

ECG Practice Note

Following Up and Reporting on the Implementation of Recommendations

December 2019

BACKGROUND TEXT

This practice note was prepared by a Working Group led by Sabine Bernabè, Sonia Vega Vega and Adrian Costandache (EIB). Working Group members included Maya Vijayaraghavan (ADB); Oscar Garcia and Johanna Pennarz (IFAD); Ivory Yong-Prötzel, Monika Huppi and Ana María Linares (IADB); Ahmed Ag Aboubacrine (IsDB); Geeta Batra and Neeraj Kumar Negi (GEF); and Kristin Strohecker and Bahar Salimova (IEG WBG).

Development of the ECG practice notes was initiated at the ECG Fall 2016 meeting and this practice note was approved for publication by ECG members at the ECG Fall 2019 meeting.

Also see: Final Report - Working Group on Evaluation Recommendations, Management Responses and Feedback loops (November 2018).

What are ECG practice notes?

The Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG) comprises the independent evaluation departments of multiple multilateral finance organisations. . (www.ecqnet.org).

ECG seeks to strengthen evaluation practice and effectiveness across its member institutions through good practice standards, harmonised approaches and sharing of experience.

Practice notes provide members with guidance (rather than formal methodological standards) on topics of shared interest and operational relevance.

Introduction

Evaluations often require substantial financial and human resources to be carried out and are expected to identify areas of improvement and contribute to decision-making in the organisations. Evaluations usually issue recommendations to which the Management has to respond and, when agreed or partially agreed, action plans are generally developed to address identified issues. Once these action plans are elaborated, it is important to make sure that they are implemented, otherwise the issues identified by the evaluations are likely to remain unresolved. While in some cases things may get done without a proper follow up system in place, such a system clearly ensures that actions (and ultimately the evaluation recommendations) are not forgotten.

Box 1 : Functions in ECG member institutions to which this Practice Note refers

- *The evaluation function* refers to the (centralised) independent evaluation service.
- *Services* refers to the operational staff whose activities are subject to evaluation.
- *Management* refers to the senior management overseeing the day-to-day activities of the institutions.
- *The Board* refers to the Board of Directors and/or equivalent, representing (and appointed by) the institution's shareholders.

All ECG members follow up on the implementation of evaluation recommendations, with largely similar roles for the involved functions (evaluation function, Services, Management and Board) but with some differences in how these roles are carried out.

This ECG Practice Note¹ therefore focuses on the last step in the evaluation process, namely the follow up and reporting on the implementation of recommendations, which we define here as the systematic assessment of, and reporting on, the extent to which the agreed and/or partially agreed evaluation recommendations are implemented as planned.

Purpose

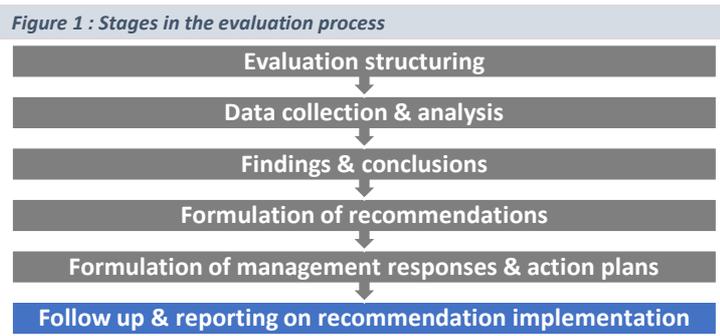
This Practice Note aims to provide guidance on the follow up and reporting on the implementation of recommendations by putting forward “suggested features”. In doing so, the Note seeks to answer the following questions: Who should follow up and report on the implementation of recommendations? When should this follow up and reporting take place? Moreover, how should the follow up and reporting be conducted?

The Practice Note does not attempt to comprehensively treat the issues raised by these questions, nor set out agreed standards. The Note is intended rather to provide ECG members with observations and guidance that they may find useful for following up and reporting on the implementation of their own recommendations. In addition, an indicative checklist for following up and reporting on the implementation of recommendations is provided in Annex 1.

¹ The Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG) comprises the independent evaluation functions of multiple International Financial Institutions. The ECG seeks to strengthen evaluation practice across its member institutions through good practice and knowledge sharing. Practice Notes provide members with guidance (rather than formal methodological standards) on topics of shared interest. This Practice Note builds on the Final Report produced by the ECG Working Group on evaluation recommendations, management responses and feedback loops.

Scope

This Practice Note focuses on the follow up and reporting on the implementation of recommendations, which is the last stage in the evaluation process. The previous two practice notes focused on the formulation of recommendations, management responses and action plans. This is the third and last practice note in this series.



The utility of the follow up and reporting on the implementation of recommendations is not solely dependent on the way such a process is conducted in itself, but is significantly influenced by the activities that precede it (see Figure 1).

The follow up and reporting on the implementation of recommendations is only useful if the related evaluation is of good quality, if its recommendations point to important issues requiring corrective actions and if the Management Responses to these recommendations and their corresponding action plans adequately address the issues raised by the recommendations. This practice note therefore assumes that all these stages preceding the follow up meet the quality requirements. Having an appropriate follow up system in place is important to ensure the monitoring of the implementation of those corrective actions.

Suggested features

The Who *The entity ultimately responsible for the implementation of the agreed evaluation recommendations should be the Management.* In fulfilling this responsibility, Management should be accountable to the Board of Directors. In order to allow Management to fulfil this responsibility, the operational services or the evaluation function should provide it regularly with information on the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations and highlight any outstanding issues.

The Services should regularly monitor the implementation of recommendations and related action plans and self-assess the progress they make in this respect. The Services should keep track of the agreed or partially agreed recommendations and corresponding action plans and make sure they implement them in a timely manner. They should regularly self-assess the progress they make in the implementation of the agreed actions, keeping the evaluation function informed of this and providing it with the corresponding evidence. They should also ensure the agreed actions continue to be relevant and adequately address the issues highlighted in the evaluations.

The evaluation function should keep the Management and Services informed on their responsibilities. The evaluation function should develop a procedure for the follow up of recommendations and make sure that all those concerned are well aware of their roles and responsibilities early in the process. The evaluation function or the operational services should also ensure there is a regular and adequate interaction with Management at each step

of the follow up process and that Management is informed on the progress made in the implementation of recommendations.

The evaluation function should validate the self-assessments done by Services, and report on progress made to both Management and the Board of Directors. Any changes in the status of the recommendations should be validated by the evaluation function based on the evidence provided by the Services. The persons who validate should have a good knowledge of the original intent of the recommendations. The evaluation function should keep Services informed on the decisions it takes and the reasons behind them, and report regularly to both Management and to the Board of Directors on the progress made in the implementation of recommendations. This reporting should be used by the evaluation function as an incentive for the Services to implement actions in a timely manner.

The When *The follow up of recommendations should start as soon as the recommendations, Management Responses and action plans have been validated. The evaluation function should provide a reasonable timeframe for the completion of Management Responses and related action plans and encourage Services to start working on these as soon as the recommendations are finalised. When the Management responses and Action Plans are not completed on time, the evaluation function should report this to the Management and, if necessary, to the Board of Directors in order to ensure the process is efficient.*

The recommendations should be followed up until they are implemented or become irrelevant. Setting out a fixed timeframe beyond which the recommendations are no longer followed up is generally not a good idea. It can leave important issues highlighted by the evaluations unaddressed and can also create a perverse incentive for some to postpone implementation until the monitoring is due to stop. Having said that, the continued relevance of the recommendations and corresponding action plans should be systematically assessed by the Services and the evaluation function. Services should suggest changes to the action plans when necessary. However, this should not result in a continuous adaptation of the deadlines for implementation. As a general rule the deadlines should not be changed when the content of the action remains the same. Moreover, any changes to the action plans should be endorsed by the evaluation function to make sure that the action plans continue to address the issues identified by the evaluation. Services should also ask the evaluation function to consider withdrawing a particular recommendation, when justified. The evaluation function should consider such requests and take a decision accordingly.

The How *The evaluation function should consider whether a detailed follow-up is needed for all recommendations. There is certainly a rationale to follow up the implementation of all recommendations. However, in the organisations which produce a large number of evaluations it may be difficult to do this systematically. In such cases, the evaluation functions may wish to prioritise recommendations and identify those that definitely require a detailed follow up. Some types of evaluations (e.g. project evaluations or country level evaluations) may be too specific to justify a regular reporting to Management and Board of Directors. In such cases, the evaluation function may wish to consider alternatives, such as following up on the implementation of recommendation as part of a subsequent evaluation covering the same topic.*

The reporting to the Management and Board of Directors should remain at recommendation level. While the action plans are essential for clarifying what the Management and Services intend to do concretely to implement the agreed recommendations, these should be reasonably flexible and allow for adaptations where circumstances justify it. Such flexibility should also help to avoid undermining the ownership of the Services and Management over the corrective actions they plan to take. It is however important that any changes in the action plans are endorsed by the evaluation function to make sure that they continue to address the issues identified by the evaluations. Reporting to the Management and to the Board of Directors at recommendation level allows such flexibility.

The follow up and reporting should go beyond listing actions taken and counting recommendations implemented by presenting what changed in the organisation. While it is important to keep track of which recommendations are implemented and which ones are not, the number of actions and recommendations implemented are not per se a good measure of success, neither for the Services and Management, nor for the evaluation function. The Services should therefore be encouraged by the evaluation function to provide feedback on what has changed in the organisation as a result of their actions. This should help to shift the focus of the reporting from output to outcome and ultimately increase the relevance and usefulness of the reports to the Board of Directors.

The evaluation function should consider the use of an IT application to document the follow up process and facilitate exchanges with Services. The benefits of such IT applications include the ability to maintain an overview on the implementation of recommendations and facilitate access to data to all stakeholders. They can also link to previously submitted information and introduce a certain level of automation in the process that reduces the burden on Services and on the evaluation function and enhances the consistency of analysis and reporting. The disadvantages of these systems include the potentially high costs and duration of implementation and the need to train users. The usefulness of these IT applications depends on the number of recommendations produced by the evaluation function and on the extent to which they are simple and easy to use.

Challenges and mitigation measures

An overview of challenges identified during the follow up and reporting on evaluation recommendations is provided in Table 1, along with suggested mitigation measures.

Table 1: Challenges faced in the follow up of recommendations, and corresponding mitigation measures

| Challenge | Mitigation measure |
|---|--|
| Disagreement between Services and the evaluation function on the extent to which the recommendations are implemented. | Adequate interaction between the evaluation function and Services. Relevance and clarity of the action plans (and the deliverables to be produced by Services to prove the recommendations have been implemented). Such features of the action plans need to be carefully assessed upfront by the evaluation function. |
| Follow up process becoming difficult when the implementation of an action plan concerns the intervention and coordination amongst various Services. | Institutional positioning of the Service responsible for the implementation of the actions is essential to ensure that actions are done on time and that actions properly address the issue raised by the evaluation recommendation. In cases of complex nature and/or requiring coordination across different Services, a central coordination body should oversee the process to implement the actions and ultimately the evaluation recommendations in due time and form. |

Annex 1 – Indicative checklist for the follow up and reporting on evaluation recommendations

| | | |
|-----------------|--|--------------------------|
| The Who | Has the evaluation function informed Management and Services of their roles and responsibilities early in the process? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Is Management regularly informed by the evaluation function or by the Services on the progress made in the implementation of recommendations? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Do Services monitor and self-assess regularly the progress made in the implementation of recommendations and inform the evaluation function accordingly? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Does the evaluation function validate the self-assessments done by Services? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Does the evaluation function report on progress made in the implementation of recommendations to both Management and the Board of Directors? | |
| The When | Has the follow up of implementation started after the validation of the Management Response and related action plan? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Are recommendations followed up until they are implemented or become irrelevant? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The How | Has the evaluation function considered whether all recommendations require a detailed follow up? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Does the reporting to the Management and Board of Directors stay at the level of the recommendations? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Does the follow up and reporting go beyond listing actions taken and counting numbers to present what changed in the organisation? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Has the evaluation function considered the possibility of using an IT application to document the follow up process? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Annex 2 - Useful resources

ECG (2018) Final Report by the Working Group on evaluation recommendations, management responses and feedback loops. Available [here](#).

UNEG (2010) Good Practice Guidelines for Follow up to Evaluations. Available [here](#).

Canadian Evaluation Society (2009) Management Response Action Plan Follow-up Process. Available [here](#).