Resource D   The 'ROTUR' framework for managing evaluation expectations

Evaluation is not just about picking the 'best' methods. It's a real risk of setting off on shaky foundations, or even the wrong path altogether, if it does not set realistic expectations of what is needed, why, who for and when. Managing expectations is about setting solid foundations for an evaluation by paying close attention to: roles and responsibilities; the evaluation's own outcomes (and deliverables); timing, use and users; and appropriate resourcing. This R-O-T-U-R framework sets out some of the most common 'do's' and 'do not's' for this crucial step of planning.

1. Roles and responsibilities	
DO …	DO NOT …
• Start at the end; who is the end-user (any intermediaries); how/when are they to be engaged in decision-making	• Forget to identify internal/external procurement needs (may affect sign off; funding limits; close-open tender; marketing; etc.)
• Establish who has delegated responsibility for the specification (including objective setting; timetable; resourcing and budget)	• Delay review of information/data access needs (may affect timing; likely to need negotiating or disclosure agreements pre-start up)
• Agree who manages all aspects of sign-off/commissioning and (if different) who project manages (including external contractors)	• Neglect the need to prioritise any internal roles (including project management) if the evaluation is to deliver on time
• Agree focus of how much method guidance to give to contractors pre-commissioning (and who answers queries)	• Forget credible findings may need independent analysis or validation (this may need an external role to be added and this will affect resourcing and timing)

• Establish needs for any formal steering or progress review (what for, when and who)	• Forget to brief those recruited to steering on goals and agenda; their roles and agreeing any 'rules of engagement'
• If internal evaluation: Identify who fills what roles for direction; design; delivery/data collection; analysis/verification; reporting	• Ignore the need for an evaluation champion – who will have the role of taking forward the evaluation findings and advocating change against the evidence with decision makers

2. Outcomes needed of the evaluation

DO …	DO NOT …
• Critically review your overarching aim statement for the evaluation – is it clear, credible and realistic?	• Defer seeking wider agreement on the aims and objectives; aims must precede decisions on design and are not retrofitted
• Critically review the subsidiary objectives – are they consistent with the rationale for what is being evaluated? Is it coherent with any logic chain/theory of change for the 'intervention'?	• Forget to use objectives to clarify/set out the specific areas where evaluation evidence is needed to aid decision-making
• Critically review the coverage of the objectives – do they un-necessarily overlap or duplicate each other? If so, consolidate. Establish any gaps in aims/objectives; is anything missing. How do the objectives change to reflect any gaps?	• Confuse objectives (what/how evidence is to be used) with 'method' (i.e., how to get evidence); method guidance or prescription follows objective setting
• Assess realism of aims and objectives; the goals of the evaluation need to reflect the context, time and resources available	• Hold back from asking for clarification or challenge – setting solid and appropriate expectations are the foundation of effective and usable evaluation
• Assess viability of aims and objectives; are they consistent with likely information availability, existing data or other evidence which is 'to hand' or can be gathered?	• Extend the aspiration for the evaluation beyond the needs of the aims and objectives; information and evidence is a tool and not just 'nice to know'

3. Timing and delivery	
DO …	**DO NOT …**
• Take account of 'upstream' needs (e.g., internal and/or external sign-off of specification); procurement notice period; marketing/tendering/commissioning decision-making lags; etc.	• Forget to allow enough time also for potential contractors to produce viable tenders (2-4/5 weeks depending on needs)
• Build in 'engagement time' to liaise with stakeholders (i.e., specification/pre-start-up; during evaluation/steering; pre-reporting including previews of findings; review and sign-off of reports)	• Assume stakeholders are best held at 'arms-length' until findings are finalised; earlier engagement brings challenges/delays but can help later with the credibility of findings
• Allow appropriate time for sensible measurement of outcomes (and impacts) – these may take time to be realised; compressed timeframes may miss/under-represent achievements	• Skimp on time for design, testing and clearance of evaluation 'tools'; rushed design compromises information quality and reliability
• Allow sufficient time for gathering any new/additional evidence (e.g., survey response/reminder time) and thorough analysis and interpretation by evaluators	• Forget 'good' evaluators will need time for verification of the evidence they do collect; verification also adds to quality and credibility
• Build in time for staged/mid-point review (e.g., via contract review or steering group); this is especially important for formative evaluations	• Under-estimate the amount of time needed for staged review within evaluations (especially where steering groups are involved)
• Allow for 'downstream' time after (draft) reporting to review, reflect on (consult if appropriate) and sign-off the evaluation before getting results/implications to decision makers, etc.	• Under-estimate time needed downstream to build credibility, confidence and understanding of findings among intermediaries, stakeholders/doubters; evaluation utility may depend on this

4. Use and users of the evaluation	
DO …	**DO NOT …**
• Focus the evaluation approach, scope, timing and communication on the primary user(s). This will have been agreed from 'roles and responsibilities'; BUT …	• Forget the secondary users … appropriate engagement will help build the credibility and utility of the findings; are there other (non-user) stakeholders who also need to be engaged
• Clarify pre-specification how the evaluation findings are to be used; are there any expectations of change/improvement, etc.	• Forget that different users (primary and secondary) may have different expectations of the evaluation and its utility; unrealistic expectations of change need to countered/conditioned for all
• Identify critical timings/decision making points and align scope and approach to meet these (where appropriate)	• Forget that compressing the approach/scope to meet decision-making schedules may mean compromises need to be agreed, with evaluation aims/objectives re-engineered as appropriate
• Identify if there are critical 'user' intermediaries (people, functions or bodies between whoever is accountable for the evaluation and decision-makers)	• Underestimate the importance of champions/brokers of the evaluation findings (positive and negative) in influencing change; findings rarely speak for themselves among decision-makers
• Identify sufficiently early if/what communication strategy is needed to bring findings/implications to the various users	

5. Resourcing the evaluation appropriately

DO …	DO NOT …
• Recognise that resources are your budget, staff and time; these will vary with internal or external evaluation	• Underestimate the staff resource and range of skills needed for internal evaluation; external advice or peer review may help build your confidence where the skills mix/experience is limited
• Remember that 'appropriate' resourcing is led by the scope, needs and expectations of the evaluation – not availability of budget/time, etc. Limited resources may need compromises to the aims and scope	• Be funding-led (what can we do for the money); critically review if the budget available is appropriate for the aims and objectives (and/or proposed approach/scope)
• Appropriately resource project/contract management; this takes time to do well. Does the allocated staff member have the necessary availability, skills and experience?	• Forget that project managers will need to balance the added demands of evaluation management with their other tasks/roles; does the new role have clear prioritisation/sign off?
• Are internal or partner interests/functions 'bought in' to resourcing decisions (e.g., is procurement able to support the necessary timetable)	
• Set up appropriate review/steering arrangements pre-evaluation with clear briefing on roles/responsibilities to ensure engagement and continuity across evaluation	
• Ensure timing challenges are reflected in the agreed timetable	