



Administrative Instruction on Evaluation **United Nations Secretariat**

Guidelines



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A New Administrative Instruction for Evaluation in the UN Secretariat



António Guterres
Secretary-General

In his report A/72/492 on “Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: ensuring a better future for all”, the Secretary-General committed to strengthening the evaluation capacity of the UN Secretariat to better inform programme planning and design and enhance reporting on programme performance. A stronger evaluation function is integral to organizational learning, improved accountability and increased transparency on programme delivery to Member States. This new Administrative Instruction on Evaluation in the UN Secretariat is intended to support and facilitate those critical goals.

The Administrative Instruction (AI):

- establishes the Secretariat evaluation architecture;
- sets out the Secretariat’s requirements and procedures for the management, conduct and use of evaluations;
- details governance arrangements, accountabilities and performance standards for Secretariat evaluation functions;
- outlines evaluation roles and responsibilities of Secretariat entities; and
- establishes the Evaluation Management Committee (a subcommittee of the Management Committee chaired by USG DMSPC) and the Evaluation Advisory Committee (made up of an independent panel of experts to advise OIOS on its evaluation function).

The current guidelines will therefore support entities to implement the new AI and achieve the Secretary-General’s vision of a ‘culture of evaluation’ to help guide our work. [Annex 1](#) sets out the theory of change for strengthening evaluation capacity within the Secretariat.

Evaluation in the UN Secretariat – What it is and how it fits

In the UN Secretariat, evaluation is discussed in Article VII of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2018/3), otherwise known as the PPBME. The new Administrative Instruction builds upon the PPBME.

As per the PPBME, the objective of evaluation is:

- (a) To determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Organization's activities in relation to their objectives;
- b) To enable the Secretariat and Member States to engage in systematic reflection, with a view to increasing the effectiveness of the main programmes of the Organization by altering their content and, if necessary, reviewing their objectives.

The definition of evaluation as agreed within the UN Evaluation Group is:

"an assessment, conducted as systematically and impartially as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area or institutional performance... An evaluation should provide credible, useful evidence-based information that enables the timely incorporation of its findings, recommendations and lessons into the decision-making processes of organizations and stakeholders. The purposes of evaluation are to promote accountability and learning".

The PPBME mandates both "external" evaluation undertaken by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), meaning external to the entity being evaluated, and "self-evaluation" undertaken internally by an entity itself. Following this framework, evaluation is undertaken in the UN Secretariat at three different levels:

1. Secretariat entities conduct their own evaluations with an internal scope relating to their programmes, sub-programmes, functions, activities and/or processes. The purpose of entity-led evaluations is to facilitate internal assessment and reflection on how to enhance the performance of the entity, to serve as a management tool and learning function, and to support programme managers with identifying areas for improvement.
2. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and its Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED) conducts evaluations that are external to the Secretariat entity being evaluated. The purpose of OIOS evaluations is to provide an independent perspective on results achieved and opportunities for greater achievement of programme outcomes. OIOS evaluations have a dual learning and accountability purpose, supporting Member States and senior leadership decision-making with independent and credible evaluative evidence. OIOS has a reporting line directly to the Secretary-General, and to the General Assembly, giving it independence from Secretariat entities.

“We need a culture of evaluation, independent and real-time evaluation with full transparency

**António Guterres
Secretary-General**

”

3. The System-wide evaluation unit in the Executive Office of the Secretary General (EOSG) and the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) conduct UN system-wide evaluations. The purpose of these evaluations is to provide UN system-wide assessments of cross-cutting issues and topics of strategic importance for the United Nations organization.

Evaluation is part of a larger organizational architecture for assessing programme performance which also includes the following processes:

- Monitoring
- Review
- Audit
- Inspection
- Evaluation

Some definitions for other assessment processes include the following:

Monitoring: the periodic determination by the head of a department or office of the actual delivery of final outputs in comparison with the commitments for the delivery of outputs set out in the programme budget as approved by the General Assembly.

Review: a periodic or ad hoc assessment that typically addresses performance and operational issues of programme/project implementation.

Audit: an assessment of the adequacy of management controls with a primary focus on compliance which looks at the effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes.

Inspection: an examination of an organizational unit, issue or practice to determine the extent to which that unit, issue or practice adheres to prescribed standards, good practices, or other criteria.

Evaluation: While sharing similarities with all the processes outlined above, evaluation is distinct in that it is defined by all the following conditions:

- is a systematic and discrete process, that determines the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and/or sustainability of any element of a programme's performance relative to its mandate or goals;
- can be performed at any level of a programme, such as an activity, process, function, component, thematic area or subprogramme;
- provides credible, useful and evidence-based information thanks to independence, impartiality and rigorous methodology;

- is a one-time event with a start and end date, and is usually presented in the form of an evaluation report;
- has a clearly defined design, including evaluation questions;
- uses a well-defined methodology, ideally combining multiple methods, to answer those questions; and
- results in evidence-based evaluation findings and conclusions and includes recommendations where applicable.

Evaluation provides an objective source of information to inform programme planning, identify duplications and gaps in programme implementation, and identify opportunities, such as organizational restructuring or work process redesign, to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. It provides credible, evidence-based information on results achieved by an entity or programme to inform decision-making.

Within the Secretariat, evaluation serves three main purposes:

(a) Evidence-based decision-making:

Evaluation supports better decision-making. It should inform planning, programming, budgeting, implementation and reporting and contribute to evidence-based policymaking and organizational effectiveness. Evaluation and feedback are critical to effective results-based management.¹

(b) Learning:

A strong culture of evaluation is a prerequisite for a learning organization. Evaluation helps the Secretariat to learn from experience and better understand what works well, and not so well, in what contexts and why. This learning can be the catalyst for innovation and continuous improvement.

(c) Accountability:

Evaluation is an integral part of the accountability framework and constitutes an important source of evidence for understanding organizational performance. The transparent reporting of evaluation results will enhance Member States' confidence in the ability of the Secretariat to deliver on the mandates entrusted to it.

The norms and standards for evaluation of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) provide additional non-binding advice on the conduct and management of evaluations².

“Evaluation serves three main purposes: evidence-based decision making, learning and accountability”

¹ [A/67/714](#) paragraph 91.

² www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914 Norms and Standards

II Evaluation Procedures

Drafting an evaluation policy (para 1.4)

The AI requires all Secretariat entities to have an evaluation policy. Those entities that already have an existing evaluation policy should review and update it as needed to adhere to and reference the requirements of the new AI. Those entities that do not have an evaluation policy should develop one based on the AI. The policy will contain more entity-specific information than the AI since it will outline how evaluation will be planned, conducted and used within the specific context of that entity's mandate, size, budget and programme objectives.

An evaluation policy describes the principles and framework for an entity's evaluation function. The policy need not be lengthy nor complex and should emanate from the new AI. It is the important first foundational step to build an evaluation function and culture in an entity.

An evaluation policy should contain the following elements:

- A clear explanation of the concept and role of evaluation in the entity; for example, if it is to be used for accountability, learning and/or performance management purposes;
- Reference to the UN Evaluation Group standards, such as utility, credibility, independence, impartiality, and transparency;
- A clearly defined institutional framework, with roles and responsibilities spelled out;
- How evaluation resources will be commensurate with the size and function of the organization;
- How often the policy will be reviewed and updated;
- How evaluations are prioritized and planned;
- How evaluations are organized, managed and budgeted;
- Measures to ensure the quality of evaluations;
- The mechanisms for the follow-up of evaluations, including how evaluation results will feed into learning and planning;
- Integration of gender, human rights and disability considerations in evaluations; and
- The disclosure and dissemination procedures for evaluations.

When developing an evaluation policy, the following good practices should be considered:

- The person/team tasked with drafting the evaluation policy should include those who will manage and carry out evaluation activities;
- The Head of the entity should be actively engaged and supportive of the overall effort;

- The drafting of the policy should be a consultative process;
- The policy should be simple and clear so as to allow all programme managers, staff and key stakeholders to understand it and appreciate the benefits of evaluation;
- The policy should be endorsed by the Head of the entity or governing body; and
- The policy should be periodically reviewed and, if needed, updated, to ensure that it continues to meet the evaluation needs of the entity.

An evaluation policy template is provided in [Annex 2](#).

Evaluation planning and coverage norms (paras 2.1 to 2.4)

The AI requires all entities to have an annual evaluation plan meeting specific coverage criteria. Building an evaluation plan should ideally be a collaborative process involving senior leadership and programme staff, which takes into account management needs as determined by the entity's highest priority, most relevant and/or most risky subprogrammes, issues and/or activities. This could include, for example, considerations of budget, the strategic importance of the subprogramme objectives and risk of non-performance, or the need to assess a relatively new area of work for which an entity wants to assess early performance and draw lessons learned. Evaluation planning should identify evaluations that will be useful for decision-making and senior leadership information needs. It is also considered best practice to submit the evaluation plan to the Entity Head or Governing Body for review and approval. Sample templates for an evaluation plan is provided in [Annex 3a](#) and [Annex 3b](#).

This plan can take the form of a timetable, report, or other format, but at a minimum an evaluation plan should include:

- At least one planned evaluation per year, with a clearly defined purpose, scope and period covered;
- The evaluation type(s), such as subprogramme, thematic, and/or project evaluation;
- Rationale for selecting the evaluation;
- The anticipated application of evaluation(s) findings - how the results will be used;
- Who will conduct the evaluation, e.g. evaluation unit, consultant, or external firm;
- Who is responsible for managing the evaluation;
- The budget or resources (staff) allocated for the evaluation; and
- The timing of the evaluation (start date and estimated completion).

The AI requires that entity evaluation plans cover each subprogramme at least once every six years. For larger entities, this could be a whole-of-subprogramme evaluation or an evaluation focused on a specific function, activity, process and/or project in the subprogramme. For peacekeeping missions, this could be a whole-of-mission Results Based Budget mission component evaluation or an evaluation focused on a specific function, activity, process and/or project in the component. For smaller entities with no specific subprogrammes, this could be a whole-of-entity evaluation or an evaluation focused on a specific function, activity, process and/or project in the entity. All entities may also wish to consider cross-cutting thematic topics for evaluation.

In order to ensure adequate evaluation coverage overall within the UN Secretariat and also to avoid duplication, entities should coordinate their evaluation plans with OIOS and with other external oversight bodies, such as the JIU. To assist entities in this regard, DMSPC can provide (by request) the evaluation plans from OIOS and JIU. Alternatively, these plans are available online at the entities' websites.

Management and conduct of evaluation (paras 2.5 to 2.6)

The AI requires management arrangements for evaluation be put in place to ensure independence and impartiality. The independence of the evaluation function entails the ability of evaluators to evaluate without undue influence by any party and ensures credibility of the evaluation results. The key elements of impartiality include objectivity, professional integrity and absence of bias, all of which should be present in all stages of the evaluation process. Staff responsible for designing, managing and conducting evaluations should conform to UN Evaluation Group ethical guidelines and ensure that evaluation staff and consultants are aware of and follow those standards. The staff and consultants should also be selected through an open, transparent process, with balance in terms of geographical and gender diversity.

While ideally the evaluation function should be positioned independently from other programmatic functions, when it is co-located with other management functions, it is important that evaluators and evaluation managers are not directly responsible for the policy setting, design or management of the subprogramme/mission component/function/activity/function being evaluated. It is also important that the evaluation function has a direct line of communication (and ideally a direct reporting line) to the Entity Head or Governing Body. Finally, it is key that evaluators are provided with access to the information they need to undertake the evaluation.

“Evaluation is an assessment, conducted as systematically and impartially as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area or institutional performance”

The AI requires entities to develop an evaluation inception report or Terms of Reference (TOR) for each evaluation it undertakes. The TOR should be shared with stakeholders, where possible, to promote transparency and engagement. A sample TOR template is provided in [Annex 4](#). An evaluation TOR should ideally include the following elements:

- Purpose of the evaluation
- Evaluation scope
- Objective(s) of evaluation
- Evaluation questions, sub-questions and criteria
- Methodology
- Expected deliverable(s)
- Evaluation process and timeline
- Potential use of the evaluation

The AI additionally requires that evaluation results, lessons learned, and recommendations be incorporated into planning and budget documents as per the process, templates and guidance provided by OPPFB. BTAD's Evaluation Section can advise on this.



Quality Assurance (paras 2.7 to 2.8)

The AI requires entities to have an evaluation quality assurance system. A quality assurance system is also called for in Standard 5.1 in the UN Evaluation Group Norms and Standards for Evaluation. Producing high-quality evaluations is key to improving performance, generating knowledge, and supporting accountability and credibility of programmatic results. There are many ways to introduce quality assurance processes in evaluations, such as peer reviews, expert guidance and oversight, as well as quality check lists. For nascent evaluation offices it is recommended to start with quality checklists, which help evaluation managers take into consideration key quality attributes of both the evaluation process and the evaluation report.

The following quality assessment framework can be considered when establishing a quality assurance system for evaluation reports:

Background: Are the evaluation's subject, context, purpose, objectives and scope sufficiently clear to frame and guide the evaluation?

1. The report clearly specifies the subject of the evaluation, and for programmes or projects: intervention logic or theory of change; budget; human resources; time frame; implementing partners, modalities and status.

2. The report provides sufficient information for understanding the context within which the subject of the evaluation operated (e.g. key social, political, economic, demographic and institutional factors) and describes the key stakeholders involved in the evaluation's subject.
3. The report clearly specifies the purpose and objectives of the evaluation.
4. The report specifies the scope of what the evaluation covers (e.g. time span, geographical coverage).
Methodology: Is the methodology used for the evaluation clearly described and is the rationale for the methodological choice justified?
5. The report specifies and explains the chosen evaluation questions, criteria, performance standards or other criteria.
6. The methodology clearly describes the level of stakeholder participation, data sources, and data collection and analysis methods.
7. The chosen methodology is adequately robust/appropriate for answering the key evaluation questions, including adequate measures to ensure data quality/validity.
8. The methodology addresses methodological challenges and/or limitations, and the report mentions ethical standards that were considered during the evaluation (e.g. informed consent of participants, confidentiality, avoidance of harm, evaluator's ethical obligations).
Findings: Are the findings clearly presented, relevant and based on evidence and sound analysis?
9. Findings are presented with <u>clarity</u> , <u>logic</u> , and <u>coherence</u> (e.g. avoid ambiguities).
10. Findings clearly relate to the evaluation <u>criteria and questions</u> defined in the scope in terms of report structure and substance.
11. Findings are <u>objective</u> and are supported by sufficient <u>evidence</u> reflecting systematic and appropriate analysis and interpretation of the data; they are free from subjective judgements made by the evaluators.
12. Findings uncover underlying <u>causes</u> for accomplishments/difficulties and <u>opportunities</u> to build on.
Conclusions and lessons learned: Are the conclusions clearly presented based on findings and substantiated by evidence?
13. Conclusions are <u>clearly presented</u> and <u>logically linked</u> to the findings.
14. Conclusions reflect reasonable <u>judgments</u> of the evaluator(s) in relation to the main evaluation questions and <u>add value</u> to the findings (e.g. include lessons learned; focus on significant issues; answer the evaluation's big questions).

<p>Recommendations (if any): Are the recommendations well-grounded in the evaluation and clear?</p>
<p>15. Recommendations are <u>logically derived</u> from the findings and/or conclusions.</p>
<p>16. Recommendations are <u>clear, realistic</u> (e.g. reflect an understanding of the subject's potential constraints to follow-up) and <u>manageable</u> (e.g. avoid providing a laundry list or being overly prescriptive).</p>
<p>17. Recommendations are <u>actionable</u> (e.g. specifies who should implement them) and formulated with their use in mind.</p>
<p>Gender, human rights and disability: Are gender, human rights and disability perspectives integrated and well addressed in the process of the evaluation as well as in the evaluation report?</p>
<p>18. <u>Gender equality and women's empowerment</u> (GEWE) is integrated in the evaluation scope of analysis and evaluation criteria and questions are designed in a way that ensures GEWE related data will be collected.</p>
<p>19. A gender-responsive methodology, methods and tools, and data analysis techniques are selected.</p>
<p>20. The evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations reflect a gender analysis.</p>
<p>21. <u>Human rights</u> considerations are integrated in the following, where applicable: evaluation scope of analysis; evaluation criteria and questions design; methods and tools, and data analysis techniques; evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations.</p>
<p>Report structure: Is the report well structured, logical, clear and complete?</p>
<p>22. The <u>executive summary</u> is a stand-alone section with a clear structure along the key elements of the report: subject, purpose and objectives of the evaluation; methodology; main results; conclusions; and recommendations. It is reasonably concise.</p>
<p>23. The report is <u>well-structured</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easily readable (i.e. concise, avoids complex language and unexplained acronyms); • cohesive and logical; • contains relevant graphics for illustrating key points (e.g. tables, charts and pictures); • includes <u>annexes</u> where applicable on methodology such as the Terms of Reference, evaluation matrix, bibliography, and a list of people consulted; and • states <u>when</u> the evaluation was conducted (<u>period</u> of the evaluation) and by <u>whom</u> the evaluation (evaluator names not required).

Use of evaluation data, findings and follow-up

The AI requires Heads of Entities to promote the use of evaluation data, findings, and follow-up through an interactive process. The UN Evaluation Group stresses that proactive and effective communication and dissemination contribute to the use of evaluation, not only for public accountability purposes but also for knowledge building and sharing, cross-fertilization of lessons learned and the promotion of good practices. In this sense, evaluations should be actively disseminated to all relevant stakeholders and to any potential users of the information and knowledge generated.

Effective evaluation communication should be presented in simple and easily understandable formats tailored to the specific needs of different audiences. Evaluation results can also be disseminated through innovative ways, e.g. social media, videos, dashboards and other type of data visualization techniques.

Messages to communicate include:

- Key findings and recommendations from evaluations;
- Relevance and contribution of evaluations to the effectiveness of the organization and its operations;
- Successes and good practices identified by evaluations, including the uptake of findings and recommendations for improvement;
- The organization's evaluation experience and technical capability; and
- Any outstanding evaluation innovations.

In the interest of accountability, the UN Evaluation Group norms and standards promotes the transparency of evaluation reports. On this basis, evaluation reports should be made publicly available. The overall approach to classifying information entrusted to or originating from the United Nations is based on the understanding that the work of the United Nations should be open and transparent, except insofar as the nature of information concerned is deemed confidential or sensitive³. In those cases, the head of the entity can determine that an evaluation report should not be made publicly available at all, or only made available after necessary redaction.

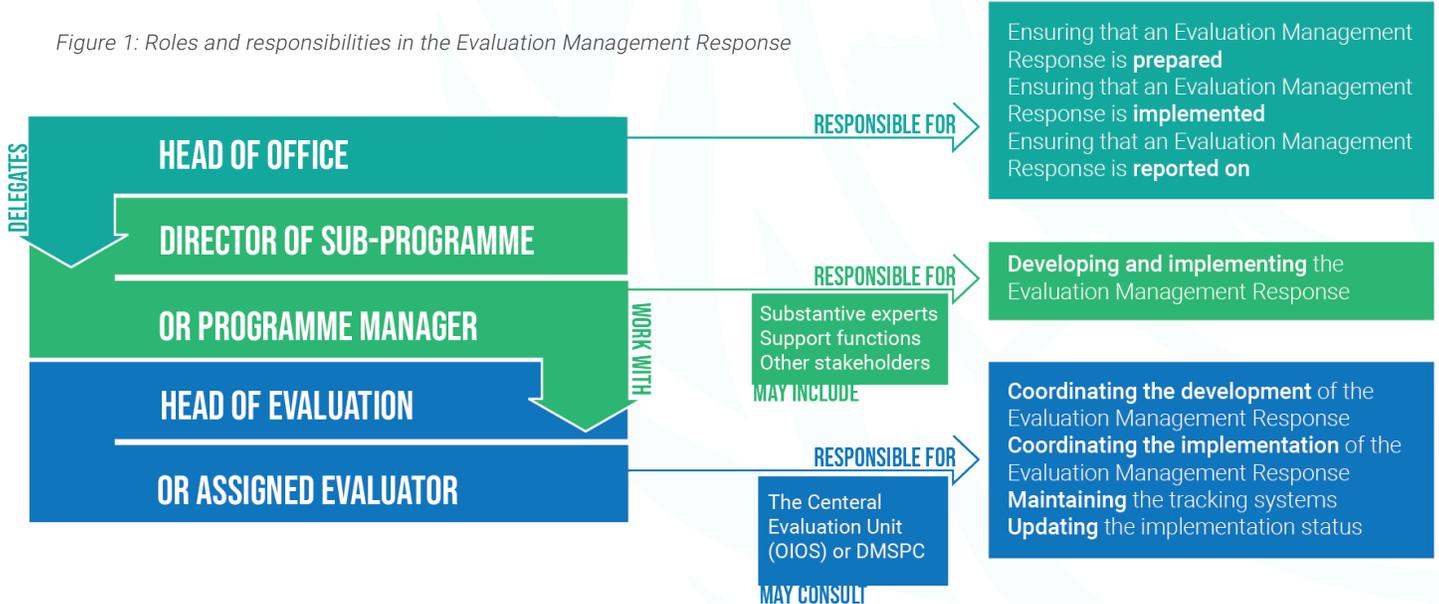
Regardless of the decision on publication, each entity must share their annual evaluation plan and all evaluation reports with BTAD's Evaluation Section and OIOS IED using the contact details at the end of this document. Entities should also note that plans to conduct evaluations and the key learning resulting from completed evaluations should be included in the relevant budget and programme documents as detailed in the programme planning and budget instructions. These documents are publicly available.

³ Section 1.2 of ST/SGB/2007/6 (Information sensitivity, classification and handling) describes what kind of information can be deemed sensitive

The AI also requires that entities prepare a management response to each evaluation. The development of an evaluation management response is a crucial step to improve the timely and effective use of evaluations and to ensure that recommendations are implemented. Through the management response process, evaluation stakeholders review the evaluation recommendations and agree on the actions to be taken to implement the recommendations, with specific accountability and timelines for implementation. When recommendations are rejected, the management response should provide detailed justification of the reasons for rejection. As stated in the Instruction, all management responses shall be made public, except when dealing with confidential information. **Figure 1** shows a suggested configuration of respective roles and responsibilities for an evaluation management response.

It is also important to track the progress made in implementing recommendations through a tracking system. This system can be as simple as a table where the recommendations are assigned a responsible party and a deadline for completion. Reporting on the follow-up to evaluation recommendations should take place at regular intervals and should be aligned with the organization’s planning processes.

Figure 1: Roles and responsibilities in the Evaluation Management Response



Roles and responsibilities of Secretariat entities

Integrating respect for gender equality, disability and human rights (para 5.5-b)

As determined in Norm 8 of the UN Evaluation Group Norms and Standards for Evaluation, gender equality disability and human rights-responsive evaluation should be integrated throughout the different steps of evaluation process. Disability inclusion must also be considered. This includes:

- putting together evaluation teams that are diverse and gender balanced;
- mapping and consulting evaluation stakeholders with a view to gender, disability and human rights considerations;
- reflecting any relevant gender, disability and disability-specific aspects of the programme;
- ensuring an evaluation methodology and including evaluation questions that focus on these three dimensions;
- collecting sex-disaggregated data; and
- writing the evaluation report presenting relevant findings and recommendations related to all three dimensions.

Evaluation resources

The AI further requires Heads of entities ensure adequate capacity and resources for evaluation capacity. As per standards established by the JIU (in its report JIU/REP/2014/6, para 77), the general range of evaluation funding should be between 0.5% and 3% of organizational expenditure, depending on the mandate and size of the entity. This need not require new resources but could also be addressed through the reallocation of existing resources. Entities are also encouraged to think about the possibility of pooling resources with other entities with similar mandates and expanding upon already existing review and assessment exercises.

VI Evaluation support – DMSPC and OIOS

Both DMSPC and OIOS are available to provide support to Secretariat entities with their evaluation function. DMSPC is mandated by the General Assembly to provide policy leadership in all management areas, including evaluation, through a clear, integrated global management strategy and policy framework and through strengthened monitoring, evaluation and accountability mechanisms. OIOS, as the Central Evaluation Unit discussed in the PPBME, is responsible for quality standards, methodology and guidelines for the conduct of evaluation, as well as providing methodological guidance to entities and for the adaptation and transfer of evaluation information and knowledge.

The main support activities are identified in the table below.

DMSPC	OIOS
Support entities as they plan and budget for evaluations	Host and online knowledge management platform with evaluation guidelines, tools and secretariat reports
Assist with identifying evaluation consultants	Provide ad-hoc methodological support advice through an online help function
Support entities with evaluation follow up	Assist entities with evaluation quality assurance
Advise entities on incorporating lessons learned from evaluations into programme plans and budgets	Support entities with building evaluation capacity
Host an evaluation community of practice to share experiences	Provide guidance on drafting evaluation policies and focal point ToRs
Serve as secretariat for the Evaluation Management Committee	Perform trend and meta-analyses and syntheses of evaluation findings across the secretariat, and identify and share innovative and good evaluation practices
	Assess Secretariat evaluation capacity through its Biennial report on Strengthening Evaluation and accompanying evaluation scorecards, and identify opportunities for improvements in entities' evaluation functions

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BTAD Community of practice:

https://unitednations.sharepoint.com/sites/DMSPC-BTA_COMMS/SitePages/ES.aspx

OIOS website:

<https://oios.un.org>

VIII

Annexes

[Annex 1 – Theory of Change for strengthening evaluation capacity in the Secretariat](#)

[Annex 2 – Examples of UN Secretariat evaluation policies \(ECLAC, ESCWA, DPPA, DPKO-DFS, OCHA and ODC\)](#)

[Annex 3a – Template of an evaluation plan \(Excel\)](#)

[Annex 3b – Template of an evaluation plan \(Word\)](#)

[Annex 4 – Template of evaluation terms of reference / inception paper](#)

CONTENT

A joint collaboration between DMSPC/BTAD/Evaluation
Section and OIOS/Inspection and Evaluation Division

GRAPHIC DESIGN

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