



# Checklist for Evaluation Recommendations

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The purpose of this checklist is to guide the process of formulating and delivering evaluation recommendations. It is oriented to evaluators conducting evaluations but may also be used by commissioners and/or managers of evaluation to help them clarify their expectations concerning recommendations. Furthermore, the checklist may also be used for quality assurance reviews.

This checklist is suited for use in evaluations for which it is necessary, appropriate, and feasible to provide recommendations (which should be framed as suggestions, not as directives). In evaluations of international cooperation agencies—and in some national, subnational, and sector agencies—recommendations are required. Sometimes the implementation context may have changed, creating opportunities that were not envisaged when the intervention was designed and that, if seized, would enhance the effectiveness of the intervention. Thus, some recommendations may facilitate adaptive management. In addition, some situations call for a recommendation, e.g., when programs fall short of achieving an intended outcome, a blatant error is noted, or it's clear that some aspects of implementation are not working,

The types of evaluations for which this checklist applies are project, program, strategy, and policy evaluations. For readability, the term “intervention” is used to mean a project, program, strategy, or policy. The checklist is not intended to assist in the formulation of recommendations for product or personnel evaluations.

The United Nations Evaluation Group (2018) defines “evaluation recommendations” as “proposals aimed at enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency, impact, relevance, sustainability, coherence, added value or coverage of the operation, portfolio, strategy or policy under evaluation. Recommendations are intended to inform decision making, including programmed design and resources allocations.” The quality of recommendations is also crucial for evaluation follow-up. The objective of this checklist is to enhance the quality of evaluation recommendations.

A one-page summary is provided at the end of this checklist as a stand-alone document.

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## When Formulating Recommendations

**1. Timing: During the initial phase of the evaluation, raise questions and make observations that may be inputs for recommendations.** Evaluators should be concerned with identifying suitable recommendations while doing fieldwork, to have more time to think about them and to enter early on into a dialogue about possible recommendations. Do not wait until the final report draft to start thinking about recommendations.

**2. Engagement: Engage with decision makers and staff involved in the design and/or implementation of the intervention to develop buy-in for or appropriation of the recommendations.** This engagement is important. With it, an evaluator can benefit from decision makers' insights and increase the likelihood of their acceptance and implementation of the recommendations. Engage in a dialogue with those involved about how to improve interventions (in formative and/or developmental evaluations), either by changing the implementation or by designing new interventions. *Note: Evaluators' independence is preserved with rules of engagement that make explicit that evaluators have the final responsibility in the formulation of the recommendations (independence is not isolation).*

**3. Consultation: Consult thematic experts directly or through a literature review.** Expanding your knowledge about the subject matter of the evaluation will enrich the process of formulating recommendations. Consult with thematic experts either directly or through a literature review, paying particular attention to the context for which the nuggets of knowledge apply. The next step or checkpoint may help in tailoring recommendations to the context.

**4. Validation: Validate recommendations early on.** As you identify problems or shortcomings with the intervention through direct observation or preliminary results, try to find possible solutions or elements of solutions and discuss them with program staff and, if possible, thematic experts, thus embarking on a process of progressive validation of the recommendations. In these conversations, emphasize that these are provisional ideas.

## When Writing Recommendations

**5. Number: Limit the number of recommendations.** Be prudent and concise in the number of proposed recommendations. Avoid combining different recommendations into a single one, as this jeopardizes follow-up of their implementation.

**6. Clarity: Make certain that the recommendations are sufficiently clear. In some cases, recommendations may appear to be clear to evaluators due to the evaluators' knowledge.** Ask evaluation colleagues to peer review recommendations to ensure that they are sufficiently clear with respect to their content, and that the language used is plain and actionable. For example, "design technological packages consistent with women's resource endowments" could be replaced by "the design of technologies should consider labor and other resources available to women."

**7. Evidence: Refer to the evidence for each recommendation.** Indicate the evaluation results, findings, and/or conclusions that provide evidence to support the recommendations. If supporting evidence is provided in the literature, then appropriate references should be cited. If the recommendations are not supported by the evaluative data but are ideas for consideration from an evaluator’s perspective, opinion, or observations, this should be explicitly mentioned.

**8. Feasibility: Make recommendations that are implementable with existing human and financial resources (“static feasibility”) or through resources that can be mobilized (“dynamic feasibility”).** If the latter is the case, the recommendations should include indications of how those resources could be mobilized.

## **When Presenting Recommendations**

**9. Categories: Group recommendations under a few sets of categories or types,** such as “strategic recommendations” (avoiding those so general they are banal or obvious), “operational recommendations” (leaving degrees of freedom to management), “for further development of the intervention” (in case it has not yet been fully implemented), “for future interventions,” and “for monitoring and evaluation.” Another option would be to group recommendations by stakeholder groups. At the beginning of the evaluation, evaluators should identify the types of recommendations that clients expect. The categories mentioned could be used as a menu from which clients can choose.

**10. Priorities: Indicate the two or three recommendations that should be considered as top priorities for implementation.** Following Steps 1 to 4 may help to identify key recommendations. Attention should be focused on the sequence of implementation. Provide a time frame for the implementation of the recommendations (which should be discussed with those who have to implement the recommendations, and this discussion may take place in a workshop).

**11. Verifiability: Facilitate the monitoring of progress (or lack of it) in the implementation of recommendations,** proposing, whenever possible, key indicators (which should be discussed with those who have to implement the recommendations). *Note: Although evaluators have no role to play in the implementation of evaluation recommendations, they may be able to propose indicators to assess progress in implementing the recommendations. Given that the role of the evaluator can differ significantly depending on the context and disciplinary field, there could be evaluations for which this checkpoint may not always be feasible or appropriate.*

**12. Responsibility: Facilitate management’s decision making to identify who would be responsible for implementing the recommendations.** This is important for the follow-up of the implementation of recommendations and should be discussed with the concerned decision makers. *Note: In some complex organizational settings, it may be more difficult to identify the responsibilities for implementing the recommendations, so additional consultations may be needed to ensure that the identification is appropriate for that organizational context. Furthermore, given that the role of the evaluator can differ*

significantly depending on the context and disciplinary field, there could be evaluations for which this checkpoint may not always be feasible or appropriate.

## References

This checklist is based on formal evaluation training and 35 years of experience in formulating evaluation recommendations, as well as presentations at the American Evaluation Association and at the European Evaluation Society. In addition, the following resources were also considered in preparing this checklist and would be useful as reference materials:

Preskill, H. & Jones, N. (2009). *Practical guide for engaging stakeholders in developing evaluation questions*. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/eng-stake>

As this guide indicates, “Recommendations from an evaluation with stakeholder involvement are more likely to be accepted by a broader constituency and implemented more fully and with less resistance.”

Robertson, K. N., & Wingate L. A. (2017). *Checklist for program evaluation report content*. Retrieved from <https://wmich.edu/evaluation/checklists>

This checklist includes a section on recommendations and shows the placement of recommendations in the context of evaluation reports.

Scriven, M. (2013). *Key evaluation checklist*. Retrieved from [http://www.michaelscriven.info/images/KEC\\_3.22.2013.pdf](http://www.michaelscriven.info/images/KEC_3.22.2013.pdf)

This checklist provides evaluators with valuable checkpoints on different topics. Concerning evaluation recommendations, it mentions inviting program management and staff to become co-authors or co-creators of recommendation options as a strategy that is often more likely to result in implementation than a mere recommendation from an outsider.

United Nations Evaluation Group. (2018). *Improved quality of evaluation recommendations checklist*. Retrieved from <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2124>

This checklist includes useful background information, and it also deals with the follow-up of evaluation recommendations, using the UNEG *Good Practice Guidelines for Follow-up to Evaluations* (<http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1412>).

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. (2016). *Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function*. Retrieved from <http://www.fao.org/publications/card/en/c/935ee9ec-8fba-4181-95af-512c60b7e359>

This is an example of an evaluation report that explicitly shows links between recommendations and conclusions. It includes a time frame for implementation of the recommendations and identifies who is responsible for implementation.

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# Checklist for Evaluation Recommendations

## Summary

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### When formulating recommendations:

- Timing                      Begin early to think about recommendations early on
- Engagement                Engage with decision makers and implementors
- Consultation                Consult with thematic experts and review the literature
- Validation                    Progressive validation of the recommendations

### When writing recommendations:

- Number                      Limit the number of recommendations
- Clarity                        Make certain that the recommendations are sufficiently clear
- Evidence                     Show the evidence for each recommendation
- Feasibility                    Check human and financial resources are (or can be made) available

### When presenting recommendations:

- Categories                    Group recommendations under a few categories
- Priorities                     Indicate which recommendations should be top priority
- Verifiability                Facilitate monitoring the implementation of the recommendations
- Responsibility                Support the identification of those responsible for implementing the recommendations