DPME Evaluation Guideline 2.2.6
How to develop an Improvement Plan to address evaluation recommendations

Developed 28 March 2013
Updated 29 May 2013

THE PRESIDENCY
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT: PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Addressed to	M&E Units in government departments or programme managers who are undertaking evaluations
Purpose	The purpose is to give practical guidance on how to develop an Improvement Plan responding to recommendations in evaluation final reports
Reference documents	National Evaluation Policy Framework
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1   Introduction

The research part of an evaluation is considered complete when the Evaluation Steering Committee approves the final evaluation report as a technically valid report and without any factual errors. Evaluators may not come up with feasible recommendations and departments may not agree with all the recommendations and so departments are then provided an opportunity to provide a management response indicating which recommendations they accept, and for ones they do not accept, why. Guideline 2.2.5 outlines the process with the management response. If the reasons for disagreeing with recommendations are not convincing to DPME, then the reasons for disagreement will be included in the submission to Cabinet.

The point of the evaluation system is to improve performance and decision-making, as well as accountability. Once recommendations have been agreed, departments are expected to draw up an Improvement Plan of how the recommendations will be addressed. The Improvement Plan is used to ensure that evidence from evaluations is used to improve plans, policies and budgets, indicating who will be responsible and time frames.

Note that where DPME is mentioned below, in provinces this would be the Office of the Premier.

2   Purpose of the Improvement Plan

The purpose of the Improvement Plan is to:
2.1   Ensure utilisation of evaluation findings and consequently strengthening of the programme/project/policy/plan in question;
2.2   Track/monitor the implementation of recommendations; and
2.3   Keep stakeholders abreast of the necessary actions that will be taken to improve the delivery of a programme, project or policy. These could be changes to the policy or programme, amendments to implementation strategies or changes to internal budget allocations.

3   Process for developing the Improvement Plan

3.1   The evaluation report is produced and approved as technically acceptable and factually correct by the Evaluation Steering Committee (note there may be disagreements on some of the findings or recommendations if it is an independent report).

3.2   Departments involved are given 30 days to provide a management response to the evaluation.

3.3   After 30 days a presentation is made to the relevant cluster on the findings as well as the management response, and a cabinet memo is prepared outlining the main finding of the Evaluation which is tabled at Cabinet Sub-Committee and then Cabinet.

3.4   One month after the evaluation final report is approved, an evaluation quality assessment is conducted by independent quality assessors. Ideally the results are included in the cabinet memo.

3.5   Communication processes are started after Cabinet approval, including putting the evaluation report on the DPME website with management response and the evaluation is sent to portfolio committees indicating that they may wish the relevant department to make a presentation on the evaluation.

3.6   As soon as the Evaluation Report is approved by the Steering Committee, or management response submitted, work can start on the Improvement Plan.

3.7   If there are many recommendations, these are grouped (as per example in Annex A) and Improvement Objectives defined. The Improvement Objectives draw from the recommendations but also from some of the findings.

3.8   Meanwhile the Evaluation Steering Group organises an appropriate process for developing the Improvement Plan. A workshop with stakeholders may well be the best modality (see box). Here the synthesis document is tabled, and then groups work on developing how each improvement objective will be addressed. An example of part of an Improvement Plan is shown in Annex B.

3.9   The Improvement Plan is then tabled at the senior management forum of the department for approval, or for sign-off by the DG. The approved plan is submitted to DPME. This should be no more than 4 months after the date the evaluation steering committee approves the final report (this is the target given to Cabinet).

3.10   The relevant programme manager or their supervisor should be responsible for developing and implementing the Improvement Plan, as well as reporting on progress in implementing the Improvement Plan.

3.11   The Improvement Plan is then tabled at the relevant cluster as well as Implementation Forums, MinMECs, etc as appropriate.

3.12   The department produces quarterly reports on the improvement plan for at least one year, which are submitted to DPME (the exact modalities for this will be tested).

3.13   Ongoing actions must be incorporated into APPs of relevant departments and programme managers, so they become part of the normal monitoring process

3.14   Possible implementation evaluations can track progress and changes needed, eg on a 1-2 yearly basis.

Organising a workshop to prepare the Improvement Plan:

1. It may well be appropriate to run a workshop including key stakeholders to develop the Improvement Plan. This should include representatives of implementation structures, eg district office of a relevant provincial office, or a good frontline manager (such as an agricultural extension officer), who can help advise on practical implementation modalities.
2. If external stakeholders are key to implementation, include representatives of these.
3. In the case of Early Childhood Development evaluation, this was a 2 day workshop, groups focused on different recommendations and came up with how these would be addressed. Annex C has the programme for this workshop as an example, as well as an example of the group task for groups working on each of the improvement objectives and defining how these will be achieved.

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4   Format of the Improvement Plan and Reporting Template

The Template in **Annex B** covers the following sections:

4.1   **General Information:**   The first section of the plan covers details of the evaluation, custodian department, the contact person and the reporting period.

4.2   **Improvement objective** – developed from the synthesis mentioned above.

4.3   **Outputs** - what are the key building blocks/products that should be achieved if we want to achievement the Improvement Objective?

4.4   **Priority –** How would you rate the priority of this aspect (Low/ Medium/ High?). If there are many recommendations and improvement objectives as in the ECD example you will need to prioritise.

4.5   **Activities** – what activities will need to be undertaken to achieve each output?

4.6   **By who?** – who needs to be involved in this activity. The person responsible or institution accountable should be in bold.

4.7   **By when** – when should this activity be undertaken by?

4.8   **Target** – what is the target in relation to the output?

4.9   **Embedded where** – particularly for outputs which carry over to the next financial year, the outputs will need to be embedded in plans – eg in the department's APP or SDIP, otherwise the Improvement Plan will remain an orphan outside the system and is unlikely to be implemented.

4.10   **Current situation/progress** – in the initial drafting of the Improvement Plan, this should indicate what has already been undertaken in relation to this output and activity. In subsequent reports it should indicate progress.

Action Points:

1. It is critical that stakeholders including DPME should be involved in developing the Improvement Action Plan, addressing the areas identified to be strengthened.
2. It is important to ensure that there is consensus amongst stakeholders on prioritisation of findings and recommendations.
3. The plan must be approved by the Director-General (DG) of the commissioning Department and DG of DPME, based on recommendation by the Head of the Evaluation and Research Unit at DPM. Approval of the Plan indicates commitment by both parties to its implementation.
4. The plan must include a page policy statement extracted from the final report in order to provide clarity and coherence in the plan

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5   Monitoring and evaluating implementation of the Improvement Plan

5.1   Departments send reports to DPME/Offices of the Premier on a quarterly basis on progress on implementing the plan, over the period of the Improvement Plan (this could be one year or more than one year).

5.2   DPME and Offices of the Premier will provide 6 monthly updates on progress on implementing evaluation recommendations to Cabinet and Provincial EXCOs accordingly.

6   Integrating the Improvement Plan with other processes

Strategies for improvement should be incorporated into the Annual Performance Plan and Service Delivery Improvement Plan. Evaluation findings should also be used to inform budgeting and policy-making.

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Dr Sean Phillips
Director-General
The Presidency: Performance Monitoring and Evaluation
Date: 29 May 2013

Annex A: Synthesis of recommendations and development of improvement objectives (example from ECD)

A   Legislation and policy

Recommendation 1 **Recommendation 2**	**A country strategy for ECD should be developed** from which each department (DBE, DSD, DoH, DWCPD, DPW, DCOG, and if relevant other departments) should develop an implementation programme for their component. **The national strategy should** include a common definition of ECD; agreed provisioning based on age, stage of development, socio-economic circumstance and needs (including delivery services to reach poor and vulnerable children, and promoting universal access); multidisciplinary and inter-sectoral teams with funding streams & mechanisms in line with outcomes and results; specific institutional arrangements of interdepartmental and inter-sectoral cooperation with clear protocols; mechanisms for information sharing A **Task Team** should be established to produce the Strategy – with clear roles and responsibilities of key players and government departments. The country strategy should be submitted to Cabinet for approval
Improvement Objective 1	**A country strategy for ECD** is developed to submit to Cabinet and the Children's Act is revised. The strategy should include a common definition of ECD; agreed provisioning based on age, stage of development, socio-economic circumstance and needs (including delivery services to reach poor and vulnerable children, and promoting universal access); multidisciplinary and inter-sectoral teams with funding streams & mechanisms in line with outcomes and results; specific institutional arrangements of interdepartmental and inter-sectoral cooperation with clear protocols; mechanisms for information sharing.

B   Coordination and Integration

Recommendation 7 **Recommendation 8** **Recommendation 24** **Recommendation 25** **Recommendation 26**	An effective **coordinating mechanism** must be established - an agency, board or commission - with high-level influence, an explicit mandate, and the necessary resources including expertise, to drive the ECD agenda forward in all 3 spheres (including local government) and deliver results. A **feasibility study** needs to be conducted considering the options, pros and cons of the best mechanism for inter-sectoral coordination, how it could be established, how it could be funded, and what its terms of reference would be. In the meantime the 4 key ministers of DBE, DSD, DWCPD and DoH are asked to **reinforce the current interdepartmental mechanism** and to report on to Cabinet on how this will be achieved. **An integrated M&E system** for the ECD sector should be developed as part of the overall national ECD strategy and its implementation with a National Information System hosted by the lead department. This should include an Essential Data Set for ECD to address the challenge of inter-sectoral and separate practices of data collection across various departments A challenge for M&E is that the questions on preschool participation in the General Household Survey are too general to provide information for policy development and amendment. Similarly, the questions on disabilities among preschool children are inappropriate. A technical group should work on measurement of these two important aspects of ECD and work with Statistics South Africa and others to improve the measurement of child care, preschool experience and disabilities.
Improvement Objective 2	A **feasibility study** is conducted considering different options for inter-sectoral management and coordination, and recommending the best mechanism, how it could be established, how it could be funded, what its terms of reference would be, and how cross-sectoral M&E will be conducted. In the **interim** DBE, DSD, DWCPD and DoH should propose to cabinet how to strengthen the current interdepartmental mechanism.

Annex B: IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND QUARTERLY REPORTING TEMPLATE

Title of Evaluation		Date of Publication of Evaluation Report	
Name of lead Department		Date of Approval of Improvement Plan	
Contact Person		Position	
Telephone		Email	

Date of report				
Quarter: mark with an X	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

Improvement Plan for ECD Diagnostic Review/ECD Conference/NIPECD Review

A   Legislation and policy

Improvement Objective 1	**A country strategy for ECD** is developed to submit to Cabinet and the Children's Act is revised. The strategy should include a common definition of ECD; agreed provisioning based on age, stage of development, socio-economic circumstance and needs (including delivery services to reach poor and vulnerable children, and promoting universal access); multidisciplinary and inter-sectoral teams with funding streams & mechanisms in line with outcomes and results; specific institutional arrangements of interdepartmental and inter-sectoral cooperation with clear protocols; mechanisms for information sharing.

Outputs to achieve the objective	Priority L/M/H	Activity to achieve output	Person/institution responsible	By when? (Deadline)	Target	Embedded where	Budget available	Current situation/ Progress Report
1. An ECD policy framework developed	H	1.1.1 Establish inter-departmental task team as successor to evaluation steering committee, chaired by DSD.	DGs of DBE, DSD, DoH and DWCPD and DPME, led by **DSD**	30 November 2013	Interdepartmental mechanism for coordination of ECD operational by 30 November 2013	APP of DBE, DSD, DoH, WCPD, DPME	n/a	NIDECD committee exists Interdepartmental steering committee for the ECD Diagnostic review.

Outputs to achieve the objective	Priority L/M/H	Activity to achieve output	Person/institution responsible	By when? (Deadline)	Target	Embedded where	Budget available	Current situation/ Progress Report
		1.1.2 Develop project plan for ECD policy development namely White Paper for ECD	**DSD**, DBE DOH DWCPD	28 February 2013	White Paper on ECD published including norms and standards for differentiated services, provisioning and funding	APP of DBE, DSD, DoH, WCPD, DPME	n/a	Segregated policies targeting young children such as White Paper of Social Welfare, Education, Maternal and Child Health policies White paper 5 for ECD NIPECD Guidelines for ECD Draft Policy Framework for ECD(NIPECD)
		1.1.3 Finalize the Cabinet Memo on the project plan for the White paper on ECD	**DSD**	May 2013		APP of DBE, DSD, DoH, WCPD, DPME	n/a	
		1.1.4 Develop the Draft White Paper on ECD	**DSD**, DBE DOH DWCPD			APP of DBE, DSD, DoH, WCPD, DPME	n/a	
		1.1.5 Consult with stakeholders	**DSD** DBE DOH DWCPD	JULY 2013-DEC 2013		APP of DBE, DSD, DoH, WCPD, DPME	Use current budget	
		1.1.6 Produce and submit White Paper to Cabinet	**DSD**, DBE DOH DWCPD	November 2014		APP of DBE, DSD, DoH	n/a	
2. Norms and standards for differentiated services, provisioning and funding for	M	1.2.1 Review all norms and standards for ECD and Grade R	**DSD**, DBE, DOH Municipalities DPW DCOG	July 2013	Norms and Standards developed for differentiated services provisioning	APP DSD DBE DOH DWCPD	Include in current unit budget	Guidelines on ECD , NELDS, regulations to Children's Act, Funding norms for Grade R, Health provisioning and Funding Norms and

Outputs to achieve the objective	Priority L/M/H	Activity to achieve output	Person/institution responsible	By when? (Deadline)	Target	Embedded where	Budget available	Current situation/ Progress Report
ECD reviewed and new norms and standards developed.					and funding for ECD			Standards Norms and standards for Children's Act,
		1.2.2 Develop norms and standards for differentiated services models (household, community and centre based), provisioning and funding, for ECD(zero to school going age group)	**DSD** DBE DOH	November 2013	Norms and Standards developed for differentiated services provisioning and funding for ECD	APP DSD DOH DBE	Identify budget	Guidelines on ECD, NELDS, Regulations to Children's Act, Funding norms for Grade R, Health provisioning and Funding Norms and Standards Norms and standards for Children's Act,
3. Amendment of Children's Act[1] on ECD	H	1.3.1 Phase 1 - Review of Children's Act (2005)	**DSD**, DBE, DoH and DWCPD	November 2014	Children's Act amended by November 2014	APP DSD	Include in budget for 2013/14	Children's Act (2005)
		1.3.2 Phase 2 Development of a separate Act on ECD.	**DSD**, DBE, DoH and DWCPD	November 2015	Act on ECD passed by November 2015	APP DSD, DBE DoH DWCPD	Include in budget for 2014/15	

etc

Annex C: Example of workshop outline for developing Improvement Plan

Workshop to develop Improvement Plan for ECD 25-26 September 2012

Background
The last stage of an evaluation under the National Evaluation System is developing an improvement plan, whereby the agreed findings and recommendations and translated into actions. In this case this will be developed from the Diagnostic Review, ECD Conference and NIP Review.

The management response has now been received from DBE, DSD and DWCPD. This workshop will now develop the improvement plan which will be submitted to Cabinet along with the Diagnostic Review report.

Objective
By the end of the workshop we have developed an ECD improvement plan, in the process testing out the format for developing an improvement plan.

Participants
ECD steering committee members plus other resource people (eg provincial staff of DBE/DSD/DoH, key NGOs) to enable several groups to work on different recommendations. Ian Goldman will facilitate the workshop.

Time	Session	Objective	Responsible
	Tuesday 25 September		Chair: Thabo Mabogoane
8.30	Coffee and registration		
9.00	Opening, objectives, introductions		Thabo Mabogoane
9.10	Outline programme and flow	Participants understand the flow of the day	Ian Goldman
9.15	Update on what work has been done so far on the Improvement Plan Test grouping of recommendations	Participants understand what has happened with the recommendations	Marie-Louise Erasmus/ Margot Davids/ Nonhlanhla Dlamini Ian Goldman
10.00	Agree concept for the intervention objectives (not detailed wording) and the main outputs	Participants have agreed the overall objectives and generated ideas for the outputs	Ian Goldman
10.30	Coffee	Allocate groups	
10.50	Continue		Maria Mabetoa
12.00	Introduction to work in groups	Groups understand what they have to do	Ian Goldman
12.05	Break into groups dealing with the core areas: • Legislation and policy • Coordination and integration • Programmes and services • Human resources and capacity building • Financing and funding	Groups have produced the Improvement Plan	
13.00	Lunch		Chair: Margot Davids
13.45	Continue		
	Tea in groups		

Time	Session	Objective	Responsible
15.40	Update on where groups are at and issues emerging which may need discussion in plenary	Any issues which need resolution in plenary have been identified	Marie-Louise Erasmus
16.25	Closing for the day		Margot Davids
	Wednesday 26 September		Chair: Marie-Louise Erasmus
8.00	Coffee		
8.30	Introduction to the day	Participants understand the flow of the day	Ian Goldman
8.40	Reflections on yesterday	Participants have reflected on how they are feeling about the plan	Ian Goldman
9.00	Discussion of issues which need resolving in plenary	Issues requiring addressing in plenary are resolved	Thabani Buthelezi
10.00	Groups continue	Groups have completed their section of the Improvement Plan	Ian Goldman
11.00	Coffee		
11.15	Feedback from groups validating/adding to what each has produced (5 minutes per recommendation)	The contributions to the plan have been validated	George Laryea-Adjei
13.00	Lunch		Chair: Rose September
13.45	Continue		Nonhlanhla Dlamini
15.00	Tea		
15.15	Discussion on managing the Improvement Plan: • What structure • Any dedicated team • Phasing • Budget	How the Improvement Plan will be managed has been agreed	Ian Goldman
16.00	Way forward	The next steps to submit to Cabinet and taking the Improvement Plan forward have been identified	Ian Goldman
16.30	Closing		Thabo Mabogoane

Group Task – Drafting the Improvement Plan

1   Background

Groups are allocated into the following:

- Legislation and policy
- Coordination and integration
- Programmes and services
- Human resources and capacity building
- Financing and funding

2   Purpose

The purpose of the task is for groups to have produced the Improvement Plan for the specific improvement objectives they are dealing.

3   Tasks

3.1   Facilitator has been allocated.
3.2   Group selects rapporteur to write on flip chart and secretary to capture on computer
3.3   Group runs through the task and ensures all understand it
3.4   Then read recommendations and improvement objectives allocated and make sure all understand these (10 mins)
3.5   For the first objective, check the wording of the improvement objective and make changes as needed (10 mins)
3.6   Then check the outputs suggested in plenary and adjust as needed (check with Ian when this has been done, so we are sure outputs are OK before proceding)
3.7   Then work on completing the table for each output – the activities needed, whom, when etc
3.8   While you are doing this flag any issues which need to be discussed in plenary for discussion in the afternoon
3.9   If you have an issue where you need to confer with someone in another group, do so
3.10   Repeat for the next improvement objective
3.11   By 15.30 check the issues you have raised to be mentioned as needing to be resolved in plenary

You have about 4 hours in total, 3 hours on Tuesday, 1 hour on Wednesday.

4   Resources

- Blank format for the Improvement Plan
- Copy of the Diagnostic Review of the Early Childhood Development Sector
- Printed document summarising the recommendations and improvement objectives