG members

For more background information on topics related to the Evidence Act and evidence-based policymaking, see the following additional **optional** readings:

Background on the Evidence Act
- Public Law No 115-435 - The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act
- Building and Using Evidence to Improve Government Effectiveness

OMB guidance on Evidence Act implementation
- Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance (OMB M-19-23)
- Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices (OMB M-20-12)

Example evaluation plans from Federal agencies
- Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office
- Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences

Evaluation Policy background
- Why Your Agency Should Have an Evaluation Policy Now

Example Evaluation Policies from Federal agencies
- USAID Evaluation Policy